

Australian Heritage Strategy Submissions  
Heritage Branch  
Department of the Environment  
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### **Submission in response to the draft Strategy for Australia's Heritage**

The Maritime Archaeology Association of Western Australia (MAAWA) is a Western Australian non-for profit community based organisation that is composed of professional maritime archaeologists, SCUBA divers, professional divers, historians, photographers. MAAWA plays an active role in local maritime archaeology in Western Australia.

MAAWA welcomes the development of an Australian Heritage Strategy, but considerable concerns have been raised among MAAWA members that the Strategy in its current form completely ignores the key issues relevant to Australia's unique Underwater Cultural Heritage (UCH). Additionally, it appears that the Strategy overlooks the importance of the UCH as a significant component of Australia's cultural heritage.

It is our opinion that an appropriate Australian Heritage Strategy must demonstrate Australia's leadership in UCH by committing to the ratification of the UNESCO *Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage* 2001.

The Australian government should act in order to maintain Australia's world leading position by finalizing the review of the outdated, *Historic Shipwrecks Act* 1976, and consequently ratifying the UNESCO *Convention on the Protection of the UCH* 2001. This will have several benefits in terms of strategy, vision and aims, such as:

- Increasing heritage policy and process alignment across all levels of government, by promoting consistency in Commonwealth and State legislation consistent in the area of UCH (ITEM 2.a - Pursue innovative partnerships - Priorities - Greater heritage policy and process alignment across all levels of government);
- Applying protection to a greater range of UCH sites, not just shipwrecks (ITEM 3.d - Encourage communities to understand and care for their heritage);
- Bringing Australia's outdated UCH legislation up to international standards (ITEM 3.d - Encourage communities to understand and care for their heritage);
- Building on existing management frameworks to promote greater knowledge and engagement with our heritage (ITEM 3.b - Encourage communities to understand and care for their heritage; and ITEM 2.a - Pursue innovative partnerships - Priorities - Greater heritage policy and process alignment across all levels of government);

- Contributing, as an influential nation in our region, to international heritage standard setting and guidance by ratification of the UNESCO 2001 Convention. (ITEM 1.d - Commitments and proposed actions).

MAAWA's view is that it is appropriate that the Australian Heritage strategy has a strong focus on the natural environment; however, it is unfortunate that the strategy has sidelined Australia's UCH and missed opportunities to address cultural and natural heritage issues holistically.

An inclusive and constructive Australian Heritage Strategy must acknowledge, and identify actions to recognize and progress the role of UCH as an intrinsic and unique component of Australia's heritage. To achieve this MAAWA recommends the following commitments be included in the Strategy:

- Complete the Review the *Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976* and implement the recommended changes.
- Raise Australia's international profile in term of UCH by ratifying the UNESCO Convention on the Underwater Cultural Heritage.
- Commit to the ongoing support of the national Historic Shipwrecks Program.
- Build management capacity and leadership to assist regional countries develop best practice in protection and management of their UCH.
- Celebrate and commit to continuing Australia's involvement in protection and capacity building for UCH in SE Asia and the Pacific.

MAAWA will welcome the opportunity to further engage with those drafting the strategy to assist in the development of appropriate, sustainable, actions to achieve these commitments.

Yours sincerely,



Mark Wanless

Vice President

MAAWA