



COVER SHEET FOR INPUT INTO AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE STRATEGY

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TEMPLATE FOR INPUT INTO THE AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE STRATEGY

Overview

This template should be used to provide comments on the content of the Australian Heritage Strategy.

Contact Details

Name of Organisation:	Collaborative Research Centre in Australian History (CRAH), Federation University Australia http://federation.edu.au/research-and-innovation/research-areas/research-centres-and-networks/crah
Name of Author:	Professor Erik Eklund with input from Federation University colleagues associated with CRAH
Date:	2nd June 2014

Questions

Please add your comments for some or all of the questions provided with the Strategy's three high level themes below. If you have other information you wish to provide, please add this in the "Other comments" field.

1. Improve National Leadership

What are the most important things the Australian Government should be doing to offer leadership in heritage?

How can the Australian Government provide guidance and support for our national heritage—while still empowering other government, industry and community members to take responsibility and get involved?

What priority areas are important to you, your organisation or group?

What practical actions would you suggest to improve national heritage leadership?

What are the most important things the Australian Government should be doing to offer leadership in heritage?

The Collaborative Research Centre in Australian History at Federation University Australia (or CRAH) welcomes the draft statement's focus on the Commonwealth Government providing leadership on heritage. We submit that crucial dimensions of that leadership role should include the Government developing and implementing policies that show respect for the existing international and national instruments which have defined, preserved and interpreted Australia's natural and cultural heritage. Therefore, the decision to seek an excision from the World Heritage area in Tasmania is a counterproductive step.



The argument contained in the Government's case for excision reveals a very narrow definition of what might constitute heritage values and also an underlying assumption that natural values cannot be reasonably rehabilitated or restored after human impact. The Australian Government argued that 'The Australian Government considers these areas detract from the Outstanding Universal Value of the property and its overall integrity and that the assessment work that included such areas in the property did not sufficiently take this in to account.'

(<http://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/pages/f99dbb51-03c2-4eb2-a66e-87c4044117b4/files/twwha-2014-proposal-dossier.pdf> accessed 1 June 2014)

Not only does this justification suggest that natural values cannot be restored but it also privileges natural heritage values over cultural values that may be evidence of use through resource extraction for example. This narrow definition contradicts the appropriately broad and inclusive definition provided in the draft National Strategy. The fact that deep natural values exist in close proximity to evidence of human impact can be seen as a strong case for a distinctive and unique interaction of natural and human elements which add to overall heritage values. Further, recent work not only in heritage studies but also in areas such as environmental history have shown the extent to which natural values cannot be completely isolated from cultural values.

The Government's position on the excision and its justification is not supported by the recent work on defining 'heritage'. This work has added to our understanding of 'cultural heritage', 'intangible heritage', and 'moveable heritage' (Turnpenny, 2004; Ahmad, 2006; Roberts & Eklund, 2012).

The situation with regard to the World-Heritage listed Great Barrier Reef is somewhat similar in that the Commonwealth Government can show effective national leadership in the international and national heritage domain by adhering to the accepted norms of the international and national instruments that have been developed to define, protect and interpret natural and cultural heritage. It is of concern to CRAH that policies on the Tasmanian excision and response to the Great Barrier Reef threats may not have been driven by expert advice from the Australian Heritage Council or other acknowledged experts in the field.

How can the Australian Government provide guidance and support for our national heritage—while still empowering other government, industry and community members to take responsibility and get involved?

We argue that this 'modelling' element to national leadership referred to above can help create a positive role model for state and local governments as well as the corporate sector and community groups. With regard to the laudable aims to engage community groups, we recommend that such a strategy needs to have reasonable financial support for such groups to organise, research, and submit proposals for consideration.

Without a modicum of financial support available to the community sector in particular, only very specific types of proposals will be developed. CRAH members have experience of cultural and industrial heritage values in Australia's mining towns for example. In cases where resource extraction has finished and the corporate sector has moved on, it is difficult for local communities



to mobilise resources to define, protect and interpret local heritage (see Eklund, 2012; 66, 170-71). Former mining towns also have higher than national levels of unemployment and higher proportions of low SES households. This all makes for a scenario where such local communities have fewer resources to draw upon when making cases for heritage significance. Former mining towns are only one example where unfunded community groups would struggle to access the resources to 'take responsibility and get involved'.

Programmes such as the National Library's community heritage grant perform a very important function in allowing continued engagement of local community groups with appropriate and modest support through financial assistance. To support the community engagement strategy we would urge the Government to maintain and if possible increase the funding available through this program.

What priority areas are important to you, your organisation or group?

CRCAH has expertise in specific areas of Australia's natural and cultural heritage covering Indigenous heritage, cultural heritage and tourism, applied heritage and regional development as well as industrial, mining and labour heritage. We are naturally keen for that expertise to be utilised for the better understanding and protection of Australia's heritage. It is surprising then that the draft strategy does not make any reference to the diverse research sector and how its expertise and findings might be a part of a lively renewal of the national heritage strategy. In many cases, successful heritage preservation and interpretation has been based on path-grounding research conducted by heritage scholars, then subsequently translated into the public sphere (for example, Beggs-Sunter, 2003).

Therefore we would urge the Government to include in the final strategy acknowledgement of the role played by researchers based in Australia's Universities, public institutions such as the National Library and National Museum, as well as the work of a diverse group of independent scholars who work in the heritage and public history fields.

What practical actions would you suggest to improve national heritage leadership?

The draft strategy aims to encourage the voluntary sector in developing relevant skills and expertise are worthwhile, however a much broader and arguably more significant challenge is to ensure that Australia's diverse workforce has appropriate heritage-friendly skills. Here again, the role of the post-secondary and Higher Education sector should be formally acknowledged.

CRCAH, like other higher education providers, is playing a key role in educating heritage and museum professionals. The operation of the Centre is strongly community-based with particular issues being defined, tackled and solved using a partnership model. CRCAH members have also provided skills education for the voluntary sector. This model embodies many of the key themes of the draft strategy. The government needs to find a place to acknowledge formal post secondary education in the heritage strategy since this sector will assist in providing the skill sets for the professionals in local and state governments, the corporate sector and in the NGO sphere, who will be able to engage with the concepts of heritage and make decisions which will be aligned with the strategy's overall goal to encourage a greater recognition and respect for Australia's heritage.



In highlighting the role that the research sector can play, there should also be a recognition that the findings and expertise of this sector can assist the Australian Heritage Council make well founded, evidence-based recommendations. There is considerable commitment to making such a meaningful research contribution within CRCAH, and we are certain that other like-minded university professionals share this commitment.

To that end the Australian Heritage Council could establish an Expert Advisory Group. This could include individuals who might be consulted on specific areas so as to broaden and deepen the Council's expertise. The current membership on the Council of six means that it is simply not possible for this small group to be across all issues in all key heritage areas.

The thematic studies series, which is already underway, should be continued and ideally extended. This provides another valuable way for key scholars to make their expertise available to the broader heritage community.

Overall, we strongly support the inclusion of key heritage 'places' as part of the National Heritage Register for example, but would also recommend

- a. further research work that explores cultural, moveable and intangible heritage and how this might or might not interact with specific places (See Robertson, 2009).
- b. the inclusion of sites/places that are often overlooked in heritage terms, in particular the sites of industrial and labour heritage of settler Australia which are poorly represented in the National Heritage Register at the moment (See Fahey et al, 2003 & Reeves et al, 2011)
Some of these sites are nineteenth century in origin while others date from the more recent past as Australia's manufacturing and industrial base undergoes rapid change.
- c. These places of industrial heritage, important components of labour and cultural heritage, also provide opportunities for adaptive re-use. Strategies should be developed that identify such sites and provide appropriate state and/or national protection through heritage listing and encouragement for adaptive re-use.



2. Pursue Innovative Partnerships

What partnerships are most needed within the heritage sector?

What heritage roles and responsibilities should be led by governments, peak heritage organisations or community groups in the 21st century?

How should resources be shared through heritage partnerships to ensure the greatest return on agreed priorities?

Can you provide examples of successful innovative partnerships you or your organisation have established?

The draft strategy has appropriate mention of the voluntary sector and this is to be applauded. The role of the voluntary sector could be strengthened however if a three-way partnership between government, the expert community, and the voluntary community was more strongly integrated into the final strategy.

In section 1 (above), for example, we have argued for an acknowledgement of the role of higher education providers in assisting and training the voluntary sector

We reiterate the positive role that expert research can play in guiding community groups with academically rigorous studies that might underpin their activities.

Furthermore, some research groups, such as CRCAH, have strong links within industry and community groups. This means that their research efforts are community-derived and have a strong platform in real-world issues and concerns. In other words the research-community relationship is not always a case of 'knowledge transfer' but is a much more engaged two way process that sees researchers working with community groups to help identify, develop, and implement research findings.

Therefore, the final National Heritage Strategy should privilege research inputs that have this community-engaged basis. This 'community based research' overall-

- a. privileges a partnership model between researchers and the community;
- b. promotes multiple methods and inputs, and
- c. seeks change and action through outcomes and implementation (See Strand et al 2003)



3. Enable encourage communities to understand and care for their heritage

What should the Australian heritage sector be doing to help the Australian community better engage in heritage activities?

How can a shared understanding of our national heritage be developed and best celebrated together?

Do you have any examples of activities that have been successful in promoting local heritage to a broader audience?

What is the role of technology and new media in providing greater community access to heritage?

From the perspective of CRCAH, with its strong research and education role, we submit that the formal integration of Australia's diverse research community into the final National Heritage Strategy is a vital way to develop and promote national and local heritage. Many higher education providers, including Federation University with its distinctive regional base, have strong community engagement activities (such as public lectures, seminars and outreach programmes) which can be utilised to further the goals of the National Heritage Strategy.

Higher Education providers can-

- a. offer expert training to museum staff, local and state government officers as well as assist in the training of community based volunteers. These connections are already happening and could be acknowledged and strengthened through incorporation in the National Heritage Strategy
- b. make high quality contributions to the thematic series through commissioned works and studies
- c. make high quality contributions to the Australian Heritage Council through the development of an expert advisory panel.

One final way in which the Commonwealth Government might engage productively with other levels of government, and the community sector, is with an awareness campaign focusing on identifying, protecting and preserving Australia's heritage. CRCAH members are aware of numerous examples where places and/or items of local and state heritage significance have been destroyed or neglected. Items of moveable heritage such as business and community group records are particularly vulnerable. Sometimes staff members making decisions about the heritage significance of these records do not have adequate knowledge or training to assess their value.



Prepared by Professor Erik Eklund

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9th June 2014

This document was developed in collaboration with CRCAH colleagues especially Dr Anne Beggs-Sunter, Lecturer in History, Federation University Australia.

Other comments

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Australian Government