# Template FOR INPUT INTO THE

**AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE STRATEGY**

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| Overview  This template should be used to provide comments on the content of the Australian Heritage Strategy. | |
| Contact Details | |
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| **Date:** | **10 June 2014** |
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| 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? | |
| Be the leader. Think about heritage as a national narrative and update the understanding of what heritage is to reflect current thinking and lead future thinking about heritage. ‘Icons’ program is out of touch and does not reflect the current historical thinking, nor does it reflect contemporary heritage theory or practice.  Leadership embodies vision and strategic thinking. The draft Strategy reflects the status quo in thinking. The vision for heritage is considered tired and didactic. It is realistic to envision that heritage is valued by all Australians? Wouldn’t it be more ‘visionary’ if the Commonwealth engaged in debate and discussion about what defines our national heritage and our cultural identify. For too long, heritage has been and continues to be conceptualised as ‘things’ that are ‘objectively’ assessed and conserved according to specific standards and practices. Whilst this process and practice is important in recent times the Commonwealth has played a largely insignificant role in asking critical questions and fostering or contributing broader debate and conversation around what heritage means today.  The vision for heritage should be that it is considered as part of contemporary culture.  We cannot assume that the work of identifying heritage is complete, far from it.  Recognise the Australian Government’s role in listing, conserving and promoting heritage nation-wide. The Australian Government is the single biggest landholder in Australia and its agencies are already managing heritage via their obligations under the EPBC Act. The Australian Government could provide leadership by being the exemplar in managing its own heritage places. This receives no mention in the draft heritage strategy.  The strategy seems to express a desire to devolve responsibility down to state and local levels, and remove the over-arching protection that the EPBC Act can provide through ‘streamlining’ processes and the ‘one stop shop’.  Funding—there is no commitment other to World Heritage than for Port Arthur. The focus on one site diminishes the richness and diversity of Australia’s World Heritage and does not reinforce or support the three overarching themes.  No commitments for Indigenous heritage, only ‘proposed actions’. Only a single mention of ‘Ask First’ guidelines, but no other leadership ideas for Indigenous heritage.  No mention of the Burra Charter and its role in national heritage as a leading guideline and standard for practice.  The leadership role of the Australian World Heritage Committee is not referred to.  The vital role of the Australian World Heritage Indigenous Network is similarly omitted.  Both the Committee and the Network play a role in cohering and centring discussion and debate and should be supported to assist in framing the aims of the Strategy in the areas of leadership, partnerships and community engagement.  No explanation of the ‘Green Army Programme’. Concern about the suggestion that the Green Army used National and World Heritage sites for training—surely these are the places for skilled trades.  The National Heritage List should be appropriately and adequately resourced. In our experience, clients that are encouraged to assess and nominate their property to the National Heritage List have become disillusioned and frustrated with the process. This is due to the lack of timeliness and responsiveness and the exhaustive bureaucratic process. Leadership at National level would foster industry and community engagement around key priorities and themes for National Listing.  We consider that the Commonwealth could support the States and Local Government through thematic National Heritage Listings that ‘tell the stories of our nation’ through ‘collections’ of State and Locally listed places.  One key strength of the Commonwealth’s approach it the statutory mandate to identify and assess all values including natural, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Integrated values assessment is still the exception rather than the norm at State and Local levels. The Commonwealth could play a key role in this area. | |
| 1. **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? | |
| Heritage skills and trades training receive no mention.  The strategy seems to express a desire to rely on community groups and non-government organisations like the National Trust. However, there is no commitment for funding and no recognition that the National Trust and similar organisations are struggling to survive already.  No commitment to engaging Indigenous leaders nation-wide.  Is crowd-funding really an appropriate initiative for Australian Government programs?  One key innovation in partnerships would be ‘joined up thinking in government’. For example, there are strong synergies between heritage and the arts, however, there is little evidence that consideration has been given to this in the draft Strategy.  Innovative partnerships could be perused with universities, theatre and performance groups, artists etc to generate different ways of connecting and responding to heritage.  Fostering higher research into heritage and developing new strands of thinking would be both progressive and innovative.  Clear delineation of the roles and responsibilities of the various tiers of government and how it is proposed to partner with each to realise the vision for heritage is necessary and should be integrated into the strategy.  Partnerships with businesses aligned to and supportive of natural and cultural heritage should be identified.  More economic modelling to demonstrate the costs/benefits of heritage need to be undertaken so as debate may focus evidence and how the Commonwealth can target resources for maximum benefit and ‘return’. | |
| 1. **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? | |
| Fund it. Commit worthwhile funding to community grants that build capacity and engagement in heritage.  Support for local government through encouraging and promoting heritage. Recognition of community groups and organisations that have played a role in protecting our heritage should continue.  The Commonwealth could consider a national awards program that recognises excellence in natural, Indigenous and non-Indigenous heritage management and conservation.  The heritage ‘brand’ and identity needs to change. The industry and profession has matured and different ways of understanding, making meaning and valuing heritage have emerged. To remain relevant and engaging, the Commonwealth needs not only to adopt fresh ways of presenting the past through technology, but the conversations need to change. WilderQuest, is an Office of Environment and Heritage award winning children’s program designed to engage them in exploration of the natural world. Vivid, the Sydney based festival of light and ideas, has generated public engagement and participation in the city. The light protection on historic buildings has also contributed to people looking at these buildings through different eyes as they create new forms of life and spectacle.  A critical revaluation of where we are and what the future for heritage management and protection is needs to be considered. As is quoted in the Report of the National Estate, ‘we must expand the concept of conservation to meet the imperious problems of the new age. We must develop new instruments of foresight and protection and nurture in order to recover the relationship between man (sic) and nature and make sure that the national estate we pass on to our multiplying descendants is green and flourishing. (John Fitzgerald Kennedy, 1963, quoted in Report of the National Estate. | |
| **Other comments** | |
| GML Heritage would be pleased to provide further comment or contribute to the review of further drafts of the strategy.  We would like to commend the Department on this significant initiative and eagerly await the outcome following the period of public consultation and comment. | |