

Australia's Heritage Collections

National Conservation and Preservation Policy and Strategy

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FOREWORD

Australia's cultural heritage encompasses all the things that are significant to Australians which have survived from the past. Movable cultural heritage refers to items of cultural heritage which are capable of being transported. Australia is one of only a few countries which have developed and published a specific policy and strategy to care for their cultural heritage.

This heritage is made up of the tangible such as paintings, books, aircraft and natural history specimens and the intangible. Increasingly what was formerly intangible—such as traditions, customs and habits—are recorded and documented in photographs, films, tapes and disks. As rapid advances are made in technology, it is important that the preservation and accessibility of cultural heritage increases accordingly.

The National Conservation and Preservation Strategy for Australia's Heritage Collections is a joint Commonwealth, State, and museum sector initiative through the Heritage Collections Council (HCC), formerly the Heritage Collections Committee. The aim of the strategy is to implement the National Conservation and Preservation Policy for Movable Cultural Heritage, endorsed by the Cultural Ministers Council (CMC). The policy was released in 1995 and is reproduced here to accompany the strategy and should be read in tandem with it. The term 'movable cultural heritage' has been replaced in the strategy and throughout this document with the term 'heritage collections'.

The National Conservation and Preservation Policy and Strategy for Australia's Heritage Collections positions Australia as a leader in caring for the cultural material of our diverse community.

It is with a great deal of pleasure that I commend this policy and strategy to all Australians in the hope that we will continue to treasure our extraordinary cultural heritage for the enrichment of people today and in the future.

RICHARD ALSTON

Minister for Communications, the Information Economy and the Arts
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The Heritage Collections Council wishes to thank and acknowledge the contribution of the following groups to the Policy and Strategy:

Cultural Ministers Council

Members of the Heritage Collections Working Group

The Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material

University of Melbourne Conservation Service

Members of the former Heritage Collections Committee

Members of the Conservation Working Party

Museums Australia

Authors of the Strategy Forum Working Papers and the forum facilitator

All participants in the Strategy Forum of October 1996

All stakeholders who responded with comments to the draft strategy in 1997

Members of the Collections Management and Conservation Working Party

Past and present staff of the HCC Secretariat in the Heritage Branch of the Department of Communications and the Arts

The HCC's Collections Management and Conservation Working Party is responsible for coordination of the implementation of the strategy. Members of the Working Party and their contact numbers are listed at Appendix 1.

BACKGROUND

Australia's heritage collections are in the care of many individuals and organisations. The Commonwealth, State, Territory and Local Governments are custodians of much of this heritage, but non-government organisations, voluntary groups, private sector companies and individual members of the community also play important roles in conservation and preservation of Australia's heritage collections.

Fundamental issues related to the conservation and preservation of Australia's heritage collections are addressed in this document, including:

- cultural diversity;
- understanding the significance of this heritage;
- coordination;
- skills development, education and training; and
- research.

This document is the culmination of many years work and reflects a spirit of cooperation between governments and the private, community and non-government sector.

The Heritage Collections Working Group was formed by the CMC in 1990 and identified the development of a national conservation and preservation policy as a cornerstone of a national program.

As a result of the recommendations of the Working Group, the Heritage Collections Committee (a collaboration between Government and the heritage collections sector) was formed in 1993.

The HCC's Conservation Working Party (CWP) tackled the development of the policy as its first task, having identified the policy as the foundation upon which other program elements could be based.

A consortium led by the University of Melbourne Conservation Service was commissioned to write a first draft and produced a comprehensive document in July 1994. This document was refined following discussion with the CWP and the redrafted policy circulated to peak bodies for comment. The National Conservation and Preservation Policy for Movable Cultural Heritage was endorsed by the Cultural Ministers Council on 6 July 1995 and subsequently released.

To develop this strategy to implement the policy, the CWP consulted with heritage collection stakeholders at a national forum in October 1996. A series of working papers were commissioned for the forum which identified the main issues that needed to be included in the strategy. Following extensive consultation and revision, the strategy was presented to the HCC for endorsement.

In December 1996 CMC Ministers agreed to form a Heritage Collections Council to build on the work of the Heritage Collections Committee and endorsed a five year strategic plan for the Council. The new HCC will work to achieve specific outcomes by the year 2001 including coordination and implementation of the strategy. Online access to collections has already been achieved through Australian Museums Online (AMOL) which was developed by the Online Working Party of the HCC.

Many of the comments made in the consultation period were detailed and collection-specific and will be considered more closely in the implementation phase. Full implementation of the strategy depends on resources being available from both the public and private sector, and support across government and non-government institutions.

The HCC's Collections Management and Conservation Working Party has been given the responsibility of developing yearly workplans until 2001 which incorporate initiatives to support the implementation of the strategy.