AusHeritage

Australia's International Network for Cultural Heritage Services

Submission in response to the Consultation Paper on a new National Cultural Policy

AusHeritage is pleased to provide a submission on what the next chapter should be for Australia's National Cultural Policy.

As Australia's international cultural heritage network, we have been in the forefront of representing Australia since 1995, collaborating on cultural heritage projects and capacity building globally, with a strong focus on the Indo-Pacific. AusHeritage is an active, important, and successful expression of Australian cultural diplomacy.

In 2023, we welcomed *Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place* which sought to strengthen the arts infrastructure and cultural practices of this country. We hoped this would provide a stronger platform for this nation's engagement and cultural collaborations across the world.

Many of the commitments in *Revive* have been delivered successfully. However, there remain significant gaps in the policy framework, and there are both new and continuing challenges to be met.

In August 2022 we made a submission on the development of Australia's much-needed first national cultural policy for many years. *Revive* was a good start for the arts sector, but much less so for culture, cultural heritage and the humanities. It is now urgent that this be rectified.

We have attached our original submission which clearly sets out the case for an expanded and inclusive concept of Australia's national cultural policy, along with identifying areas that need more focus and support. **We conclude that very little has shifted over the last 3-4 years in the areas we highlighted. We suggest that this is clear evidence that if there is no or inadequate policy recognition in the first place, then platforms for developing national strategies and programs of support are severely limited or non-existent.**

Recommendations
In a nutshell:

- **A cultural policy is far broader than an arts policy and must include Australia's cultural heritage**
    - For decades, there has been an imbalance in Australia at the national level between strategic oversight and investments in non-Indigenous cultural heritage, and in the arts. The government now has a chance to remedy this, and it can be done in different ways, as set out in the attachment.

- **Sustainability should be a key goal**
    - Acknowledgement of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and recognising the need to align cultural policy with achieving relevant goals are

critical steps. In 2020, Australia's GLAM peak bodies outlined how this would work in their domains, and policy and funding support are essential.

- **Adherence to international conventions, declarations, and charters** should be explicitly stated and organisations supported in their efforts to comply.

- **A whole-of-government approach to enabling, implementing and benefitting from the new national cultural policy is required**
    - This would see strengthened interactions and co-funding with key national priorities such as in education, *Closing the Gap* programs, and climate action. A highly relevant example is in the field of disaster risk reduction and management.

- **Education and training pathways need increased and sustained investment**
    - Strengthening Australia's expertise in all aspects of cultural practice provides benefits both to Australian communities and our international relationships.

- **Promoting international and intercultural exchange and co-operation in cultural heritage should be supported in the same way as the arts are currently**
    - Cultural heritage connects to identity and belonging. With a broader conceptualisation of national culture, Australian cultural heritage can be appreciated for its role in contributing to international relations and the expansive goals of a creative Australia.

- **Cultural diplomacy has become even more important in these turbulent times**
    - International instability will make it more important than ever for nations to manage relationships.
    - We believe that the resources and interpretive skills of the heritage constituency create a medium to ensure informed and considered understanding of the world outside our borders, and in particular our neighbours in the Indo-Pacific region, so that Australia can successfully negotiate its future.

Challenges

Australians need their foundational cultural institutions, as well as the private sector, to be ready and able to support the challenges faced at home and regionally. In these momentous times of global power shifts and climate disasters, it is imperative for Australia's sustainability that the capability and capacity of our cultural infrastructure is appropriately resourced to help Australians and the Australian government achieve informed and culturally aware understandings of our place in the world, and the Indo-Pacific especially.

Such understandings need to embrace the interconnectedness of investment, trade, our aid programs, climate change, defence, cultural history and living cultures. As conflict strategists note, investment in these areas by Australia as a middle power can help avert conflict

upstream. Through AusHeritage's demonstrated commitment and diplomacy we have already contributed to strengthening international networks. With a broader conceptualisation of national culture, the sector can achieve much more.

Conclusion

AusHeritage strongly supports the development of a new and more inclusive national cultural policy and can provide further advice. We also support the submissions of related peak national cultural heritage organisations, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Australia, GLAM Peak, the Australian Museums and Galleries Association (AMaGA) and Interpretation Australia.

AusHeritage Ltd Board
22 May 2026

Chair: Vinod Daniel - vinod.daniel.am@gmail.com

Contact Vice-Chair/Board Member: Alex Marsden – marsdenalexxx@gmail.com

Website: https://ausheritage.org.au

AusHeritage

Australia's International Network for Cultural Heritage Services

ATTACHMENT 1 **Previous Submission lodged on 15 August 2022**

Submission on the development of a new national cultural policy for Australia

AusHeritage welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to inform the development of a much-needed national cultural policy.

Who we are

AusHeritage was established by the federal Government in 1995 and has been an independent organisation for over 25 years. Our membership interconnects a diverse and unique group of specialists with rich Australian and international expertise in movable and immovable cultural heritage that includes buildings, places, intangible heritage, and collections in galleries, libraries, archives, and museums (GLAMs).

As Australia's international cultural heritage network, we have been in the forefront of representing Australia, collaborating on cultural heritage projects and capacity building in priority fields such as museum leadership and management, historic buildings conservation, world heritage community engagement strategies, site interpretation, and disaster risk reduction, particularly in South Asia, South-East Asia, and the Pacific. While our focus is international, the expertise of AusHeritage members is founded on extensive Australian experience that is sought globally.
https://ausheritage.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/AusHeritage-Strategic-Plan-2021-2023.pdf

AusHeritage is an active, important, and successful expression of Australian cultural diplomacy. We have developed and renewed MoUs with several heritage and government cultural organisations in countries such as India, Taiwan, and Malaysia, to enable the sharing of expertise and capacity building in the region.

Furthermore, as our AusHeritage Board members provide strategic and cultural policy advice to national and state governments and actively contribute to Australia's peak cultural organisations[1], we would like to highlight the opportunity for Board representatives to contribute rich expertise and strategic advice to the development and implementation of the new cultural policy framework.

We have three key points to make.

1. **Definition and scope**

A cultural policy is far broader than an arts policy and must include Australia's cultural heritage.

Drawing on our international experience, we provide the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)'s definition of culture to illustrate the point.

> *"Culture"* means the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, intellectual, emotional and material features that characterize a society or social group. It includes the arts and letters as well as human modes of life, value systems, creativity, knowledge systems, traditions and beliefs. *(ASEAN Declaration On Cultural Heritage July 2000)*

For the purposes of developing Australia's new national cultural policy, the key missing element is a place for our tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and their creators, interpreters, and custodians. Museums and galleries; collections and objects; historic places and cultural landscapes and their associated artefacts, artworks, and histories; libraries and archives - these are all crucial parts of cultural life. While a holistic approach is rightly taken for our First Nations' cultures (and it is axiomatic that they be central to the new policy) so too is the diversity of our non-Indigenous

cultural heritage important to include, to help enable an integrated and maturing sense of who we are and our place in the world. An inclusive cultural policy will also support greater civic empathy, equity and belonging.

Heritage is a core component of the cultural policies of most other countries, such as the UK. Sweden's cultural policy, for example, aims to "promote a dynamic cultural heritage that is preserved, used and developed."

For decades, there has been an imbalance in Australia at the national level between strategic oversight and investments in non-Indigenous cultural heritage, and in the arts. The government now has a chance to remedy this, and it can be done in different ways, such as:

- Establishing a new body (an Australia Council for the Humanities / Cultural Heritage), or
- Expanding the resourcing and remit of the Australia Council for the Arts, or
- Establishing a new strategic investment fund for cultural heritage in the department, with new resourcing not taken from existing appropriations.

2. Five pillars

We support the five pillars and the expansive way in which the Minister is interpreting them as outlined in his Town Hall meetings. There needs, however, to be more explicit focus on the following:

- **Sustainability** - both for cultural infrastructure and the cultural industries, and in our contributions to national and global environmental sustainability and climate action. Acknowledgement of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and recognising the need to align cultural policy with achieving relevant goals are critical steps. In 2020, Australia's GLAM peak bodies outlined how this would work in their domains, and policy and funding support are essential. The six themes are access, diversity, environmental sustainability, economic contribution, collaboration, and awareness raising. https://glampeak.files.wordpress.com/2022/05/2020-08-31-glam-peak-sdg-priorities-endorsed.pdf

- **Adherence to international conventions, declarations, and charters** – along with the SDG, there are, for example, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People; the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions; the World Heritage Convention; and the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. (A priority, to bring Australia into line with other countries, would be a commitment to ratify the two Protocols to this Hague Convention).

Industry standards and best practice should also provide guidance and benchmarks, such as ICOM's *Code of Ethics for Museums,* Australia ICOMOS' *Burra Charter for Places of Cultural Significance*, and AMaGA's *First Peoples: A Roadmap for Enhancing Indigenous Engagement in Museums and Galleries.*

- **Strengthened interactions and co-funding** with key national priorities such as in education, health, and climate change mitigation. A highly relevant example is in the field of disaster risk reduction and management:

- The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction *Sendai Framework for disaster risk reduction*[2] and bodies such as Blue Shield International and Blue Shield Australia recognise the importance of the 'vital expression of the culture that makes up unique communities' and that 'its loss during conflict and disaster can be catastrophic.' [3]
- Cultural heritage needs to be embedded as a core value and critical element in a systemic disaster risk reduction framework across the country, along with an integrated multi-disciplined approach that includes the traditional knowledge and environmental management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- AusHeritage members have expertise and rich experience in developing and delivering integrated disaster education and training that focuses on safeguarding cultural heritage to diverse audiences within Australia and internationally[4]

- **Education and training** – strengthening Australia's expertise in all aspects of cultural practice provides benefits both to Australian communities and our international relationships. AusHeritage's expertise is valued in the Asia-Pacific region. The two-way exchange of knowledge and expertise in cultural heritage has significant potential to continue to enhance cross cultural understandings if conceptualised through central policy.

- **International impact** – promoting international and intercultural exchange and co-operation in the cultural sphere. Cultural heritage connects to identity and belonging. Through AusHeritage's demonstrated commitment and diplomacy we have already contributed to strengthening international networks. With a broader conceptualisation of national culture, Australian cultural heritage can be appreciated for its role in contributing to the goals of a creative Australia.

3. Cultural diplomacy

Many Australians share the view that we live in momentous times. Climate change, energy crises and transitions, the impact of pandemics, global and regional power struggles, and the political impact of uninformed thought and extreme ideologies, make our future uncertain and unprecedented in human history. This instability will make it more important than ever for nations to manage relationships.

AusHeritage believes that in what is now the Asia-Pacific century, responses to global challenges can only be addressed by a fundamental understanding of cultural phenomena and systems. We believe that the resources and interpretive skills of the heritage constituency create a medium to ensure informed and considered understanding of the world outside our borders, and in particular our neighbours in the Asia-Pacific region so that Australia can successfully negotiate its future.

Australians need their foundational cultural institutions, as well as the private sector to be ready and able to support the challenges faced at home and regionally. As a significant focus, AusHeritage sees a stronger engagement with ASEAN as a way of increasing the value of our relationships alongside the exchange of cultural knowledge and understanding of the region.

In these turbulent times it is imperative for Australia's sustainability that the capability and capacity of our cultural institutions are appropriately resourced to help Australians and the Australian government achieve informed and culturally aware understandings of our place in South-East Asia. Such an understanding needs to embrace the interconnectedness of investment, trade, climate change, defence, cultural history and living cultures. Australia's new and sophisticated cultural policy must understand, promote, and support this endeavour.

Conclusion

AusHeritage strongly supports the development of an inclusive national cultural policy and is ready to provide advice and support for action to address the policies we have proposed. We also support the submissions of related peak national cultural heritage organisations, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Australia, the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material (AICCM), and the Australian Museums and Galleries Association (AMaGA).

AusHeritage Ltd Board
15 August 2022

Chair: Vinod Daniel - vinod.daniel.am@gmail.com

Contact Board member: Alex Marsden – alex.marsden@canberra.edu.au

Website: https://ausheritage.org.au

Footnotes

[1] For example, the International Council of Museums (ICOM), Australia ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites), Blue Shield Australia, Australian Museums and Galleries Association (AMaGA), the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) and the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Materials (AICCM).

[2] United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). (2015). *Sendai Framework for disaster risk reduction 2015-30. Section 30 d.* New York, NY: United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). https://www.preventionweb.net/files/43291_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf

[3] Blue Shield International. (BSI). (2021). https://theblueshield.org

[4] Some indicative examples of AusHeritage members' involvement in education and training in disaster risk reduction include:

- Workshops at the BSA symposium on Cultural Heritage Climate change and natural disasters (2018)https://blueshieldaustralia.org.au/symposium/workshops/
- AMaGA Disaster Preparedness, Response and Recovery Training (2019) https://www.amaga.org.au/events/amaga-victoria-presents-disaster-preparedness-response-and-recovery-training
- Integrated disaster training in India: https://web.archive.org/web/20200331053633/http://artlabaustralia.com.au/news_details.php?event_id=364
- Capacity building for Tamil Nadu Museums https://www.aninews.in/news/national/politics/capacity-building-for-tamil-nadu-museums/
- Australia and India: protecting national heritage from natural disasters https://india.highcommission.gov.au/ndli/PA_03_2002.html
- BSA cultural heritage symposium on disaster preparedness (2021) https://www.artlabaustralia.com.au/news/artlab-at-disaster-preparedness-and-our-cultural-heritage-and-collections-symposium-today