

# NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY

DISCUSSION PAPER  
SUBMISSION



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Yes

No

## Introduction

The Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Materials (AICCM) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the National Cultural Policy Discussion Paper. Since 1976, the AICCM has represented the conservation profession in Australia. AICCM has actively worked to promote the preservation of Australia's cultural heritage in recognition of the role that material culture plays in establishing and enhancing our national identity and the identity of groups and individuals throughout our nation. Our organisation believes that:

- The development of a National Cultural Policy is an opportunity to re-affirm the importance of conservation and preservation, and of the heritage sector as a whole. This is of particular importance to AICCM as conservation enables access to culture.
- Conservation enriches people's experience of material culture and provides opportunities to develop greater knowledge of the technologies and cultural practices that have produced the objects we keep.
- Conservation preserves the significance of cultural materials and thus the stories associated with them.

The goals in this policy align with the current aims and work of AICCM. We are well-placed to support the development of the National Cultural Policy.

## 1. About your organisation

The Australian Institute for Conservation of Cultural Materials (AICCM) is the peak body for conservation in Australia. It is a non-profit organisation concerned with the conservation, preservation and provision of access to Australia's tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Our membership includes over 550 professional conservators and allied professionals such as archivists, architects, curators, librarians and volunteers. Conservators work in galleries, libraries, archives, museums and private practices across the country and internationally.

The aims of the AICCM are:

- To promote the science and art of the conservation of cultural material,
- To promote co-operation and exchange amongst those concerned with the conservation of cultural material,
- To improve the scientific and technical knowledge of the profession,
- To inform and lobby government and other organisations on matters relating to the conservation of cultural material.

AICCM is committed to preserving our tangible and intangible heritage to enable our nation's stories to be told. We aim to preserve significant objects from the past and present, which is an investment for the future. Through these objects we can share our knowledge, experience and assist others to care for their heritage. This is demonstrated by the work we have done in the past. For example, as part of the Heritage Collections Committee (HCC) Conservation and Collection Management Working Party, AICCM members were instrumental in developing a range of policies and publications that ensured long-term preservation of Australia's Cultural Heritage. These documents include:



- Heritage Collections Committee and Cultural Ministers Council, *National Conservation and Preservation Policy for Movable Cultural Heritage*, Canberra, 1995.
- Cultural Ministers Council and Heritage Collections Council, *National Conservation and Preservation Policy and Strategy: Australia's heritage collections*, Commonwealth Department of Communication and the Arts, Canberra, 1998.
- A number of publications focused on collections management and care as part of the Heritage Collections Council. They are: *Significance* (2001), *Significance 2.0* (2009), *re-Collections* (1998) *Be Prepared* (2000) and *Guidelines for Environmental Control in Cultural Institutions* (2002).

## 2. Do you support the development of a National Cultural Policy, and why?

The discussion paper identifies cultural heritage as sitting parallel to “core arts and creative industries”. We believe that these three strands of Australia’s cultural life are intermingled with Australia’s rich and diverse cultural heritage, providing inspiration for many new works and reference points for many creative industries. A National Cultural Policy is important not just for those working within the cultural sector but for the broader community who have a right to access and experience Australian culture in all its forms.

AICCM supports the development of a National Cultural Policy as:

- The aims of the policy are consistent with the aims of our profession in recognising the role that culture plays as core to a vibrant, dynamic and resilient society.
- We believe there will be significant benefits that will flow from a national approach to managing our national cultural heritage and developing programs for engagement with the arts and our cultural and technological history to which conservators can directly contribute through their research.
- Australia is not a mono-culture and the recognition of diversity and efforts to draw on that diversity increases our knowledge and understanding of each other and our heritage. Conservators have benefited from this diversity and their profession has been enriched by exposure to different ways of thinking about preservation and in turn we have contributed to sensitive approaches to preservation in different cultural contexts.
- AICCM recognises the need for a policy that represents contemporary Australian society, looks to the future and addresses the challenges and opportunities that technological, social and environmental change over the coming decades brings. These include:

### *Opportunities:*

- Increased participatory engagement made possible through on-line technologies and social media networks.
- Developing technologies for cultural heritage research that allow for new methods to both increase and share our understanding of cultural material for example the Synchrotron for materials analysis, 3D scanning for documentation, nanotechnology for materials treatment, semantic web to more effectively aggregate knowledge, and data visualisation techniques to assist art learning.
- A return to craft and to community engagement (as evident through such groups as the Maker Movement; Slow Movement; Transition Towns) provides an opportunity for society explore its material culture both present and past and re-discover the ethics of care, manual skills, creativity and social well-being.
- Potential growth in volunteerism and engagement with traditional cultural activities through the retirement of Baby Boomers.
- The Asia-Pacific becoming a global economic centre in the coming decades due to the rise of China and India in population and GDP growth is likely to increase cultural tourism across the region; expand opportunities for cross-cultural collaborations and highlight the uniqueness of Australian arts and culture.

### *Challenges:*

- Resources required for transferring existing collections to on-line compatible formats.



- Keeping abreast of the growth in new materials and techniques incorporated into artworks and the rapid changes in technologies to inform effective preservation strategies.
- Meeting environmental challenges that may account for greater variance in weather patterns and pre-emptive natural disaster planning as well as the need to ensure a more sustainable approach to collections management.
- Developing a sustainable funding model to ensure on-going government and the development of private sector funding of the arts and culture sectors.
- Facilitating the discovery of cultural heritage for younger generations in meaningful and engaging ways.
- Clarification of intellectual property boundaries.

### 3. What are your views about each of the four goals?

#### ***GOAL 1: To ensure that what the Government supports - and how this support is provided - reflects the diversity of a 21<sup>st</sup> century Australia, and protects and supports Indigenous culture***

- To be a truly national policy, the NCP must reflect the nation that we are which is diverse and culturally rich. Thus AICCM strongly supports this aim. AICCM recognises the role access to arts and culture can play in “shaping identity and building strong, resilient, prosperous communities”. Cultural heritage has an important role to play in developing cross-cultural awareness, which is key to the development of cohesive communities and celebrating the diversity of 21st century Australia.
- AICCM encourages vibrant relationships with Indigenous and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) groups across sectors of our community through the preservation of and research into tangible and intangible heritage associated with cultural material. This lies at the core of the AICCM Code of Ethics. For many Indigenous Australians access to cultural heritage including photographs, recordings and secret sacred objects plays a significant role in re-engaging with their heritage. Conservators work to preserve cultural heritage to enable such access for not only Indigenous but for all Australians.
- AICCM believes that strategies that build new audiences and increase engagement with Australian culture should incorporate the preservation of Australian cultural heritage to ensure it is accessible to present and future generations.

#### ***GOAL 2: To encourage the use of emerging technologies and new ideas that support the development of new artworks and the creative industries, and that enable more people to access and participate in arts and culture***

- This goal reflects social and technological changes in the way we communicate and engage in contemporary society. AICCM believes that without this goal the National Cultural Policy would be lagging behind what is happening globally. Technology continues to change at an unprecedented rate and the challenge will be to keep the policy current when the unimaginable becomes reality. This goal is important to ensure the sector remains relevant in the modern world.
- AICCM recognises the opportunities that emerging technologies offer for the production as well as the interpretation of cultural heritage. This encompasses the potential for new ways of accessing our collections via on-line and virtual environments. We see this as an opportunity to enhance interaction and understanding of cultural heritage collections rather than compete with the tangible artefact. Emerging technologies open the door for innovation within the cultural heritage field for example the use of haptics technology for collections care training or ‘physical’ access to cultural heritage collections for the visually impaired. This will require the conservation profession to be responsive and open to technological developments in order to effectively evaluate their utility for use in the preservation of works of art and other cultural material.
- New technologies also enable us to share knowledge more readily and work co-operatively within the profession, across the sector and to the broader community.

- There is significant potential for people to access and participate in arts and culture through the digitisation of existing collections. However, national coordination of the digitisation of Australia's cultural heritage is needed to avoid duplication and ensure the development of a simple, comprehensive access point. As well as providing access for people in regional areas, support is required to provide appropriate access to collections in regional areas. Conservation is an important aspect of digitisation as material often requires some level of conservation to stabilise items for handling and to obtain the best digital image.
- New analytical techniques often provide insights into collections that draw in new audiences. A number of cultural institutions are providing online access to the conservation and analysis of collections that enriches audiences' understanding of cultural heritage and can provide inspiration for the creation of new works. For Indigenous communities conservation analysis can aid in rediscovering lost knowledge.

### **GOAL 3: To support excellence and world-class endeavour, and strengthen the role that the arts play in telling Australian stories both here and overseas**

#### *Supporting Excellence and world class endeavour*

AICCM supports this aspect of Goal 3 in its role as a peak professional body.

- Australia has a reputation for excellence in digital and Indigenous collection preservation and in many other areas of conservation and preservation activity.
- Australian conservators are employed overseas and Australian conservation expertise is valued internationally, with many of our members involved in international professional committees and having publications in international peer-reviewed and other professional journals.
- Australian conservators have been delivering training programs to organisations in regional Australia and throughout the Asia Pacific region for a number of years assisting in raising standards of collection care.
- AICCM's professional accreditation is one aspect of how we develop benchmark standards nationally.

#### *Strengthen the role that the arts play in telling Australian stories*

Conservation is a key activity in the delivery of exhibitions within Australia and overseas, hence the profession is already, and will continue to be, a key contributor to this goal. This is principally through the work we do in caring for collections held in Australia and through preparing items for loan to regional, national and international organisations. This goal is aligned with our present and ongoing work and commitments.

- Conservation explores objects and enriches knowledge of them and the history that they represent.
- Conservation can facilitate a greater understanding of histories of use, cultural context, technical art history, anthropology, cultural production, and through revealing and disseminating this information enables others to tell stories.

### **GOAL 4: To increase and strengthen the capacity of the arts to contribute to our society and economy**

- This is an important goal for us as a nation as well as for the sustainability of heritage collections.
- The conservation profession is committed to education. Conservation activities are an excellent vehicle for communicating messages of heritage preservation, material science, cultural history and production in education programs.
- We believe that the conservation profession makes a direct contribution to education, social inclusion and most particularly to tourism and the economic benefits that flow from it. Our contribution to tourism includes:
  - Conservation of collections for exhibitions and touring exhibitions
  - Conservation of public monuments and historic interiors
  - Conservation of archives and primary and secondary research resources
  - Conservation of technology items
  - A contribution to the sustainability of intangible culture e.g. language, dance, performance etc.
  - Enabling access to heritage material that has not been accessible due to its condition



- Knowledge of material science and cultural production that can engage and inform the work of practising artists.

#### 4. What strategies do you think we could use to achieve each of the four goals?

##### **GOAL 1: To ensure that what the Government supports — and how this support is provided — reflects the diversity of a 21<sup>st</sup> century Australia, and protects and supports Indigenous culture**

AICCM supports the strategies outlined in the discussion paper but would also add that consideration be given to:

- Increasing support for research into the material culture of the diverse groups in Australia to facilitate cross-cultural understanding.
- Supporting the development of networks for information sharing.
- Facilitating national and international training and activities in collection care.

##### **GOAL 2: To encourage the use of emerging technologies and new ideas that support the development of new artworks and the creative industries, and that enable more people to access and participate in arts and culture**

In addition to the goals in the discussion paper the AICCM recommends that the NCP:

- Recognise the potential and support the development of online training across the arts
- Encourage innovation and the use of new technologies across the broad spectrum of the cultural sector in the areas of research, conservation, access to collections
- Build on Australia's existing strengths in digital preservation
- Make provision for a national network dealing with cultural heritage education and research and collections access as was previously addressed by the Collections Australia Network (CAN) and Collections Council of Australia (CCA)
- Make provision for researching methods for preserving contemporary media works of cultural significance

##### **GOAL 3: To support excellence and world-class endeavour, and strengthen the role that the arts play in telling Australian stories both here and overseas**

AICCM strongly supports the strategies outlined in the discussion paper. In addition to these the AICCM recognises the need to:

- Assist in the development and funding for internships and professional skills development of Australian conservators to both study and work overseas and sponsorship of international colleagues to learn and benefit from Australian expertise.
- Engage with organisations such as the AICCM, to develop their profile and build networks while at the same time drawing on AICCM's expertise to develop standards and to strengthen national stewardship of our heritage.

##### **GOAL 4: To increase and strengthen the capacity of the arts to contribute to our society and economy**

In addition to the strategies outlined in the discussion paper the AICCM seeks:

- Support for the development of a range of pathways to professional development including internships and craft skill apprenticeships.
- Examination of more flexible funding arrangements for heritage sector organisations to enable skills development and effective succession planning in areas where work pressure often precludes this.
- Provision of incentives for philanthropic support for internships, training programs and research.
- Promotion of the arts and cultural heritage sector to a broad audience – not as just something to enjoy, but as a sector that provides fulfilling careers, satisfying volunteer experiences and something for people to be actively involved in.
- Recognition that conservation can be used as a form of aid, outreach and cross-cultural relationship development with our neighbours in the Asia-Pacific region as well as globally.
- Promotion of the development of networks across the collecting and cultural heritage sectors as well as across regional and urban Australia.



## 5. How can you, your organisation or sector contribute to the goals and strategies of the National Cultural Policy?

**GOAL 1: To ensure that what the Government supports — and how this support is provided — reflects the diversity of a 21<sup>st</sup> century Australia, and protects and supports Indigenous culture**

AICCM can and does:

- Act as a point of contact and advice about the care of Australia's cultural heritage.
- Assist in the development of culturally appropriate keeping places.
- Provide training to organisations and communities in the care of their cultural material.
- Develop protocols that determine our approaches to conservation and preservation work that takes account of cultural difference and the needs of diverse groups within the community.
- Preserve and care for cultural heritage items that reflect the broad diversity of 21<sup>st</sup> century Australia. Examples include the conservation of Indigenous rock art; preservation frameworks for complex digital artworks; and the treatment of iconic Australian artworks such as Tom Roberts' *Shearing the Rams*.

**GOAL 2: To encourage the use of emerging technologies and new ideas that support the development of new artworks and the creative industries, and that enable more people to access and participate in arts and culture**

AICCM can and does:

- Continue research into and implementation of digital preservation activities.
- Identify and research the application of emerging technologies to inform conservation practice and create new means for access and education about Australia's cultural heritage.
- Continue to pursue innovative and effective methods for sustainable collection management including the development of passive environmental controls for collections storage.

**GOAL 3: To support excellence and world-class endeavour, and strengthen the role that the arts play in telling Australian stories both here and overseas**

AICCM can and does:

- Maintain and develop our international professional network.
- Contribute to professional forums, with a particular emphasis on our strengths and our unique skills and knowledge, for example our work in the conservation of Indigenous cultural material and the research into the materials and methods used in the manufacture of cultural heritage items.
- To increase publications concerning the stories of cultural heritage items, their manufacture and materials history.

**GOAL 4: To increase and strengthen the capacity of the arts to contribute to our society and economy**

AICCM can and does:

- Showcase the work we do more effectively – heritage conservation has proven to be a very effective vehicle for communicating the work of museums, galleries and libraries.
- Engage with educators to increase knowledge of conservation, which embodies science and the arts and cultural stewardship.
- Embrace alternative routes into our profession, recognising the value of a range of skills and the roles they can play in our work.

In more general terms:

- Sustainability - assisting communities with managing the effect of climate change on their cultural capital.
- Facilitating access - helping make cultural heritage items available through conservation treatment.
- Conservators are well-placed to help society explore its material culture both present and past.

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## 6. Are there any other goals you would like to see included in the National Cultural Policy?

AICCM advocates the provision of a goal that outlines the importance of the preservation of Australia's cultural heritage for future generations. Cultural heritage is of national importance and provides an understanding of who we are, a point of reference for the development of new works and opportunities for engagement with audiences of all ages. Its ongoing care and management is important to ensure future generations can tap into this important cultural resource.

The AICCM would welcome a more clearly articulated commitment to preservation of the collections, cultural practices, skills and knowledge that we already have. This could build on developments, which came out of *The Piggott Report* (1975). Culture roots us in our past and enables us to imagine and explore our future. This is basic to telling our nation's stories and learning from the past to create a better future.

AICCM and its members also seek a commitment to the support of networks across the collecting and cultural heritage sector. Models used in the past may need to be reviewed and updated, but there is no doubt that these were extremely valuable in helping the sector to develop, grow and showcase Australian expertise. Many of the outcomes arising from these networks have effectively shaped and ensured the preservation of the cultural resource that Australia enjoys today and garnered international recognition in the process.