

# *AusHeritage Ltd*

*Australia's international network for cultural heritage services*

## **Australian National Cultural Policy AusHeritage Ltd submission**

### **AusHeritage and our submission**

1 AusHeritage Ltd is a network of Australian cultural heritage organisations established as a company limited by guarantee with the support of the Australian Government in 1995. The network aims to facilitate the engagement of practitioners and organisations from the Australian heritage industry nationally and internationally. AusHeritage has a strong interest in and focus on South, South-east and East Asia as well as the Pacific.

2 A major thrust of AusHeritage's activities relates to promoting the skills of Australian organisations and individuals overseas through the staging of workshops, seminars and co-operative projects. AusHeritage has long working relationships with organisations such as INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage) and ASEAN-COCI (Committee on Culture and Information).

3 AusHeritage is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the Minister's invitation to comment on the development of an Australian National Cultural Policy and would be pleased to meet with the Minister and his staff to discuss the submission.

4 Because of our interest in Australia's cultural engagement internationally, our comments are directed to the importance of international engagement within the context of an Australian Cultural Policy. Before we do this; however, we would like to present some broader issues for consideration.

### **Introductory comments**

5 While AusHeritage focuses its attention within the heritage discipline, it sees heritage as inclusive and broad ranging. It embraces aspects of architecture and urban planning, cultural landscapes, movable heritage, whether that be historic memorials or collections held within the collections domains of archives, galleries, libraries and museums or managed in keeping places or by interpretive centres. It also covers the vast array of cultural practices associated with intangible heritage, including the arts and crafts, music, song and dance, beliefs and practices and traditional knowledge.

6 On this basis it is our view that an Australian National Cultural Policy should be holistic and hence established so that it reflects the complex diversity of our nation's history and its peoples. To this end we reflect on the important historical and present role of the sciences and sport in our way of life and therefore highlight the need to take the arts, heritage, the sciences and sport into account in framing an Australian cultural policy.

7 A variety of approaches could be adopted in drafting a national cultural policy. One approach would be to base policy considerations on cultural forms. It would thus make sense to develop a cultural framework as part of the policy writing process.

8 Such an approach would define what part of the cultural terrain is being discussed, for example is the Minister talking about a performing arts policy or a comprehensive policy that acknowledges the complexity of Australia's cultural system? Is the extensive system of Indigenous rock art sites a part of Australian Culture? Is the World Heritage site Uluru a part of the national culture? Is the wreck of the Centaur and its tragic history a part of our culture? Are Indigenous languages a part of our culture and are the First Fleet Journals held by the State Library of New South Wales a part of our culture? We believe the answer is yes to all these questions.

9 An alternative approach would be to structure the policy in terms of where the arts and heritage can make a contribution to the nation in terms of the economy, education, health, and social and environmental development including the national response to climate change.

10 An interesting but essentially forgotten model in this respect is the 1995 policy (National Conservation and Preservation Policy for Movable Cultural Heritage) developed by the Heritage Collections Committee for the Cultural Ministers Council. This was further developed into a national strategy in 1998.

11 The 1995 conservation and preservation policy for collections<sup>1</sup> is structured around ten principles:

- Affirmation
- Cultural diversity
- The role of significance philosophy and methodology in guiding operational processes.
- The need for action to conserve and preserve.
- Equitable opportunity of access for all Australians.
- Sustainable access founded on conservation and preservation of collections.
- Involvement and coordination across governments, the private sector, the community and non-government sectors.
- Community understanding to achieve improved conservation, preservation and access.

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<sup>1</sup> *National Conservation and Preservation Policy for Movable Cultural Heritage*, Cultural Ministers Council. Heritage Collections Committee, September 1995

- The need for community-wide skills development, training and education for those involved in the sector, and
- Research to improve conservation and access understanding.

12 The recently published *Strategy for Cultural Policy* (2009)<sup>2</sup> by the Ministry of Education, Finland covers issues such as cultural rights, cultural diversity, indigenous culture, multiculturalism, demographics, ICT, sustainability, innovation and entrepreneurship and the efficiency of cultural administration. The Finn's approach acknowledges the complexity of cultural systems and includes art, architecture, cultural heritage, museums, libraries and archives as part of their discussion.

13 AusHeritage strongly supports the idea of a comprehensive national conservation policy which embraces the complexity of cultural resources (cultural capital), the role and function of culture across society and how it interfaces with other government policy and strategy areas.

### **Culture, Australia and the neighbourhood**

14 Australia is a diverse, multicultural society; it has a complex history including migration history. Its cultural spectrum includes an ancient Indigenous heritage as well as long associations with British, European, Asian and Pacific cultures. There is an opportunity in the proposed national cultural policy to highlight this situation by pointing out the role of cultural activities and services in the contemporary migration process through engaging peoples from around the world new to Australia.

15 Is it possible for a national cultural policy to be conceived in isolation from Australia's larger cultural environment? The concept of the nation state operating in isolation can hardly be supported in a global world facing the challenges of climate change, food security, health endemics, financial crises and racial and religious conflicts. It therefore makes sense for a national cultural policy to be framed 'globally', notwithstanding its need to focus 'locally' on its cultural traditions and cultural futures. Managing this dichotomy is a major challenge in drafting a national cultural policy.

16 AusHeritage's position is that the proposed policy needs to not only embrace our history but our geography as well. While it should reflect the historic cultural relations and interactions of the past, the policy needs to acknowledge the currency of Australia's location in the Asia-Pacific and the culturally diverse communities from the region that have made Australia home or are making Australia home today.

17 An Australian National Cultural Policy needs to reflect Australia's cultural diversity and the complexity of its cultural expressions. It also needs to look outwards and acknowledge that we live in a region of

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<sup>2</sup> *Strategy for Cultural Policy*, Ministry of Education, Department for Cultural, Sport and Youth Policy, Finland 2009.

extraordinary cultural richness and that as we engage with and contribute to life in the region we are enriched by it.

18 We suggest that the policy needs to address and by inclusion support, our cultural relations with our neighbours. It can do this by acknowledging the need for building and strengthening programs for communication and engagement. This includes stronger commitment for the education of all Australians in regional languages and cultural skills.

### **A cultural policy, economics and sustainability**

19 While a national cultural policy would be expected to acknowledge and endorse the valuable role of culture in terms of identity, the recognition and celebration of diversity and social cohesion, it could also be expected to enthusiastically outline the synergies between creativity in all its manifestations and innovation, and the place of both in the local and international economies.

20 In considering culture as an economic resource, Australia has an opportunity to contribute to and strengthen its participation in the region's cultural and broader economies. This will prove increasingly significant as nations and regions grapple with challenges linked to climate change and other phenomena that will impact on social stability and where mitigation and adaption will become increasingly dependent on cultural issues.

21 Furthermore, in an environment where information technology will continue to flourish and where ideas will have greater currency, culture and cultural organisations will inevitably play a more significant role in economic development, growth and sustainability than they have in the past.

22 An Australian National Cultural Policy should therefore highlight the current and future role of culture and the cultural sector in the Australian and regional economies.

### **Concluding remarks**

23 The Finnish Government's statement on government cultural policy in their *Strategy for Cultural Policy*, (sited above) is an excellent summary of AusHeritage's views on what an Australian National Cultural Policy might cover:

*The aim in government cultural policy is to promote creativity, plurality and inclusion. The means to this end are to provide favourable conditions for the work of artists, other creative workers and cultural and art institutions; to promote the preservation and development of cultural heritage and cultural environments; to enhance equal access to, accessibility of and diverse use of culture; to boost production, employment and entrepreneurship*

*in the cultural sector; and to reinforce the cultural foundation of society.*

24 The inclusion of frameworks for defining what culture means, who are involved in it and where it has a role in a sustainable civil society, would seem to be a sound starting point for the development of an Australian National Policy.

25 AusHeritage strongly holds the view that such a policy needs to be inclusive in its coverage and appeal if it is to provide a reference point that confirms the importance of cultural life and creativity and fosters continuing positive contributions from the cultural sector and Australian society as a whole.

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On behalf of the AusHeritage Board of Directors  
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