



## APPENDIX H

1 February 2010

The Hon. Peter Garrett AM, MP  
Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts  
PO Box 6022  
Parliament House  
**CANBERRA ACT 2600**

Dear Minister,

### **SUBMISSION TO THE NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY CONSULTATION**

Thank you for providing this opportunity to contribute to the development of a National Cultural Policy to help shape Australia's cultural future.

Blue Shield Australia urges the Minister to include principles that would guide the care and management of cultural heritage in emergency or disaster scenarios, as part of a comprehensive National Cultural Policy.

#### **1 Cultural Heritage in the National Cultural Policy**

Blue Shield Australia recommends that a comprehensive cultural policy for Australia must include a commitment to the care of cultural heritage, and principles for its management and use. We agree with comments in the Discussion Framework explaining that culture 'encompasses our values, traditions, attitudes and expressions, and is shared by us all'. Blue Shield Australia is reassured to see further comments in that Discussion Framework explaining the 'rich legacy' of culture, the role it plays to 'preserve and innovate, ensuring that links between the present and past remain strong', and the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, that is 'unbroken in song, dance and stories over millenia'. These comments reflect the significance of cultural heritage, and foreshadow a commitment to preserving cultural heritage for current and future generations.

Cultural heritage is both tangible and intangible. It embodies the collective memories and beliefs which underlie social systems and cohesion. A nation's cultural heritage is a fundamental part of its way of life, history, traditions, civilisation and identity and provides links between the past, the present and (potentially) the future. Cultural heritage contributes significantly to community sustainability, through preservation, reflection and transmission of identity. Cultural heritage also contributes to economic sustainability, through tourism and research potential.

Tangible cultural heritage can take the form of structures, sites, collections and individual objects that are determined to be historically or culturally significant. Intangible cultural heritage can

include customs, cultural activities, ceremonies, performances and languages that are socially transmitted, and that define and reinforce cultural practice of a particular population.

In times of natural disaster, disaster caused by human intervention, or conflict, cultural heritage can be threatened. Blue Shield Australia believes that a new National Cultural Policy should:

1. Acknowledge the importance of preserving cultural heritage, and the vital role that intangible and tangible cultural heritage plays in Australia and abroad; and
2. Outline broad principles asserting the importance of appropriately protecting and recovering cultural heritage in times of disaster and emergency.

The principles described above should guide emergency and disaster response in Australia, and should also inform the training and procedures of military and civilian Australians internationally, in humanitarian and conflict environments.

## **2 Domestic issues concerning cultural heritage**

Cultural heritage exists in diverse environments and is cared for in diverse ways. In times of disaster, such as fire, flood or earthquake, or human-caused incident, the preservation of collections, structures or sites can depend on preparedness, and rapid response. A delay in an appropriate emergency response inevitably leads to irreparable damage, diminished or complete loss of recovery capacity of cultural items, ongoing physical degradation and potential looting. Thus is it imperative that cultural heritage managers have disaster plans, and are able to respond appropriately.

Professional and volunteer emergency workers should be trained to recognise risks to cultural heritage, ways in which they can minimise impact, and how to contact cultural heritage professionals to assist with response. Early appropriate response will lead to long term recovery strategies and ultimately preservation of cultural heritage.

Strongly expressed commitment to the preservation of cultural heritage in the National Cultural Policy would encourage better disaster preparedness, which will vastly improve outcomes for cultural heritage and communities in times of domestic crisis.

## **3 Australia's international commitments and cultural heritage**

Australians are active overseas in military and civilian roles in many fragile environments. Defence forces are active in numerous locations, in military and peacekeeping roles. Australian Government supported aid workers are also active in many countries, often in response to natural disasters or participating in post-conflict recovery.

Sites and practices that are significant elements of local cultural heritage may not be immediately apparent to Australians working in such environments. Blue Shield Australia believes it is important that cultural heritage considerations are integrated into training for defence and other Australian personnel working overseas. Blue Shield Australia is aware that cultural heritage is addressed to some extent in the training of defence personnel, but believes that more could be done. Training across defence and emergency response organisations may be coordinated by the Australasian Civil Military Network or a similar organisation. Current training of such personnel

could be supported and extended by a strong commitment to cultural heritage in Australian Government policy.

Genuine commitment in the proposed National Cultural Policy to the preservation of the cultural heritage of Australia and other nations, as a part of the global community, could ensure appropriate training and procedures for Australians working overseas.

#### 4 Cultural heritage and disaster recovery

Emergency response domestically and internationally could also benefit from appreciation of the role that cultural heritage can play in a community's recovery from disaster. Objects and sites, or practices such as performance or ritual can aid collective memory, and unite and invigorate communities in recovery. Historically or culturally significant sites and objects can prompt storytelling and dialogue and build resilience in communities through the establishment and re-establishment of personal and cultural connections.

#### 5 Anticipated benefits of including cultural heritage and disaster response in the National Cultural Policy

Blue Shield Australia anticipates that a strongly expressed commitment to the preservation of cultural heritage in the National Cultural Policy could result in excellent outcomes for the broad cultural heritage and disaster response sectors.

These may include integration of cultural heritage considerations into training for professional and volunteer emergency response, defence and aid workers. Similarly disaster response could be incorporated into training for professional and volunteer cultural heritage workers. This commitment could lead to greater awareness of established standards and guidelines in planning, prevention, response and recovery. It should result in more cultural heritage organisations implementing and maintaining disaster plans, disaster response kits, and communication plans. In an ideal situation, such planning should be coordinated across organisations and regions, to ensure integration with other organisations, and with local government or emergency services' disaster plans. Good examples of co-operative disaster plans include DISACT (Disaster ACT, more information available at [www.anbg.gov.au/disact](http://www.anbg.gov.au/disact)) and the Ballarat Collections Network Memorandum of Understanding (outlined at <http://www.collectionscouncil.com.au/showcase+of+collaborative+projects.aspx?agentType=View&PropertyID=6>)

A strongly worded commitment would also contribute to Australia's role in the international cultural heritage community. It could lead to improvements in policy and practice that would help Australia meet its obligations under ratified UNESCO Conventions, including the *Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict 1954 (The Hague Convention)*, *Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage 1972*, *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property 1970*, and the *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions 2005*.

Finally, it could lead to greater participation by Australia in the international community concerned with the protection of cultural heritage. Evaluation of measures taken to protect cultural heritage during major incidents such as bushfires, earthquakes and floods could contribute to international discussion of best practice.

Blue Shield Australia is happy to discuss these matters further, or provide examples of best practice from Australian and international sources on request.

## 6 About the Blue Shield

The Blue Shield is the cultural equivalent of the Red Cross. It is the symbol specified in the 1954 Hague Convention for marking cultural sites to give them protection from attack in the event of armed conflict. It is also the name of an international committee set up in 1996 to work to protect the world's cultural heritage threatened by war and natural disaster.

The International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS) covers archives (including audio-visual archives), libraries, monuments and sites, and museums (including art museums and galleries). The ICBS is international, independent and professional.

## 7 About Blue Shield Australia

Blue Shield Australia (<http://www.blueshieldaustralia.org.au>) brings together in a federated association the knowledge, experience and international networks of the expert organisations dealing with cultural heritage in Australia:

- International Council on Archives, represented in Australia by the Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities
- International Council of Museums, represented in Australia by ICOM Australia
- International Council on Monuments and Sites, represented in Australia by Australia ICOMOS
- International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, represented in Australia by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA)

Blue Shield Australia is the only organisation bringing together peak professional bodies from across the full spectrum of the heritage sector. Our vision is to influence disaster preparedness and emergency management in Australia in relation to threats of all kinds, in order to ensure the preservation of cultural heritage in Australia's areas of responsibility and influence. Our annual 'MayDay' campaign draws public attention to the importance of effective emergency preparedness and management in local areas.

Blue Shield Australia was established with the approval of the ICBS in 2005, and is supported by funds contributed as required by its four member bodies, and by in-kind assistance from its Secretariat, the Collections Council of Australia Ltd.

With appropriate resourcing, Blue Shield Australia can participate in improving training for emergency response, defence and cultural heritage workers. Blue Shield Australia is also able to liaise with the Association of National Committees of the Blue Shield and the ICBS to facilitate Australians' involvement in this international community. Those bodies coordinate the response and mobilisation of cultural heritage experts in times of disaster and conflict. If resourced, Australia could contribute significant professional expertise to such situations.

Blue Shield Australia will be pleased to discuss this submission further, if required. Our submission is not confidential, and I authorise its publication via your website.

Yours faithfully,

**Detlev Lueth**  
Chair  
Blue Shield Australia