



about Australia

protecting our cultural heritage

- Australia's culture is diverse and vibrant, expressed through its customs, folklore, language and traditions, reflected in the natural and built environment, and captured in the objects created and collected. It is the product of an ancient landscape that is home to both the world's oldest continuous cultural traditions and a rich mix of migrant communities.

The Australian Government actively supports the country's cultural heritage in all its forms, from items such as paintings, books and natural specimens to intangible relics such as traditions, oral histories and habits.

A major area of the government's commitment to Australia's cultural legacy involves our national collecting institutions, which play a distinctive role in both preserving cultural items and making them available to local and international audiences. These institutions (see fact sheet *Cultural institutions*) have embraced online technologies to provide wider and more coordinated access to their collective holdings.

Cultural Ministers Council

The Cultural Ministers Council provides a forum for cooperation and coordination between the Australian Government and the state, territory and New Zealand governments on matters relating to the development of the arts and culture in Australia. The council comprises the relevant minister responsible for culture and the arts in each member government. Founded more than 20 years ago, the council promotes cultural expression to enhance national civic, social, political and economic development.

The council takes an active interest in creative arts (such as literature, musical composition and visual arts and craft); performing arts (such as drama, opera, ballet and musical performance); Australian Indigenous arts and culture; film and digital media production, distribution and exhibition; and collections, including those of museums, galleries, libraries and archives.

Some of the council's activities include:

- coordinating initiatives across its member jurisdictions
- commissioning studies and investigations through its working or advisory groups, or through consultants
- supporting the cultural sector through initiatives aimed at enhancing excellence and longer term sustainability, both in Australia and overseas
- supporting cultural industries by collecting and publishing cultural statistics
- advocacy through its communiqués or statements made by the chair on behalf of the council.

Collections Council of Australia

In February 2004, the Cultural Ministers Council agreed to establish a national industry body to represent the shared interests of archives, galleries, libraries and museums.

The resulting organisation, the Collections Council of Australia, is a public company that has responsibility for advancing the development, stability and sustainability of those organisations.

The major functions of the council are the strategic development of the collections sector, and support for the sector at the national and international level.

Collections Australia Network

Collections Australia Network (CAN) is an online public gateway to over 1500 Australian museums, galleries, libraries, archives and other collecting institutions. CAN provides simple and effective access to these institutions for researchers, community users, and professional and volunteer workers in the collections sector.

Members of the public can also access an individual institution's unique CAN website to explore its specific content, which includes collection descriptions; news and information about exhibitions and events; and useful tools, links and resources for people working in the sector.

Culture and recreation portal

Australia's culture and recreation portal is the online gateway to Australia's culture websites. The portal also provides access to stories about Australian history and culture, news and events, and online resources. Users can browse or search through the portal's database to find websites on Australian culture by category, audience and location. The portal also provides a free email newsletter that promotes cultural and recreational events throughout the year.

Protecting Australia's movable cultural heritage

Movable cultural heritage objects of significance to Australia are protected in line with the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, which regulates international trade in cultural property.

Australia ratified the convention by passing the *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986*, giving the convention force in Australian law.

Some objects covered by heritage protection regulations include artwork, fossils, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artefacts, antique steam engines, old manuscripts and medals. An export permit is required to take protected objects outside of Australia. Penalties apply for exporting items without a permit.

Further information

Collections Australia Network
www.collectionsaustralia.net

Collections Council of Australia
www.collectionscouncil.com.au

Cultural Ministers Council
www.cmc.gov.au/cmc

Culture and recreation portal
www.culture.gov.au

Protection of movable heritage: Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts
www.environment.gov.au/heritage/movable/index.html

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Western Australia coastline.

