

Heritage

AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS ACTION PLAN ENVIRONMENT & HERITAGE HERITAGE

Australia's heritage defines the Australian character and is a lasting record of the nation's cultural history. We recognise the significance and breadth of this heritage and its protection now and into the future is of the utmost importance.

Our Action Plan

"Whilst the individuals who shaped us may have passed into history their ideas and their creations and places are still with us, providing an opportunity for us to feel the life forces which flow from the past to enliven us today."

Pat Comben
Chairman, ACNT

- Repeal the 2006 changes to the EPBC Act that
 - weaken options for third party enforcement by removing the review of ministerial decisions by the AAT,
 - impose requirements for financial undertakings for interim injunctions,
 - weaken heritage nominations and listing processes,
 - give the minister discretionary powers to add or remove any place from Priority Assessment List and emergency listings and,
 - abolish the Register of the National Estate.
- Establish a national heritage strategy involving all levels of government and include a national heritage body with professional expertise and capacity to provide independent advice on heritage policy and practice.
- Establish a Ministerial Council to advise on national standards and guidelines and the allocation of funds to support projects of national importance
- Prepare nominations for following sites for World Heritage listing: The High Country, from Victorian Alps to Atherton Tablelands; 11 convict sites as an example of the global story of forced migration; Lake Eyre region; Bradshaw rock art of the Kimberley; Carnarvon Gorge; Lake Condah; Dampier Rock Art on the Burrup Peninsula; and Norfolk Island
- Provide appropriate funding to enable increased private conservation activity.
- Provide greater support for national and state-based Trusts and their properties.
- Introduce Negotiated Conservation Agreements between Government and non-government owners and allow appeals on the grounds of 'unreasonable costs'.
- Strengthen Commonwealth legislation to protect nationally significant heritage sites and artefacts by adopting all recommendations of the Schofield Report.
- Provide financial incentives for owners of heritage sites / artefacts in need of preservation, subject to public accountability standards.
- Where possible, ensure that significant Australian heritage works remain in Australia and within public ownership.
- Maintain public ownership of Commonwealth sites with significant heritage values and ensure public access to those sites.
- Establish the registration of endangered sites and artefacts to ensure that priority action is taken to preserve them.
- Re-establish a Tax Incentive Scheme for private owners of heritage properties as part of a package of measures to assist conservation.

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- Implement the recommendations of the 1999 National Inquiry into History in Schools by Commonwealth Department of Education Training & Youth Affairs.
- Establish a national primary and secondary schools heritage program to help raise awareness of our nation's heritage.
- Recognise that Indigenous Australians are the rightful custodians of their culture and establish programs to recognise the special significance of Indigenous heritage, in particular language and work with indigenous communities in protecting, registering, and interpreting this heritage.
- Strengthen the protection afforded to Indigenous heritage in state planning and environmental legislation.
- Establish an Indigenous Heritage Advisory Council, comprised of Indigenous people to advise on Indigenous heritage policy and ensure appropriate resources are available to protect and manage places of Indigenous heritage significance.
- Restore the autonomy of the National Film and Sound Archive and formally recognise its identity, functions and powers

Issues

Legislative protection

In 2003 the Democrats supported major legislative reform for heritage, bringing its protection under the Environment Protection Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act but with hundreds of amendments to strengthen provisions. Lack of political will and inadequate resources, particularly for enforcement, have however limited progress on heritage protection and in 2006 the Government substantially weakened the Act.

Heritage at Risk

Heritage sites at risk in each state have been identified by a partnership of peak bodies - engineers, architects and museums - and in November 2007 a National Top Ten list of Most at Risk Heritage will be announced. While all heritage is at risk, this list will highlight the degree and immediacy of risk and level of significance.

The so far identified sites include the Belconnen Naval Transmitting Station, Kuring-gai Urban Conservation Areas – Blue Gum High Forest, Eveleigh Railway Workshops, Redfern, Hammerhead Crane, Potts Point, Archerfield Airport Heritage Precinct, Port of Adelaide Maritime Heritage, Lower Lakes and Coorong, Holy Trinity Church, North Hobart, Lady Franklin Museum, Lenah Valley, Post 1950's architecture in Victoria, Melbourne's Green Wedges, HMAS Cerebus, Barwon Sewer Aquaduct and East Perth Power Station and the Burrup Peninsula.

Dampier Rock Art

One heritage site of immediate concern is the Dampier Rock Art of the Burrup Peninsula in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. Earlier this year it was finally recognised and placed on the National Heritage List. However the site remains under threat from industrial development. The region contains one of the world's most important ancient rock carvings dating back to the last ice age but since 1972 4,000 individual pieces have been destroyed. To avoid further degradation of the site there must be a comprehensive inventory of sites, a single holistic management plan appropriately funded and an independent committee to oversee it.



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