



Australian Government

Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts

Indigenous heritage

Commonwealth initiatives that help to recognise and protect Indigenous areas and objects

Australia's Indigenous heritage includes the places and objects that tell the story of Indigenous Australians. Recognising, protecting and celebrating this heritage can benefit all Australians. Some places and objects have special significance for Indigenous Australians. They are a tangible part of their traditional cultures and ways of life.

The Australian Government administers a number of programs and legislation which aim to recognise, protect and celebrate Indigenous places and objects, helping to ensure that the stories and traditions associated with this heritage are passed on to future generations.

National Heritage List

The National Heritage List recognises the nation's most valued natural, Indigenous and historic heritage places. The heritage values of these places are protected under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. Under this Act there are penalties for anyone who takes an action that has or will have a significant impact on the heritage values.

Places in the list with Indigenous heritage values include outstanding stone hatchet quarries, fish and eel traps, rock art galleries and places where significant events occurred that have shaped our nation.

Indigenous Australians have a direct role in managing these places. National heritage places on Indigenous land are managed through conservation agreements and management plans. They operate in a similar way to Indigenous Protected Areas – see www.environment.gov.au/indigenous/ipa

The Act also establishes the Commonwealth Heritage List, which includes places on Commonwealth lands and waters or under Australian Government control that have Indigenous heritage values.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act

The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984* enables the Australian Government to respond to applications from Indigenous Australians to protect traditional areas and objects from threats when it appears that state and territory laws have not provided effective protection. The Australian Government has proposed reforming this Act to improve Indigenous heritage protection laws nationally – see www.heritage.gov.au/indigenous/lawreform

Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act

The *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986* prevents objects of cultural heritage significance, such as sacred objects, from being exported out of Australia. This helps to ensure that Indigenous Australians can continue to have access to their heritage.

Indigenous Heritage Program

The Indigenous Heritage Program provides funding for projects that help to identify, conserve and promote Indigenous heritage. Funding these projects helps to promote an understanding of and respect for Indigenous Australians' culture. In 2008–09, the Australian Government allocated \$3.5 million from this program to help fund projects across Australia.

Other relevant Commonwealth initiatives

The Australian Government administers a broad range of initiatives relevant to conserving Indigenous heritage, from the conservation of Indigenous languages and art, to the conservation of the natural environment in partnership with Indigenous Australians. Links to these programs can be accessed at www.arts.gov.au/indigenous and www.environment.gov.au/indigenous

State and territory initiatives

Australia's state and territory governments administer a range of laws and programs to protect Indigenous areas and objects. These initiatives operate independently of and alongside the Australian Government's Indigenous heritage programs and laws.