

State of community awareness and action

Under the dusty print of hobnailed boot,
 Strewn on the floor the papers still assert
 In ornamental gothic, swash italics
 And bands of printer's flowers (traditional)
 Mixed in a riot of typographic fancy,
 This is the Western Star, the Farmer's Guide,
 The voice of Progress for the Nyngle District.

—Rosemary Dobson, *Country Press* (1970)

Environmental indicators reported on in this section.

Environmental indicator	
NCH G.8	Community awareness of and attitudes towards heritage places and objects and their conservation
NCH IL.5	The number of/proportion of traditional language used in: (a) broadcast media: radio, TV, published books, magazines, cinema, WWW, distinguishing: (i) programs aimed at speakers; (ii) programs aimed at a general audience; (b) signage in public places (streets, parks), advertisements
NCH IL.6	Number of approvals of geographic names, including map sheet names, using indigenous place names

Community awareness and attitudes are an important element of society's responses regarding heritage places and objects and the conservation of significant values. As this is such a vast field for assessment, the issues investigated were public attitudes towards heritage conservation and practices, awareness through involvement, and awareness of Indigenous heritage.

There have been no systematic nation-wide surveys concerned with assessing attitudes to or involvement in Indigenous, natural and historic heritage places during the reporting period. Data from Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) surveys and competitions described below have therefore been used as surrogates for estimating community attitudes over the period. However, periodic community attitude surveys—based on standard sets of questions designed to provide quantitative estimates of trends in community awareness and attitudes towards natural, Indigenous, and historic heritage places and objects and the conservation of their significant values—are needed.

Public awareness of heritage conservation

ABS surveys conducted over the last decade provide a context for assessing public concern about and involvement in environmental issues, including heritage place conservation. Over the decade, the proportion of people expressing environmental concerns remained about 70%.

With regard to the quality of the environment over the last 10 years, the following results were obtained (ABS 1998):

- 46% of people thought the quality of the environment had declined
- 26% of people thought the quality of the environment had stayed the same
- 24% of people thought the quality of the environment had improved.

A study conducted in 1999 by Irving Saulwick and Associates for the Melbourne Water Corporation and the Australian Conservation Foundation surveyed a random sample of 600 Victorian people aged between 16 and 24 years. On every question a significant majority favoured the environmental or conservation position. Four out of five young Victorians favour protecting the environment even if it means some reduction in economic growth; 94% thought that individuals could do something to help improve the environment, and only 6% had not taken part in any of the conservation activities asked about. They defined the most important environmental problems facing Australia today as deforestation (16%), protecting the ozone layer (14%), general pollution (12%) and water pollution (10%). Heritage was not specifically mentioned in the questions or responses.

Table 32: Public awareness: ranking of most important environmental issues.

Issue	1998	1994
Destruction of trees/ecosystems	21.8%	25.6%
Soil erosion/salinity	9.8%	9.6%
Destruction of wildlife	9.6%	13.3%
Conservation of resources	7.3%	8.5%
Irresponsible urban development	5.6%	7.8%

Source: ABS (1999).

This is mirrored in a survey undertaken in 1999 by the ABS as part of the Population Survey Monitor program. The topics rotate every three years so that this survey can be compared with that of 1994. Environmental problems ranked across Australia in all age groups as the fifth most important social issue (9%) after health (30%), crime (26%) education (17%) and unemployment (13%). However, people in the 18 to 24 year age group ranked environmental problems as the most important social issue. Some 29% of all Australians reported that air pollution is the environmental problem of greatest concern. Again, heritage was not specifically mentioned, although some issues such as destruction of wildlife and trees and inappropriate urban development could be considered as surrogates for this (see Table 32).

In 2000 the Australian Heritage Commission and the National Trust commissioned Roy Morgan Research to undertake the Heritage Revival Project, which had three main objectives:

- to develop effective communication and marketing,
- to provide a benchmark against which achievement can be measured objectively, and
- to provide data with which to advocate for heritage with important stakeholders.

Respondents were asked about dominant images associated with 'heritage'. Responses included old buildings, people/pioneers, early settlers/convicts, Indigenous Australians, family history, and historic sites such as Cook's Cottage. Images evoked by the word 'conservation' were the environment, rainforest, water, animals, the land, seashores, saving everything, old churches and other buildings, and disrespect and destruction of the natural environment. When asked how important economic considerations should be when decisions are made about heritage, 19% of respondents said they should be of high importance, 60% of medium importance and 19% of low importance. Over 50% of respondents had visited a heritage place in the previous year and 93% thought that school children benefited from visiting such places, while 49% thought that the Commonwealth government should be responsible for maintaining and looking after sites of national heritage significance.

All respondents agreed that looking after our heritage is more important than it was five years ago, but that the main reason why other people see heritage as being less important than five years ago is because there are so many important issues and not enough money to go around.

It proved impossible to collate press coverage of place-specific conservation issues during the reporting period. However, some places featured for many months in all levels of media reporting, such as Kakadu (threats from uranium mining), Sydney Harbour foreshores (transfer of Commonwealth-owned land to publicly accessible uses), Western Australian old growth forests (protection from timber harvesting), and Fraser Island (overuse by four-wheel-drive vehicles).

Awareness through involvement

The ABS surveys canvassed the degree of involvement of respondents in environmental actions. Table 33 shows the number of people who registered an environmental concern in 1998 who were also members of an environmental group.

The degree to which people were willing to commit their resources—either money or time—to support environmental protection and visit national parks is shown in the Tables 34 and 35.

Table 33: Membership of an environmental group.

Environmental group	Number of respondents who were members of the group	% of respondents who indicated an environmental concern
Marine conservation group	45 500	9.7
Landcare or catchment management group	164 600	35.1
Other	305 800	65.2
Total	469 100	100

Source: ABS (1998).

Table 34: Percentage of people donating time or money to environmental protection.

Donated time or money to environmental protection?	1998	1992
Yes	20.2%	28.0%
No	79.8%	72.0%

Source: ABS (1998).

Table 35: Number of visits to reserved areas by those involved in environment protection.

Visited a World Heritage property or national park in last 12 months?	1998	1992
Yes	54.4%	62.9%
No	43.6%	36.3%

Source: ABS (1998).

Membership of peak heritage organisations

An indicator of community awareness and activity may be represented by changes to the membership of community organisations with an interest in heritage such as the National Trusts and the Australian Conservation Foundation.

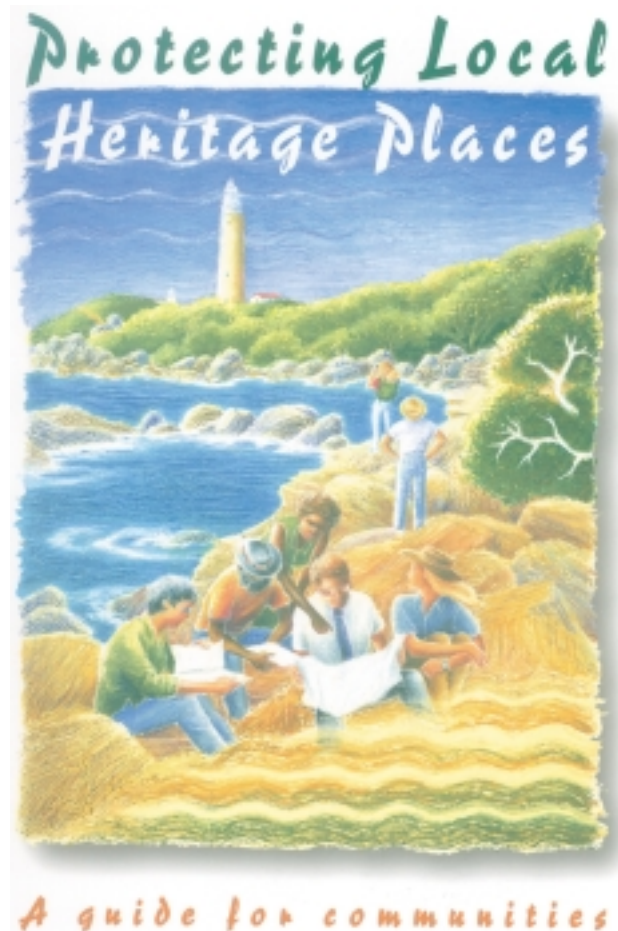
Over the period 1995–2000, National Trust membership has remained almost static. Individual members in 1995 totaled about 80 000, while in 2000 the number had dropped slightly to about 78 000.

Membership figures for the Australian Conservation Foundation in the period 1997–2000 show a supporter base increase of over 50% to approximately 60 000.

These figures could be interpreted as showing that community interest and support for the more traditional component of heritage (the built environment) remained at a near-constant level over the past five years, while support for the 'natural' component of heritage has been on the increase. However, care needs to be taken in interpreting too much from these figures, as reasons for membership are not known and membership of other heritage conservation organisations (local, State and national) may provide a better indication.

The reporting period saw the emergence of organisations that might be considered to be more radical, such as Save Our Suburbs, along with a host of community organisations and pressure groups aimed at the protection of particular heritage places. A good example of this is the popular movement to protect the natural and cultural values of the Fitzroy River in Western Australia from a proposed dam.

The Australian Heritage Commission's *Protecting Local Heritage Places: A guide for communities*, which won a Royal Australian Planning Institute's National Planning Excellence Award in 2000, has assisted local groups with

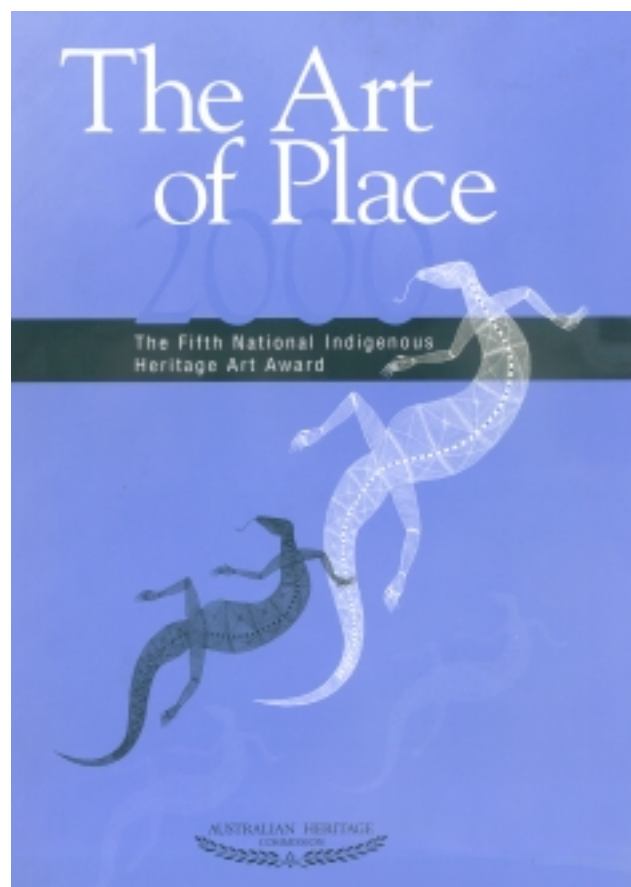


identification of places for both nomination to local registers and grant applications. It was developed in response to requests on how to protect local places of heritage significance. (The full text of this document can be viewed at <http://www.heritage.gov.au/protecting.html>)

Competitions conducted by the Australian Heritage Commission illustrate how many Australians are passionate about all categories of heritage and places, from the iconic to the local, and the need to protect them:

- Places in the Heart, conducted in 1997, resulted in 3000 entries about people's favourite heritage places. The most popular place was Fraser Island.
- Celebrating Australia's Heritage, conducted in 2000, attracted 400 entries. The winners featured an essay about Carnarvon Jetty (WA), songs about wilderness, and videos about Guluga (NSW), Glengallen (Qld) and Gowrie Creek (Qld).
- The Art of Place—the National Indigenous Heritage Art Award and Exhibition—has been held for five out of the last seven years. In 2000 there were 436 entries from Indigenous participants in a range of media, and a new 'Reconciliation' category attracted 69 entries.

Public awareness of Indigenous heritage through art has increased, a fact that is very relevant because nearly all of it is about a different view of place.



Awareness of Indigenous heritage

The increased awareness of Indigenous heritage by the general public, and increased efforts by Indigenous communities to maintain their heritage, are discussed as two separate issues. For example, the use of Indigenous languages in local radio programs is related mainly to internal community needs rather than to the general public, in the sense that people who do not speak that language will not listen to the program, although the fact that such programs exist makes a point to the public. However, there is a complex and interesting relationship between the issues of internal and external exposure of Indigenous heritage.

Transferring knowledge about Indigenous cultural heritage is crucial for its maintenance and preservation, and language is a vital component of that transfer. In order to ensure that this transfer of knowledge takes place, access to country, to cultural items, to language, and to education by the elders is vital. The cultural facilities a community has are an integral part of community awareness. Thus in one sense, the increased efforts by Indigenous communities to maintain their heritage is a prerequisite for the general community in growing awareness of and understanding of this culture.

Within communities, education is a crucial factor in handing on knowledge from one generation to the next. The degree of access to country is also an essential element for Indigenous people. Where Indigenous people are away from their country, funding can be a major issue for the education of the young. In addition, many property owners restrict Indigenous people's access, even though they have lease conditions which say they should allow them on and through the leased land.

The Knowles (2000) survey data show that two-thirds of the Indigenous organisations surveyed undertake some form of education program. In many cases these are *ad hoc* and are undertaken only when requested. Most organisations recognise the importance of education and are limited only by the lack of funds for such work. Indigenous people believe their cultural heritage is undervalued by Australian society. They see a direct link between this lack of knowledge and understanding and the lack of respect shown for the preservation and conservation of their heritage. All the organisations surveyed would like to be doing more to advance the cause of Indigenous heritage by playing a role as educators, but in most cases this is peripheral to their core work.

Intergenerational Indigenous education

Education is a crucial factor in the transfer of cultural knowledge. A good example of a program for those not living 'in country' is that organised by the Bamanga Bubu Ngadimunku (Queensland). Over the last couple of years the elders have taken the Mossman Gorge community children on regular culture camps to the Daintree, Cape Tribulation, and around Mossman (*Cairns and District Regional Council, ATSIC, Annual Report 1998–99*, p. 27). On the camps the children are taught bush craft and about

protecting the environment. Over the campfire in the evening the children are told stories of the ancestral beings, taught songs and dances, and learn about kinship and customary law. The aim of the program is to strengthen the children's self-confidence and their cultural identity. At each camp, those who have leadership skills are also identified as potential future camp leaders. Programs like this ensure the transfer of cultural knowledge from one generation to the next.

Keeping places, cultural centres and community-held databases may provide some indication of information about Indigenous cultural heritage available to non-Indigenous people. (Note that keeping places usually refer to places where Indigenous secret and/or sacred objects are stored, while cultural centres are more generally about showcasing Indigenous cultures, artefacts, and historical and contemporary collections, including databases.) The exact number and distribution nationally of keeping places or cultural centres is not known, but Indigenous involvement in their management is further discussed in the next section.

There has been an increase in public awareness of Indigenous cultures in Australia, including Indigenous languages, as shown by the number of popular publications and the amount of media coverage. This has been augmented by the focus on land rights, Native Title claims, and regional agreements during the last reporting period. This has had the effect of increasing both people's awareness of the existence of Indigenous cultural heritage throughout Australia and the amount and scope of research in this area. The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and its popular movement has gained momentum in the last five years. A recent poll shows that more than 50% of Australians support a treaty with Indigenous people. An important aspect of any treaty would be the recognition of the distinct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage of Australia. The wide publicity for the 'Stolen Generations' Inquiry Report (HREOC, 1997) also augmented this awareness. In acknowledging that the loss of culture, language and access to heritage places by the affected children was a major factor in their mistreatment, the report drew the public's attention to the reality and importance of this culture and heritage. On the other hand, the government's rejection of many of the findings and recommendations of the report has caused some confusion and disagreement in the wider community concerning some of the facts and findings.

The globally broadcast Opening Ceremony for the Sydney Olympics in September 2000 presented Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance, song and language. International events such as these showcase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures from a variety of Australian regions. Indigenous art work has a very prestigious international profile, and through it Indigenous people often celebrate and explain their heritage places. Australians are also not averse to being associated with such symbols:

'Since the late 1980s the most pivotal movement in Australian art has been Indigenous art. One has only to look at the great sense of reconciliation today to understand the contribution culture has made to that—both the visual arts and the performing arts. They have transformed our understanding of Indigenous culture in this country and also who we are as people. That contribution can only grow in importance.' (Frances Lindsay, deputy director, National Gallery of Victoria, in the *Age*, 21 October 2000, p. 16.)

Use of Indigenous language

The extent of the use of Indigenous language in broadcast media aimed at both traditional language speakers and a general audience illustrates community awareness of prior occupation of heritage places by Indigenous people and of their connection to their heritage and their country. There is increased awareness of Indigenous languages based on a comparison of the following media over time:

Indigenous language broadcasting

The Top End Aboriginal Bush Broadcasting Association (Aboriginal Corporation) (TEABBA), which represented 29 Top End Indigenous communities, proposed to broadcast for 168 hours per week, including Indigenous language and other Indigenous programs, music, news and community notices; 30% of this programming was to be in Indigenous languages.

TEABBA used 1996 census data to show that there were a large number of speakers of Indigenous languages in the Darwin region who would benefit from

broadcasting in Indigenous languages. The Association stated that:

‘the region has a significant Aboriginal population (7.9% of the total population of the licence area), a reasonable number of whom speak an Aboriginal language (1.2% of the total population of the licence area according to the Census but this could be significantly higher if second, third, or fourth languages are taken into account).’

Source: McConvell and Thieberger (2001).

- The Internet—The Internet presence of Australian Indigenous languages has increased exponentially in the last five years. (The site with the best current links to other sites about Indigenous languages is <http://www.dnathan.com/VL/austLang.htm>.)
- Print media—Indigenous languages have been used in the print media, especially local community-based newsletters in Indigenous languages, since the 1970s in a number of communities. There may have been a decline in these activities in recent years, associated with the cutbacks in bilingual education, but further research is required.
- Radio and television—There are regular broadcasts in Indigenous languages, mainly on local radio. A number of Indigenous television and radio broadcasters exist around the country, including the following media associations:
 - Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) (Alice Springs, NT),
 - Warlpiri Media Association (WMA) (Yuendumu, NT),
 - Torres Strait Islands Media Association (TSIMA) (Thursday Island, Torres Strait).

It is not possible to quantify the use of Indigenous languages in these media, but the examples above show that Indigenous languages are an integral part of the rationale for Indigenous broadcasting.

Broadcasters with Community Broadcasting Licences are now operating in 80 localities (each with both television and radio). However the Indigenous language broadcast time varies considerably. The program descriptions for one of these services, Radio 5NPY (a station based in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands) claims that 10 out of 14 sessions are ‘all or part in Pitjantjatjara Language.’ (Source: <http://pymedia.in-sa.com.au/pymedia/radio/radio3.html>).

There is a great potential for Indigenous languages to be broadcast using existing infrastructure. From the examples above it appears that the use of Indigenous languages depends on having dedicated people willing to undertake the work of speaking and broadcasting in the local language, otherwise the default path is either an end to broadcasting, or using material generated outside of the local area.

Use of Indigenous languages in signage

One of the indicators of public awareness about Indigenous languages is their mention in public places. This local use of Indigenous languages can indicate a deeper understanding in the population that Indigenous languages exist.

The Australian National Placenames Survey advised that the Northern Territory is the only nomenclature authority to have a field ‘ethnic origin’ in its placenames database.

Given the lack of official reporting, the change in the number of approvals in the last five years for the use of Indigenous languages in placenames is unable to be ascertained. Clearly some of these issues have come to the forefront of public and media attention in the last few years—a case in point is the issue of the naming of National Parks; in Victoria the official name is the Grampians National Park but many people recognise Gariwerd as the name.

In Adelaide since 1995, public use of the local Kurna language has increased in festival signage, plaques and place names, including City Council endorsement of such changes.

There are many examples in New South Wales of moves to have place and street names in local languages—for example, at Eden, Coffs Harbour and Tamworth—while in Bundjalung country there are signs in Bundjalung and English explaining the importance of

the country to its traditional owners. Muurbay Language Centre at Nambucca Heads has recently negotiated with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service to have a sacred mountain renamed using a Gumbayngirr name (AIATSIS 2000, p.14).

Conclusions and implications regarding community awareness of heritage

- Some of the data, especially ABS material, suggest a declining concern about heritage. At best, there seem to be mixed messages, but as some of the data comes from one-off surveys, conclusions about trends are not possible.
- There is a continuing concern for environmental issues, as well as the broadening of the concept of heritage to include local places as well as international icons like Kakadu. They also illustrate the increasing concern of young people about broad environmental issues. Competitions conducted by the Australian Heritage Commission illustrate how many Australians are passionate about all categories of heritage and places.
- Membership of peak heritage organisations shows that while there has been a huge increase in the numbers of one national natural heritage advocacy body, a host of community organisations and pressure groups aiming to protect particular places or classes of place have emerged. Groups in the capital cities, such as Save Our Suburbs, are resisting urban redevelopment pressures that threaten to alter the existing heritage values of their areas.
- There has been increasing public awareness of Indigenous cultures in Australia, including Indigenous languages through popular culture such as the internationally successful Yothu Yindi music group, publications and graphics, and media coverage. There has also been an increase in the use of Indigenous languages in place names and associated signage, in popular music, and on the Internet in the last 10 years.
- There has been an increase in the number of Indigenous radio and television broadcasts, but it is not currently possible to determine what percentage of the content is in Indigenous languages. There has been an increase in the public use of Indigenous names for places or objects. This is not necessarily always with the agreement of Indigenous people, or to their benefit. In fact, in recent times Indigenous people have increasingly contested the right of others to appropriate their cultural and intellectual property.
- Community awareness of heritage has expanded over the recent past to include general environmental issues and Indigenous issues as well as concerns about conserving specific heritage places.