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## **National Cultural Policy - Blue Shield Australia Submission**

This submission is made on behalf of Blue Shield Australia (BSA), the peak coordinating body for the protection of cultural heritage. Information about BSA is at the end of this submission.

### **What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you?**

#### **First Nations**

First Nations material culture and heritage sites are at risk through climate change, environmental threat and human intervention (eg Juukan Gorge). The recommendations from “A Way Forward: Final report into the destruction of Indigenous heritage sites at Juukan Gorge” relate to Western Australia but apply to all states in Australia.

Collected documentary heritage which is core to tracing family and understanding shared history is also challenged by disaster related damage (flood and fire). For example the Coffs Harbour Regional Museum impacted by flood (2011)

Collections and sites at risk should be protected through adequate disaster planning (prevention, preparedness, response and recovery).

Indigenous led, locally centred planning relies on skills development, training, career paths and development.

#### *Opportunities:*

- Invest in education and career pathways in collection management, heritage care and conservation ensuring training and resources for disaster preparedness are part of day-to-day operations.
- Through funding and incentives, ensure keeping places and cultural heritage centres have adequate, suitable storage, disaster preparedness and recovery plans and practices.

#### **A Place for Every Story**

Cultural collections and heritage are widely dispersed. Threats to cultural property through disaster has significant impact on community identity and welfare as clearly demonstrated in bushfire and flood impacts (eg Marysville, Victoria 2009; Mallacoota, Victoria 2020; Lismore, NSW 2022). Understanding of cultural property in disaster planning and response needs to be embedded across emergency services.

#### *Opportunity:*

- Coordinate across three levels of government to fund collaborative planning and exercises for disaster preparation involving regional cultural organisations such as Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums and Historical Sites together with emergency responders and emergency management agencies.

## **The Centrality of the Artist**

BSA encourages inclusion of collections management and cultural heritage protection within scope of the Cultural Policy. Collections are a springboard for arts practice and galleries, libraries, archives and museums make collected artists' works accessible. Both provide community strength. In a situation of disaster such as fire or flood, collaboration across arts, community, collections and heritage sectors are critical. Small museums, galleries, community cultural centres and historical societies are interconnected.

### *Opportunities:*

- Ensure grant funding focus on small and regional arts activity and collections includes disaster planning
- Support organisations such as Creative Recovery Australia

## **Strong Institutions**

National, State, Territory and Local Government cultural heritage institutions in the GLAM sector play key roles in preserving collections and leading the sector. However, a significant proportion of collections are held outside major institutions in regional galleries, libraries and archives, local history societies and museums, and in private hands. Small organisations often rely on a volunteer workforce. This presents huge challenges when disasters occur.

### *Opportunities:*

- Create a streamlined and equitable crisis and disaster recovery fund for cultural heritage and collections
- Strengthen skills development in disaster planning and response through local and regional GLAM institutions
- Strengthen legal measures to support cultural heritage through ratification of the protocols to the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property and by reinforcing protections in Movable Cultural Heritage legislation
- Commission research and documentation of heritage and cultural collections and levels of disaster risk
- Improve access to collections conservation and preservation education and training to improve the number of qualified professionals who can respond to cultural heritage disaster recovery in the future.

## **Reaching the Audience**

Digitisation can increase access to GLAM collections as well as giving the possibility of copies surviving loss or destruction of an original. Successful digitisation and digital access requires investment in infrastructure and skills for digital collection management and preservation.

### *Opportunities:*

- Invest in national infrastructure for digital access and preservation building on platforms such as National Library of Australia's Trove while ensuring local agency and autonomy.
- Fund grants programs open to a broad range of institutions and groups to 'digitise and preserve'

## **Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why**

### **First Nations**

First Nations cultural heritage sites, collections in galleries and museums, and shared documentary history in libraries and archives are fundamental cultural property requiring protection from threat. Blue Shield Australia advocates protection of cultural heritage through legal underpinnings, coordination of training and resources, and promotion of disaster planning

### **A Place for Every Story**

Regional and local galleries, libraries, archives, museums, heritage sites, and history societies are critical places for the cultural stories of Australia. Assessment of and planning for risks to these bodies and what they hold is critical and Blue Shield Australia endeavours to coordinate across all sectors responsible for cultural property protection

### **Strong Institutions**

The network of national, State/Territory, regional and local institutions is key to successful disaster risk assessment and mitigation. Blue Shield Australia encourages strong connection between cultural heritage organisations, professional experts, and emergency management agencies

### **Reaching the Audience**

Cultural heritage is fundamental to community well-being and resilience. Blue Shield Australia, in working for protection of cultural heritage across diverse sectors and recovery following disaster, contributes to strength of collections, heritage and community

## **Are there any other things that you would like to see in a National Cultural Policy?**

BSA strongly supports development of a national cultural policy.

The Australian government should adopt international protocols for protection of cultural property. This provides essential legal and treaty underpinnings for protection of cultural property during conflict and disaster situations. Australia is a signatory to the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in Armed Conflict, but has yet to adopt the First and Second Protocols. Signing of the Protocols would place Australia on an international level and underline legal commitment alongside the 108 nations that are parties to the First Protocol and Second Protocol [New Zealand (2013) and the UK (2017)]

Ensure the Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986 is fit for purpose and includes the diversity of movable cultural heritage including digital (born-digital or digitised)

### **About Blue Shield Australia**

Blue Shield Australia (BSA) [www.blueshieldaustralia.org.au](http://www.blueshieldaustralia.org.au) is the peak coordinating body for the protection of cultural heritage. BSA is a recognised national committee of [Blue Shield](#), an independent, neutral, non-governmental, non-profit, international organisation which strives to protect cultural heritage and material culture during armed conflicts and disasters across the world.

As representatives of the sectors caring for cultural collections and sites, BSA members have a key role in strengthening and protecting material culture and heritage. These collections and sites underpin Australia's creative and research output, community cohesiveness, and cultural life.

BSA committee members include representatives from the following organisations, working in a voluntary capacity:

- ICA: the International Council on Archives, represented in Australia by the Australian Society of Archivists
- ICOM: the International Council of Museums, represented in Australia by ICOM Australia
- ICOMOS: International Council on Monuments and Sites, represented in Australia by AustraliaICOMOS
- IFLA: the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, represented in Australia by the Australian Library and Information Association
- AICCM: The Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material
- AMaGA: Australian Museums and Galleries Association
- FAHS: Federation of Australian Historical Societies
- PARBICA: Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives

BSA raises awareness of the value of Australian cultural heritage and the need for its protection against threats, including natural disasters.

Kathryn Dan  
BSA Chair 2021-2023  
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