



Fact sheet: International repatriation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancestors

The Australian Government has supported international repatriation for over 30 years. The repatriation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancestral remains (ancestors) is administered by the Office for the Arts in the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts (the department).

Australia's National Cultural Policy, **Revive**, acknowledges the importance of respecting and promoting the rights of First Nations peoples to repatriate their ancestors and cultural heritage material. The department is responsible for implementing the Australian Government's commitment to pursuing, in a culturally sensitive way, the return of First Nations ancestors held overseas.

"This is some of the most important, respectful work a Government can do."
The Hon. Tony Burke MP, Minister for the Arts

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies is responsible for implementing the government's commitment to pursuing the return of First Nations **cultural heritage material**.

About international repatriation

The government is committed to the ongoing work to facilitate the repatriation of ancestors to Australia. The department seeks the voluntary and unconditional return of ancestors held in overseas institutions and with private holders. This requires the collaborative efforts of the department; First Nations people; international collecting institutions and private holders; other Australian Government departments; foreign governments; and Australian and international experts.

"The removal of ancestors from Country and taking them so far from home is a historical injustice, and these returns go some way towards righting those wrongs."
Senator the Hon. Malarndirri McCarthy, Minister for Indigenous Australians

Significance of repatriation

The repatriation of ancestors is a priority for First Nations people. The **Australian Government Policy on Indigenous Repatriation** acknowledges First Nations people as the rightful custodians of their ancestors. Returning ancestors back to Country helps to promote healing and justice and it acknowledges the injustices of the past providing an opportunity for reconciliation.

"Bringing our ancestor home, touches on our shared pain and our untold histories. For us, it is important that the past is set right for our ancestors."
Lama Lama People of Yintjingga, Queensland

Where an ancestor's Traditional Custodians and community are known, they are closely involved in the repatriation process. When ancestors cannot be identified to community, it is the view of the Australian Government's Advisory Committee for Indigenous Repatriation that the ancestors are returned to Australia to be cared for closer to home.

"Bringing the ancestors home is healing for the whole community and land. The repatriation of ancestors is an important part of reconciliation."
Major (Moogy) Sumner AM, Ngarrindjeri and Kaurna Elder, South Australia

Number of ancestors repatriated

The return of ancestors to their Traditional Custodians is a priority for the Australian Government. To date, the Australian Government has facilitated the repatriation of more than 1,730 ancestors from 10 countries to Australia.

"We all feel quite sad about our ancestor being taken, but want to ensure her repatriation encourages others to return ancestors to Traditional Custodians here in Australia, in the future."
Tahn Donovan, Wardandi, Western Australia and member of the Australian Government's Advisory Committee for Indigenous Repatriation

Further information

To find out more about the repatriation of ancestors from overseas please call **1800 006 992**, email repatriation@arts.gov.au or visit www.arts.gov.au/repatriation