Australia ICOMOS
Statement on Indigenous Cultural Heritage

Australia ICOMOS works to promote excellence in cultural heritage practice across a wide spectrum of places, cultures and disciplines within Australia.

The 1997 annual conference of Australia ICOMOS, held in Burra, strongly recommended that Australia ICOMOS should seek to develop a stronger and more clearly articulated role in the field of Indigenous cultural heritage, a position adopted by the Executive Committee in 1998.

These directions are closely related to the broader goals of reconciliation, and a desire by Australia ICOMOS to more fully address all aspects of Australia’s cultural heritage.

The Burra Charter, the Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance, The Code of the Ethics of Co-existence in Conserving Significant Places and Cultural Heritage Places Policy have also reflected these intentions.

In 1998, the Executive Committee established a working party to examine ways of strengthening the links between Australia ICOMOS and Indigenous people. This statement was prepared by the working party and adopted by the 2001 Annual General Meeting following comment from members. In future, it will be reviewed in light of feedback from Indigenous people and Australian heritage practitioners.

**Australia ICOMOS recognises the following:**

- Indigenous people of Australia have a unique status as the original owners and custodians of their traditional lands. The traditional rights and knowledge of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders are recognised and respected. The relationship of Indigenous people to their land is the essence of their cultural heritage, and therefore, of their survival.
- Indigenous cultural heritage is a fundamental and inseparable part of the cultural heritage of all Australians.
- Indigenous cultural perspectives require an integrated view of heritage which includes social significance and natural features and landscapes, which are given meaning through culture.

- Indigenous cultural heritage is expressed in many ways and in many kinds of places – such as places with contemporary community associations; places and landscapes which hold strong spiritual meaning; places that tell the story of conflict and survival; places with archaeological material remaining from Indigenous use and occupation of the land; places where community life has flourished; and places that reflect the political struggle of Indigenous people for social justice.
- Indigenous cultural heritage has significance for Indigenous people and communities for social, spiritual and historical reasons, and may also have significance for non-Indigenous people and communities. Places with shared heritage values should be managed to conserve and enhance them all, and involve all associated communities – Indigenous and non-Indigenous.
- The Indigenous cultural heritage significance of places can only be determined by the Indigenous communities themselves.
- Indigenous people must be effectively involved in decisions affecting their heritage, and in managing places significant to them. Land managers must respect the rights of Indigenous people to make decisions about their own heritage.
- Indigenous communities need to have control over information about their heritage. There may be instances where Indigenous communities do not want information about their cultural heritage to be generally available.

This statement has been prepared to strengthen the links between Australia ICOMOS and Indigenous people.

Australia ICOMOS will work to identify and address the ways in which it can assist Indigenous people in protecting significant Indigenous cultural places, and offers the heritage conservation skills of its membership to support Indigenous communities. Australia ICOMOS therefore urges its members to take actions wherever possible which recognise and promote awareness and understanding of the cultural heritage and rights of Indigenous people.

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