The Australia ICOMOS Guidelines for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance ("Burra Charter")

Chairman's message about the new Guidelines.

These Guidelines were adopted by Aust. ICOMOS at the August meeting in Burra. It was agreed that they should be reviewed in a year's time.

Their relation to the Venice Charter is as follows. Australia ICOMOS continues to respect and observe the Venice Charter as a document of international agreement and sees these Guidelines as following it closely in most respects; this Australian document, however, is now the working document for use in Australia, binding to ICOMOS membership and recommended to all Australian authorities and organisations concerned with conservation of the built environment and all places with cultural significance.

It is also intended to draw the attention of the parent body, ICOMOS, to this document, and to foreshadow that after suitable experience has tested it (and very likely then modified it) Australia ICOMOS will press it forward as a model for the revision of the Venice Charter.

Reasons for moving toward a revised version of the Venice Charter have been given in an earlier Newsletter and in any case that intention has been announced by the parent body, ICOMOS.

The Burra meeting was dominated by discussion of the Charter, and some twelve hours of intensive work were fitted into one day and a break fast session. The close concern of the membership expressed in that way brought to a fitting conclusion the work of the working party which had prepared the draft.

Much of the time was inevitably absorbed by concern about choosing particular words and ensuring that unclarities were eliminated. There were also, however, important debates on matters of principle, which arose from the diversity of viewpoints represented at the meeting. The diversity was apparent first in the several professions (architects, historians, archaeologists) and then in the kinds of work in which they are most experienced (practice, research, administration). The clearest divergence was raised by the effort to incorporate allowance for adaptation, while yet expressing a strictness which restrains everybody concerned from introducing unnecessary and undesirable changes to a Place (Place being site, work, structure, building).

The wording now presented reflects those differing viewpoints and has been accepted and adopted. It does allow for the adaptation, especially it allows for changes in some parts of a place so long as integrity of the whole is maintained. On the other hand it makes clear that the chief concern of ICOMOS is with strict, painstaking professional conservation measures, and therefore only incidentally with recycling processes, however common and important these are.

Places which people choose to nominate as fit for the Guidelines are not places to be compromised.

What places, then, are the ones to come under these rules? That will not be decided by ICOMOS, but the hope was expressed that they will consist of all cases registered under federal and state legislation, especially those to which public funds are offered, and all cases chosen by the National Trusts for the grade Classed. The adopted wording has in mind that list. It is a large and growing list. Perhaps the strictness of the Guidelines will in time restrain the size of that list, though that is not the aim.

I repeat: Places which people choose to nominate as fit for the Guidelines are not places to be compromised.

A summary of the document is not really possible, because a great deal of condensation and refinement has already gone into it, but those who use it will find above all that they are committed to care and clarity at all stages of conservation action. Not only in all technical aspects, but also care with the terms used, clarity about the options available and why one is chosen for the particular occasion, and clarity about decisions made along the way. The obligation to identify who is responsible for decisions and to record and make public those decisions, is evidence of the high intentions behind every clause.

Professor David Saunders,
Chairman, Australia ICOMOS.

THE AUSTRALIA ICOMOS GUIDELINES FOR THE CONSERVATION OF PLACES OF CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE ("BURRA CHARTER")

PREAMBLE

Having regard to the International Charter for the conservation and restoration of monuments and sites (Venice 1966), the Recommendation concerning the safeguarding and contemporary role of historic areas (Nairobi 1976) and the Resolutions of 5th General Assembly of ICOMOS (Moscow 1978), the following Guidelines have been adopted by Australia ICOMOS.

DEFINITIONS

ARTICLE 1. For the purpose of these Guidelines:
Place means site, area, building or other work, group of buildings or other works of cultural significance together with pertinent contents and surroundings. This includes structures and archaeological sites and areas.
Cultural significance means aesthetic, historic, scientific or social value for past, present or future generations.
Conservation is the general term for the processes of looking after a place so as to retain its culturally significant qualities. It will, according to circumstances, include preservation or restoration, as well as maintenance and it may include the minimum practicable reconstruction or adaptation.
Preservation means maintaining the fabric of a place in its existing state and retarding deterioration.
Restoration means returning the existing fabric of a place to a known earlier state.
Reconstruction means returning a place as nearly as possible to a known earlier state and is distinguished by the introduction of materials (new or old) into the fabric. This is not to be confused with either re-creation or conjectural reconstruction which are outside the scope of these Guidelines.
Adaptation means modifying a place to suit new functions without destroying its cultural significance.
Fabric means all the physical material of the place.
CONSERVATION

ARTICLE 2. The aim of conservation is to retain the cultural significance of a place and must include provision for its security, maintenance and its future.

ARTICLE 3. Conservation is based on a respect for the existing fabric, and should not falsify the evidence it provides.

ARTICLE 4. Conservation should make use of all the disciplines which can contribute to the study and safeguarding of a place. Techniques employed should be traditional but in some circumstances they may be modern ones for which a firm scientific basis exists and which have been supported by a body of experience.

ARTICLE 5. Conservation of a place should take into consideration all aspects of its cultural significance without unwarranted emphasis on any one at the expense of others.

ARTICLE 6. The conservation options appropriate to a place or a part of a place must be determined by an understanding of its cultural significance and its physical condition.

ARTICLE 7. The conservation options chosen will determine which uses are compatible. Compatible uses are those involving no change, changes which are substantially reversible, or changes which have a minimal impact on the culturally significant fabric.

ARTICLE 8. Conservation requires the maintenance of an appropriate visual setting, e.g. form, scale, colour, texture and materials. No new construction, demolition or modification which would adversely affect the settings should be allowed. Environmental intrusions which adversely affect appreciation or enjoyment of the place should be excluded.

ARTICLE 9. A building or work should remain in its historical location. The moving of all or part of a building or work is unacceptable unless this is the sole means of ensuring its survival.

ARTICLE 10. The removal of contents which form part of the cultural significance of the place is unacceptable unless it is the sole means of ensuring their security and preservation. Such contents must be returned should changed circumstances make this practicable.

PRESERVATION

ARTICLE 11. Preservation is appropriate where the existing state of the fabric itself constitutes evidence of specific cultural significance, or where insufficient evidence is available to allow other forms of conservation to be carried out.

ARTICLE 12. Preservation is limited to protecting, maintaining and where necessary stabilizing the existing fabric. Stabilization procedures which distort the cultural significance of the fabric are unacceptable.

RESTORATION

ARTICLE 13. Restoration is appropriate only if there is sufficient evidence of an earlier state of the fabric and only if returning the fabric to that state enhances the cultural significance of the place. Restoration should not be undertaken unless adequate resources are assured.

ARTICLE 14. Restoration should reveal new culturally significant aspects of the place. It is based on respect for all the physical, documentary and other evidence and stops at the point where conjecture begins.

ARTICLE 15. Restoration may involve the reassembling of displaced components or removal of accretions in accordance with Article 16.

ARTICLE 16. The contributions of all periods to the place must be respected. If a place includes the fabric of different periods, revealing the fabric of one period at the expense of another can only be justified when what is removed is of slight cultural significance and the fabric which is to be revealed is of much greater cultural significance.

RECONSTRUCTION

ARTICLE 17. Reconstruction is appropriate where a place is incomplete through damage or alteration and where it is necessary for its survival, or where it recovers the cultural significance of the place as a whole.

ARTICLE 18. Reconstruction is limited to the completion of a depleted entity and should not constitute the majority of the fabric of a place.

ARTICLE 19. Reconstruction is limited to the reproduction of fabrics the form of which is known from physical and/or documentary evidence. It should be identifiable on close inspection as being new work.

ADAPTATION

ARTICLE 20. Adaptation is acceptable where the conservation of the place cannot otherwise be achieved, and where the adaptation does not substantially detract from its cultural significance.

ARTICLE 21. Adaptation must be limited to that which is essential to a use for the place determined in accordance with Articles 6 and 7.

ARTICLE 22. Significant material unavoidably removed in the process of adaptation must be securely preserved to enable the future restoration of the place.

PROCEDURES

ARTICLE 23. Work on a place must be preceded by study of the physical, documentary and other evidence, and the existing fabric professionally recorded before any disturbance of the place.

ARTICLE 24. Study of a place by any disturbance of the fabric or by archaeological excavation should be undertaken where and only where necessary to provide data essential for decisions on the conservation of the place and/or to secure evidence about to be lost or made inaccessible through necessary conservation or other unavoidable action.

ARTICLE 25. Proposed conservation action must be set out in writing together with justification for decisions taken with supporting evidence (including photographs, drawings and relevant samples).

ARTICLE 26. The organisation and individuals responsible for policy decisions must be named and specific responsibility taken for each such decision.

ARTICLE 27. Appropriate professional supervision must be maintained during work and a log kept of new evidence and additional decisions recorded as in 25 above.

ARTICLE 28. The records required by Articles 23, 25, 26 and 27 should be placed in the archives of a public institution and made publicly available.

ARTICLE 29. The items referred to in Article 10 should be professionally catalogued and protected.