



Melbourne Maritime Heritage Network (MMHN) is a non-political, not-for-profit, member-based Network that brings together individuals and groups drawn from diverse sectors, including maritime heritage, marine industry, recreational boating, education, tourism, corporate and community sectors, relevant state and federal government agencies, and community stakeholder groups. All share a commitment to fostering greater recognition of, and knowledge about, our rich maritime heritage and maritime industry sector – past, present, and future. <https://mmhn.org.au>

Towards a new National Cultural Policy

Beyond the Revive Framework : A place for every story, a story for every place

Introduction

MMHN concurs with Minister Burke that culture is at the centre of Australia’s social and economic life. We support *Creative Australia* as a conduit through which to foster Australian creativity in all its forms. Our Heritage is the bed-rock upon which our Arts and Culture defines us - as individuals, as a society, our economy, and our global status

MMHN applauds this consultation process. This MMHN submission responds to a request by Minister Burke to provide input into what has been overlooked and how to rectify this in the next iteration of Australia’s national cultural policies.

MMHN advocates that the new cultural policy should acknowledge that the culture of Australia, an island continent, has been shaped by our enduring *maritime heritage cultural seascape*.

MMHN also advocates legislative reform to address deficiencies which work against our cultural heritage asset preservation.

Submission

Comment on deficiencies within the current *Framework - the Five Enduring Pillars of Australia’s Cultural Policy* (The Framework) Please note that this submission does not refer to *Pillar 3* which is not relevant to MMHN:

The Framework plays a crucial role shaping our civil society. Given that we are what we *hear*, what we *see* and what we perceive to have *value*, it is critical that the Framework accurately

and comprehensively identifies significant cultural determinants and policies. MMHN notes serious omissions in the current Framework which need to be addressed.

Pillar 1: Stories of our First Peoples

The Framework rightly acknowledges the fundamental centrality of *Stories of our First Peoples* but fails to acknowledge a second, in a sense parallel, powerful and pervasive cultural determinant: **Australia is an island continent located in the far south.**

Our society and culture have been, and are still, shaped by our geographic location, surrounded by vast oceans. This **geographic determinant** has been omitted in the Framework. Because of its particular geographic location, the Australian nation has been shaped by, and is still sustained by, another related key determinant - **maritime endeavour**. We note that 16th, 17th, and 19th century exploration, 19th and 20th century immigration together with the extraordinarily innovative and lucrative maritime trade has shaped, driven, and continues to drive, national prosperity. Further, maritime endeavour has enabled our uniquely successful multi-cultural society.

Framework Change: The Framework be amended to include reference to Australia's geographic location and maritime endeavour which have been powerful cultural determinants.

Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

The Framework states that *Place* underpins *Every Story*. Indeed, every *Place* has a *Story* and very often a *Story* involves tangible built-form heritage structures or objects which are associated with a *Place*. Given the significance of maritime endeavour in Australian society, very many *Places* and *Stories* in Australia relate to the ocean.

The ocean has shaped, and continues to shape, our evolving national culture – our multiculturalism, our ports-based economy and our national security. Our culture abounds in *Stories* and *Places* related to our geography, our immense coastline and our rich maritime endeavour. The Framework currently omits our cultural determinants and dependency upon the ocean.

National culture is conveyed and sustained by the existence and preservation of places and objects which inspire our *Stories*. When cultural assets are lost, inevitably the *Stories* are also lost - *out of sight, out of mind*. The Framework fails to acknowledge that ours is a **maritime culture** enriched by maritime *Places* and *Stories*. Inevitably without formal recognition in the Framework, the impetus to understand and to value structures and objects related to maritime endeavour will atrophy to the detriment of our national culture. We risk maritime 'amnesia' pervading the public realm.

Framework Change: Address deficiencies identified above.

Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Often cultural perceptions are triggered and/or reinforced by artefacts and built-form infrastructure assets. *Cultural Infrastructure* which is visible (that which we can 'see') provides tangible evidence of our national maritime heritage. Such evidence is a crucial determinant in helping us understand the *who*, *what* and the *why* we are a maritime nation. The most

evocatively compelling evidence to expand our cultural awareness is to be found in *built-form* structure. Australia's cultural heritage of maritime endeavour is multi-form but the most *neglected* form in Australia is the *built-form*. The most vulnerable *built-form* structures being maritime infrastructure and vessels.

The Framework fails to serve its purpose in recognizing and preserving maritime cultural heritage infrastructure for future generations. The result is a nation-wide pattern of ill-informed neglect, degradation and demolition, often with government acquiescence or approval, of maritime heritage infrastructure assets. MMHN can cite much evidence of significant national maritime cultural assets being lost and/or currently at risk under the current policy structure.

Framework Change: Address deficiencies identified above.

Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience

The Framework has a critically important educative role as well as a supportive role, in relation to national culture. There is an obvious causal link between the absence of due recognition in The Framework and Audience Engagement. We seldom *know* what we *do not know* nor do we *understand* this to be the case. We tend not to *value* what we do not understand. The Framework has a role in shaping and directing the wider public 'gaze' by providing a comprehensive, accurate, selective 'vision' of our National Culture. National cultural policy should proactively manifest elements of our culture which require knowledge and understanding which may be absent in our society.

Regrettably, by omitting reference to heritage maritime endeavour and maritime infrastructure, the Framework effectively renders both elements cultural infrastructure *out of sight and out of mind*. With the loss of tangible or physical cultural infrastructure assets, *audience* capacity to directly *engage* with cultural heritage, diminishes and atrophies. The inspirational potential to elicit any artistic response is obviously diminished or lost.

Framework Change: Address deficiencies identified above.

MMHN Conclusion

Stakeholders have been asked to consider how Australia's cultural policy settings can remain relevant, effective and forward-looking.

The deficiencies cited above in the current Framework makes manifest the incoherent *policy settings* approach which is currently adopted by the Federal Government. In dividing responsibility for Culture/Heritage between the Ministry of Environment and Water, and the Ministry for Arts, significant cultural elements disappear. The stewardship and management of our national cultural policy, the current strategy underpinning this division of responsibility is inexplicable and indefensible. Maritime heritage and all *built-form* heritage are adversely impacted resulting in a consequent heritage asset risk or loss.

Our heritage simply cannot be 'extracted' from Arts and Culture. Heritage is the BASIS of both. It is a counter-productive bureaucratic demarcation – and it should cease.

MMHN proposes:

1. Establishment of a dedicated Heritage Unit within the Arts Ministry, staffed by qualified heritage professionals.
2. Acknowledgement that the ocean and maritime endeavour has been, and still are, significant cultural determinants.
3. Investigate the successful United Kingdom model national lottery support for heritage preservation and the Western Australian model in which the State Lottery provides support for heritage preservation.



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