



National Cultural Policy Survey Submission – May 2026

Operating Heritage Australia supports the conservation of Australia's movable technological heritage and works with collaborators such as the University of Canberra and Engineers Australia and the more than 600,000 active private and community custodians of this type of heritage. We are committed to supporting the sector not only through protection and continued operation of the objects themselves, but also by ensuring a sustainable future through replacement of fossil fuels by renewable alternatives, training of professional and trade skills required for continued operation and other initiatives.

In the original **Revive** document launched in February 2023, 85 actions were promised.

Only 2 related to movable heritage and neither of them have been delivered:

- Update Significance 2.0: a guide to assessing the significance of collection
- Modernise the *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986*

This is symptomatic of the general disregard for this form of Australia's cultural heritage

- There is no national legislation protecting movable cultural heritage while it is in Australia. The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* covers only natural and built heritage and the *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986* only controls import and export. Any "modernisation" of the PMCH Act must include providing a level of legislative protection for movable cultural heritage.
- The Department of the Arts, in calendar year 2025, provided \$130 million in grants to the "arts" sector (which includes movable heritage) with less than 0.5% to be shared amongst the entire movable heritage sector.
- The Department of the Arts, in financial year 2025, provided \$337 million to the National Collecting Institutions to conserve a relatively small number of iconic items, selected by "experts". No support is provided to the hundreds of thousands of private and community custodians caring for highly significant items and everyday items important to everyday Australians.
- The update of Significance 2.0 is welcome. The delay is unacceptable. It took less than two years to produce the original Significance 2.0 document and, so far, over three years to "update" it with not even a review date scheduled.
- Modernising the *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986* is well overdue. The need for reform was identified in 2014 and universally supported recommendations were made in the *Borders of Culture* report in 2015. Some minor procedural changes were made in 2018 but none of the recommendations have been implemented. Now, after three more years since the launch of "Revive" there has been no visible progress and no indication of delivery. This is unacceptable. The issue is urgent as only seven movable objects have been refused an export permit since 2015, none in the category of "Applied Science and Technology" in spite of intense community dissatisfaction.

We maintain that the 5 Pillars identified in the Revive document apply to the movable heritage community. The operating technological heritage sector alone consists of over 600,000 custodians caring for millions of objects of cultural heritage and welcoming over 5 million visitors each year. Every

custodian has a story relating to their heritage objects and their current stewardship. We support the Revive assertion that “supports the self-determination of First Nations peoples to make the decisions that impact them”, and to challenge the “often elitist” “cultural institutions [which] have excluded and ignored First Nations peoples, working-class people, and people whose first language is not English.” Without degrading the real experience of our respected Traditional Owners and First Nations, this is also our experience and we propose that this respect be extended to other groups of Australians caring for other types of cultural heritage.

Operating heritage custodians perform an invaluable role in conserving historic artefacts and safeguarding and transmitting intangible knowledge and skills associated with restoring, operating and sharing the stories and experiences with the wider community. The Revive document’s principles acknowledge that “Arts and culture are generative (creating new works and supporting emerging artists) and preservative (protecting heritage and conserving cultural memory). Very little attention is given to “preservative” culture outside our First Nations.

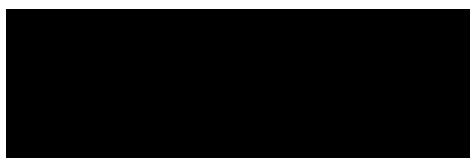
The operating heritage sector currently spends over \$5 billion annually (almost totally self-financed) which could be leveraged and increased through improved administration and marketing of organisations and events. The participants also demonstrate higher levels of personal wellbeing and community involvement than the general community. It is an extremely economical means of preserving our important heritage and delivering community benefits.

The operating heritage sector is of vital importance to the Australian community. It is seeking support in the form of:

- Ensuring that movable cultural heritage is valued and supported through national movable heritage legislation.
- Protection provided to significant objects from being exported (through a strong PMCH Act and improved compliance)
- Support for everyday Australians to conserve of all types of movable heritage and to safeguard and transmit intangible heritage in the form of knowledge and skills.
- Provision of resources (eg. Significance 2.0) which recognise the unique value and contribution of heritage objects maintained in operating condition – particularly complex engineered heritage.
- Removal of inappropriate regulations placing unnecessary constraints on the operation of heritage objects (performance-based solutions instead of “blanket” directives).

We have and will continue to collaborate with the Department of the Arts to enhance the protection, conservation and public display of Australia’s movable technological heritage.

Yours faithfully



Professor Michael Hough AM RFD ED
Convenor, Operating Heritage Australia