

Engineering Heritage Australia

Submission: A new National Cultural Policy



With more than 140,000 individual members, Engineers Australia is the profession's peak body. We are the voice of the profession and exist to advance society through great engineering. We support engineers in the pivotal role they play in shaping the future of Australia: creating safe, successful, and sustainable communities.

Australia's engineering heritage is important because only by understanding how things were done in the past can we improve on and design successful communities for ourselves and future generations. Engineering Heritage Australia developed within Engineers Australia as an Area of Practice: Heritage and conservation engineering and to be Engineers Australia's heritage voice. Our website is at: [Engineering Heritage Australia](#)

Engineers Australia has long advocated for improved protection for Australia's cultural heritage. It has participated in discussions regarding improved legislation under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, the *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986* and the *Australian Heritage Strategy* since 2012.

We have had a particular interest in the *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986* which has proved to be inadequate in protecting significant cultural heritage objects from export. The need for reform was identified in 2014 and universally supported recommendations were made in the *Borders of Culture* report in 2015. Although some minor changes were made in 2018, not one of the recommendations have been implemented. In June 2018, at the then Minister's request, representatives of Engineers Australia met with the Dept of the Arts and were informed that a new draft Bill was essentially complete and that the recommendations of the *Borders of Culture* report had been "addressed in principle if not to the letter". A meeting with the Minister in 2020 provided further assurances. The announcement in *Revive* in February 2023 that the Act would be "modernised" led to expectations that, finally, improvements would be made.

It has been three and a half years since the launch of "Revive" and there is no indication that there has been any progress at all. The delay cannot be justified.

The update of Significance 2.0 is welcome. This document is used as a teaching resource in the joint Engineers Australia/University of Canberra Heritage and Conservation Engineering Course [Heritage Engineering University of Canberra Courses - Engineering Heritage Australia](#). While it is currently useful for static museum-style conservation, it has proved not to be useful when assessing the significance of objects conserved in operating condition and for guiding conservation, operation and maintenance plans. The delay in updating this document and promoting its understanding and use is unacceptable.

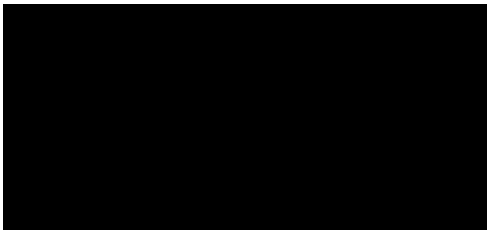
The society we have today has its strong foundations built on engineering - technological innovation, adaptation and assimilation, from transport, communications, agriculture, industry and energy to health, education and recreation. Yet this journey has been largely ignored as part of our "culture" by government policy and institutional heritage organisations. As a nation we have relied on individuals

and community groups to conserve and transmit the artefacts and intangible heritage associated with them for future generations.

Revive: A place for every story, a story for every place perpetuates the focus on place. Through the work of Engineering Heritage Australia, we know that heritage and culturally important built objects, and the people who care for them, have invaluable and precious stories. They also represent significant communities of like-minded people whose lives are enriched and are given a focus through their shared interests. In the case of Engineering Heritage, telling the history of how Australia was built and how it has affected our lives from initial European settlement, and also before.

The National Cultural Policy must:

- listen to all Australians and support what is important to them, including groups that may not obviously be seen of importance in the development of a new National Cultural Policy;
- demonstrate a greater recognition of heritage in all its forms, in particular including intangible and movable heritage; and
- include and support all Australians who are caring for its built heritage in all forms and provide support to telling of their stories.



Richard Muncey

Chair, Engineering Heritage Australia



22 May 2026