



AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE FOR THE CONSERVATION OF CULTURAL MATERIAL INC.

24 May 2026

Dear National Cultural Policy Review Team,

On behalf of the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material, I am pleased to submit AICCM's response to the review and update of Australia's National Cultural Policy.

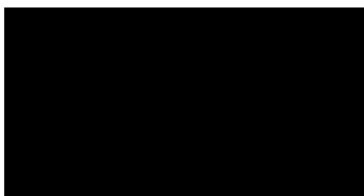
AICCM is the national peak body for conservators, conservation scientists, students and allied professionals working to preserve Australia's cultural heritage across institutions, communities and private practice.

Our submission focuses on the need to embed conservation and preservation across the next National Cultural Policy. It highlights the absence of a current national conservation and preservation framework, the increasing risks facing cultural collections, and the need for stronger support for distributed collections held across metropolitan, regional, remote and very remote Australia.

In particular, the submission recommends the establishment of a renewed National Conservation and Preservation Framework and a dedicated National Cultural Heritage Preservation Fund. These measures would support practical preservation work, First Nations-led collection care, disaster preparedness, sustainable collection environments, digitisation, workforce development, volunteer support and youth pathways.

AICCM welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this important national conversation and would be pleased to discuss the submission's recommendations further.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Samantha Hamilton

President

Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material (AICCM)



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Submission to the review and update of the National Cultural Policy

Submitted by: Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material

Submission type: On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation and national arts/cultural heritage peak body

Publication: This submission is suitable for public publication online.

Introduction

The Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material (AICCM) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the review and update of Australia's National Cultural Policy.

AICCM is the national peak body representing conservators, conservation scientists, students and allied professionals committed to preserving Australia's cultural heritage. AICCM advances conservation practice, supports professional development, builds partnerships and advocates for the protection of cultural heritage for present and future generations. Its 2025–2030 Strategic Plan identifies five interconnected objectives: organisational resilience and strategic leadership; member empowerment and network development; public engagement, partnerships and advocacy; First Nations leadership, equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility; and disaster resilience and sustainability.

AICCM submits that the next National Cultural Policy must place conservation and preservation at the centre of Australia's cultural future. Cultural policy cannot only support the creation, performance and sharing of culture. It must also protect the material, digital and living records through which culture is remembered, transmitted, reinterpreted and renewed.

Without preservation, Australia will continue to lose irreplaceable cultural assets, community knowledge and collective memory.

Executive summary

Revive restored culture to the centre of national life and recognised that arts and culture are essential to Australia's economy, wellbeing and sense of belonging. The consultation paper for the next National Cultural Policy now invites the sector to identify gaps, challenges and priorities for the next chapter.

AICCM's key message is that the next policy must move from recognising cultural memory to resourcing the systems that keep it alive.



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Australia has previously had a world-leading national conservation policy architecture. The 1995 *National Conservation Policy for Movable Cultural Heritage* and the 1998 *National Conservation and Preservation Strategy* provided a national framework for significance, skills development, collection management, research and awareness raising. The 1998 strategy applied broadly to heritage collections held in museums, libraries, archives, galleries, universities, historic sites, private collections and public-domain collections. Sloggett's (2015) analysis of this policy history emphasises that the 1995 policy was one of the few national materials conservation policies in the world.

That architecture has lapsed. The result is a significant policy gap. Conservation and preservation are now unevenly supported, often project-funded, and frequently disconnected from cultural policy, regional policy, disaster policy, climate adaptation, education and workforce planning.

This gap is most acute for distributed collections: remote First Nations community collections, keeping places, art centres, language centres, local museums, historical societies, archives, churches, universities, migrant and multicultural collections, family-held collections and volunteer-run organisations. These collections are central to Australian identity, but they often sit outside the major institutional funding systems.

Recent research on remote First Nations community collections identifies systemic risks including remoteness, exposure to agents of deterioration, climate change, sporadic funding, limited access to conservation and collections management skills, and the absence of coordinated government policy. It argues for First Nations-led preservation through sustained investment, capacity building and governance models that centre community authority and decision-making (Hamilton 2024).

AICCM therefore recommends that the next National Cultural Policy establish a National Cultural Heritage Preservation Fund and a renewed National Conservation and Preservation Framework. These should support conservation, preservation, documentation, digitisation, digital preservation, disaster preparedness, sustainable collection environments, community training, youth pathways and paid preservation roles across metropolitan, regional, remote and very remote Australia.



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Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Establish a National Cultural Heritage Preservation Fund

The Australian Government should establish a dedicated, multi-year National Cultural Heritage Preservation Fund to support the conservation and preservation of Australia's distributed cultural collections.

The fund should support:

- preservation needs assessments and significance assessments
- conservation treatment and preventive conservation
- collection documentation and cataloguing
- digitisation and digital preservation
- audiovisual and magnetic media preservation
- storage and housing upgrades
- environmental monitoring and sustainable collection care
- disaster preparedness, response and recovery
- paid community collection roles
- youth training, mentoring and employment pathways
- support for volunteers and community organisations.

This fund should be available to national, state, regional, remote and community organisations, including First Nations keeping places, art centres, language centres, local museums, libraries, archives, historical societies, universities, churches and other community custodians.

Existing programs such as the Community Heritage Grants program demonstrate the value and national demand for this kind of support. Since 1994, Community Heritage Grants have provided more than \$9.7 million to over 1,750 projects across Australia.

(<https://www.library.gov.au/services/grants/community-heritage-grants>) The next policy should scale this approach into a larger, coordinated national preservation program.



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Recommendation 2: Create a renewed National Conservation and Preservation Framework

The next National Cultural Policy should include a renewed National Conservation and Preservation Framework that updates the 1995 and 1998 national policy architecture for contemporary conditions.

The framework should address:

- climate change and disaster risk
- First Nations authority, cultural protocols and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property
- digital, born-digital and audiovisual preservation
- regional, remote and very remote access to conservation services
- workforce shortages and training pathways
- conservation science and research
- sustainable collection environments
- support for volunteers and community custodians
- mechanisms for national coordination and accountability.

The 1998 *National Conservation and Preservation Strategy* was structured around significance, skills development, collection management, research and awareness raising (<https://aiccm.org.au/conservation/collection-care/>). Those elements remain relevant, but they must now be expanded to include climate adaptation, disaster resilience, digital preservation, First Nations data governance, community-led preservation and sustainable development.



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Recommendation 3: Establish a national coordinating mechanism for preservation

The Australian Government should establish or fund a national coordinating mechanism to guide preservation policy, standards, research, emergency coordination and workforce planning.

This mechanism should include AICCM, First Nations representatives, national collecting institutions, state and territory agencies, regional and community collection representatives, universities, local government, emergency management agencies and volunteer organisations. The Australian Government should also ensure that future National Cultural Policy review and advisory process include conservation and collections expertise, including representation from AICCM and from GLAM sector collection institutions, to ensure preservation and cultural memory are embedded across all policy areas.

Its functions should include:

- national mapping of at-risk collections
- advice on funding priorities
- national preservation standards and guidelines
- disaster preparedness coordination
- research and data collection
- workforce planning
- support for regional and remote conservation networks
- public awareness campaigns.

This would address the current absence of a national preservation body equivalent to the former Heritage Collections Council (<https://minerva-access.unimelb.edu.au/items/96f755ad-25d8-4064-942c-cae6aed3a1a4>).



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Recommendation 4: Fund First Nations-led preservation on Country

The next National Cultural Policy should fund First Nations-led preservation of cultural materials, collections and knowledge systems held in communities.

Remote First Nations community collections are living cultural infrastructures. They support cultural authority, intergenerational knowledge transfer, language, identity, community wellbeing, employment and connection to Country. Yet many face significant risks from climate, pests, mould, inadequate storage, knowledge loss, staff turnover and lack of access to conservation services.

Funding should support:

- First Nations-led preservation plans
- paid collection care roles in art centres, keeping places and language centres
- in-community conservation training
- community-controlled digitisation and documentation
- culturally appropriate storage and access systems
- ICIP and First Nations data governance protections
- partnerships between communities, conservators and collecting institutions
- youth engagement and intergenerational knowledge transfer.

This work should align with First Nations best-practice frameworks, including *Our Knowledge Our Way*, which was developed with contributions from more than 100 Indigenous individuals and organisations, and *Dhawura Ngilan*, which provides a roadmap for improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage management in Australia.

(<https://www.csiro.au/en/research/indigenous-science/Indigenous-knowledge/Our-Knowledge-Our-Way>; <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/parks-heritage/heritage/publications/dhawura-ngilan-vision-atsi-heritage>).



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Recommendation 5: Embed cultural heritage in national disaster preparedness and climate adaptation

The next National Cultural Policy should recognise conservation as essential climate and disaster infrastructure.

AICCM has provided disaster preparedness and recovery support to communities and collecting organisations for more than 30 years, including resources on floods, bushfires, mould, emergency grants, disaster preparedness calendars and training

<https://aiccm.org.au/disaster/>.

The Australian Government should fund AICCM and partners to develop and deliver a National Cultural Heritage Disaster Preparedness and Response Framework. This should connect cultural heritage with emergency management systems at local, state, territory and Commonwealth levels.

The framework should include:

- disaster preparedness training for collecting organisations and communities
- cultural heritage salvage protocols
- disaster kits and regional equipment caches
- rapid-response conservation support
- integration with emergency services and recovery agencies
- support for households and community-held cultural material
- targeted programs for flood, fire, cyclone, mould, heat and pest risks.

Disaster response often focuses, understandably, on life, safety and property. But cultural material can be central to recovery, grief, identity and continuity. The next policy should ensure that cultural heritage is not an afterthought in disaster planning.



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Recommendation 6: Invest in sustainable conservation and environmental control reform

The next National Cultural Policy should support sustainable collection care that reduces energy use while protecting cultural heritage.

AICCM's *Environmental Guidelines* for cultural heritage collections were reviewed and updated in 2022. They encourage temperature and relative humidity parameters that respond to local climate, collection needs and organisational context, and they support a shift from conservative controlled environments to responsive, evaluated approaches.

(<https://aiccm.org.au/conservation/environmental-guidelines/>)

Government investment should support:

- environmental monitoring equipment
- training in sustainable environmental management
- building and storage audits
- climate-risk assessments
- HVAC optimisation
- passive storage improvements
- collection-specific risk assessments
- guidance for small and volunteer-run organisations.

This is an opportunity to align cultural policy with emissions reduction, climate adaptation and responsible public infrastructure investment.



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Recommendation 7: Build the national conservation workforce and community capability

The next National Cultural Policy should recognise conservators as essential cultural workers and invest in training pathways for professionals, emerging conservators, volunteers and community custodians.

Australia needs:

- more conservation training places
- support for early-career conservators
- paid internships and regional placements
- micro-credentials for community collection care
- First Nations conservation traineeships
- professional development for volunteers
- rare skills retention
- digital preservation and audiovisual preservation training
- youth engagement programs linked to local collections.

AICCM's Strategic Plan identifies professional development, public engagement, First Nations leadership, disaster resilience and sustainability as strategic priorities <https://aiccm.org.au/about/aiccm-strategic-plan/>. The next policy should resource AICCM and partners to deliver training nationally, including in regional, remote and very remote locations.



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Pillar-by-pillar integration

National Cultural Policy pillar	How conservation and preservation should be embedded
1. First Nations First	Fund First Nations-led preservation on Country; support keeping places, art centres, language centres and community museums; embed ICIP, cultural authority and First Nations data governance; create paid preservation roles and youth pathways.
2. A Place for Every Story	Support distributed collections wherever they are held, including regional, remote, multicultural, migrant, local, family and volunteer-managed collections; fund documentation, conservation, digitisation and access.
3. Centrality of the Artist	Recognise conservators, conservation scientists, collection managers, registrars, technicians and digital preservation specialists as essential cultural workers; preserve artists' archives, studios, materials, digital works and time-based media.
4. Strong Cultural Infrastructure	Treat preservation as core cultural infrastructure; invest in storage, environmental monitoring, sustainable building management, digital preservation systems, disaster preparedness and regional conservation hubs
5. Engaging the Audience	Ensure access is built on preservation; digitise at-risk collections responsibly; support community storytelling, education, intergenerational knowledge transfer and youth engagement through preserved collections.

Why this matters now

Australia's cultural heritage is at increasing risk. Climate change is intensifying disasters. Digital and audiovisual formats are becoming obsolete. Community organisations are under-resourced. Many collections are held outside major institutions. Volunteers carry significant responsibility without adequate support. Remote First Nations collections face disproportionate barriers to funding, training and conservation services.



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Digitisation is urgent, but digitisation alone is not preservation. It requires conservation assessment, documentation, rights management, metadata, storage, technical infrastructure and long-term digital preservation. The National Film and Sound Archive's Deadline 2025 work shows the scale of risk for magnetic media, including machine obsolescence, declining technical expertise and format deterioration. (<https://www.nfsa.gov.au/preservation/deadline-2025>)

The next National Cultural Policy should make Australia a world leader in preservation, not only cultural production. It should ensure that every story has a future, not only a platform.

Proposed implementation model

AICCM recommends that the Australian Government adopt a staged implementation model.

Year 1: Establish foundations

- Create the National Cultural Heritage Preservation Fund.
- Establish the National Conservation and Preservation Framework.
- Convene a national preservation advisory group.
- Begin national mapping of at-risk distributed collections.
- Fund pilot regional and remote conservation hubs.

Years 2–3: Deliver national programs

- Roll out preservation grants nationally.
- Fund First Nations-led preservation projects.
- Deliver disaster preparedness training across all states and territories.
- Expand sustainable environmental monitoring programs.
- Support digitisation and digital preservation of at-risk formats.
- Establish youth and volunteer training pathways.

Years 4–5: Evaluate and scale

- Publish national preservation impact data.
- Scale successful regional and remote models.
- Embed preservation in disaster, climate, education and regional development policy.
- Review workforce needs and training outcomes.
- Renew the fund as a permanent cultural infrastructure program.



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Measuring impact

The policy should measure preservation impact across four domains:

- **Cultural impact:** collections preserved, cultural knowledge protected, First Nations authority supported, at-risk formats stabilised or digitised.
- **Social impact:** community participation, volunteer support, youth engagement, wellbeing, intergenerational knowledge transfer.
- **Economic impact:** jobs created, regional skills developed, collections activated for education, tourism and creative industries.
- **Environmental impact:** energy savings, sustainable environmental controls, climate adaptation, reduced disaster losses.

This aligns with AICCM's own impact framework, which includes safeguarding cultural heritage, fostering inclusive communities, driving sustainable economies and enhancing environmental resilience (<https://aiccm.org.au/about/aiccm-strategic-plan/>).

Conclusion

The next National Cultural Policy is an opportunity to correct a long-standing gap in Australia's cultural policy architecture.

Revive recognised the importance of culture to national life. The next policy must ensure that cultural memory survives, remains accessible and is sustainably cared for into the future.

AICCM calls on the Australian Government to embed conservation and preservation across every pillar of the National Cultural Policy and to establish dedicated funding, coordination and workforce mechanisms to care for Australia's cultural heritage wherever it is held.

Australia's cultural memory is not only in major institutions. It is in remote art centres, keeping places, language centres, local museums, historical societies, libraries, archives, universities, churches, homes and communities. It is held by Elders, artists, volunteers, families, young people, conservators, archivists, curators and cultural workers across the country.

Preservation is not a passive act. It is cultural participation, climate action, regional development, First Nations self-determination, youth engagement, disaster resilience and intergenerational justice.



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The next National Cultural Policy should make Australia a world leader in protecting cultural memory for future generations.

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