



Cultural Heritage Issues



Our heritage is literally everything we have inherited from the past. Heritage reinforces communities' sense of cultural identity. By protecting heritage we help to confirm and reinforce that identity. Heritage includes buildings, landscapes, artefacts, customs and beliefs. (Built Heritage is covered in fact sheet 19.)

Aboriginal Heritage

Aboriginal heritage includes archeological and anthropological indicators of historical significance as well as 'living' culture. Living culture is the term used to describe Aboriginal cultural customs and beliefs that are active today and guide present day practices such as the continuation of language preservation.

Respect for the value of Aboriginal heritage plays a key role in reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia. Development, exploration, uncontrolled access and recreational use of sensitive areas can impact on the preservation of Aboriginal sites. For Indigenous heritage places, it is important to involve the custodial community and ensure respect for its traditions and practices in relation to caring for the land and places of cultural significance.

Shipwreck Heritage

Shipwrecks and their associated artefacts contribute to South Australia's economic and social sustainability through celebration and a sharing of stories associated with the wreck. Tourism activities such as dive, walk and drive trails, as well as museum exhibits, attract large numbers of visitors and contribute to recreational activities and employment. A shipwreck can also act as a type of artificial reef and become an important marine habitat. Conservation and protection of these sites is important not just for their heritage, but also for the sustainability of the natural environment.

Geological Heritage

Outstanding geological and geomorphological features and significant historical mining sites are also an important aspect of the state's cultural heritage. Unlike living systems, geological monument sites cannot be reproduced and when damaged or destroyed they are lost forever.

Trends



The number of sites listed on the Central Archive (including the Register of Aboriginal Sites and Objects) is **increasing**.



The total number of shipwrecks listed in the South Australian Shipwrecks Database has remained **stable**.



The number of protected South Australian shipwrecks is **increasing**.



Documentation of geological heritage has **decreased** significantly due to discontinuation of funding.

“Shipwrecks can act as artificial reefs and support a variety of marine life.”

Cultural Heritage

What is the Current Cultural Heritage Situation?

The documentation and maintenance of our heritage ensures that our links with the past are preserved and the community can fully appreciate and benefit from its inheritance. The number of places and objects listed on heritage registers is a measure of how well we understand our heritage. A consistent effort is required to ensure that our cultural heritage is maintained and protected.



Survey and conservation work to monitor shipwreck sites is needed, as accidental and deliberate damage can be caused by recreational users of shipwrecks, and it is important that sites are managed to prevent this from happening.

A survey program is currently in place to locate and record shipwrecks in South Australia and systematic monitoring and inspection of sites thought to be at risk has been initiated.

Condition Indicators

Number of items on the Central Archive of Aboriginal Heritage (including the Register of Aboriginal Sites and Objects)

All Aboriginal sites, objects and remains in South Australia are protected under the **Aboriginal Heritage Act 1988** even if they have not been registered or recorded. This means that it is an offence to damage, disturb or interfere with an Aboriginal site, object or remains. The number of sites, objects and remains on the central archive including the Register of Aboriginal sites and objects was 5,961 in 2003: this has now risen to 7,300. The South Australian Museum holds the world's largest Aboriginal cultural heritage and skeletal collections.

Geological Heritage

Geological heritage sites preserve geological features that are representative, rare or even unique to science in the state, Australia or internationally. Evidence of the geological processes that formed the Earth, and of the plants and animals that have lived on it, is preserved in our landscape. This can take the form of natural rock outcrops, river banks, sea cliffs and shore platforms as well as in road cuttings, mines and quarries. Geological heritage sites in South Australia include Wilpena Pound, Hallett Cove, Arkaroola, Ediacara fossil site and the Dalhousie Springs.

Over the last 15 years, a number of historic mine sites on public land have been conserved, interpreted and opened to the public through museums and guided walking trails. Some of the most significant mining heritage sites in South Australia are the Glen Osmond, Kapunda, Burra and Talisker Mines as well as the Barossa Goldfield and Sleeps Hill Quarries.

The state's geological heritage sites may be at risk from residential development and coastal developments, such as marinas, as well as from mineral and petroleum exploration and mining projects. There is no specific legal protection for geological heritage sites apart from listing under the **Heritage Places Act 1993**. There are 433 designated geological heritage sites in South Australia but only 54 sites are protected by the Act.

Emerging Issues

The protection of landscapes is an emerging Aboriginal cultural heritage issue. Increasing development and visitor use is compromising landscapes and scenic benefits along South Australia's coastline. Increased erosion and damage through recreational activity is also impacting on cultural landscapes, and once these are destroyed or altered they cannot be replaced.

Number of entries on the Register of Historic Shipwrecks and Associated Articles

All South Australian shipwrecks are now protected once they have been a wreck for 75 years. This means that the shipwrecks and associated relics do not belong to the people that find them, but they are a part of South Australia's cultural heritage and are protected by law. The number of protected wrecks has increased from 206 in 2002 to 392 in 2007, and this is largely due to the change in protection. The total number of wrecks recorded on the South Australian Shipwrecks Database is 788, of which only 204 have been found.

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Responding to cultural heritage issues

Recording of Aboriginal sites is often not done in a uniform way and the documentation of site information is becoming increasingly varied. This makes it more difficult to conserve cultural heritage in a meaningful way and the significance of an important site might not be recognised if careful management and documentation of heritage sites does not occur. A strategic approach to accelerate the recording of Aboriginal sites, with the active participation of the appropriate Aboriginal groups has been agreed to by government.



Taking action for cultural heritage

- Visit the South Australian Museum and learn about Aboriginal and geological heritage.
- Find out if there are any cultural heritage sites near where you live.

Impacts of losing cultural heritage



Culture

Aboriginal heritage is central to the recognition and maintenance of Aboriginal culture. Cultural heritage is also found within natural vistas such as coastal cliff views and significant urban trees. These can be threatened by development.



Economy

Heritage provides opportunities for tourism particularly for regional areas without other significant tourism drawcards. The destruction or deterioration of a heritage place results in a loss of the economic opportunity it provides.



Biodiversity

Shipwrecks can act as artificial reefs in the ocean and provide a haven for a variety of marine life. Once damaged or destroyed they cannot be replaced.

Attention!!

Aboriginal Heritage - Repatriation



There is a growing trend for ancestral remains and other cultural material to be repatriated (returned home) from overseas collections and institutions, to Aboriginal communities.

This requires cooperation by these communities and agencies to identify suitable, culturally appropriate land for burial of repatriated ancestral remains and other ancestral material that can be conserved over time.

The protection of moveable cultural heritage is also becoming an issue. Cultural material such as stone tools, ground stone axes and grindstones, and occasionally sacred objects, can often be found for sale on sites like eBay. This enables the movement of our cultural heritage interstate and overseas. Sales of cultural heritage objects are restricted under heritage legislation but more thought and action is required to monitor sales and recover items so they can be returned to the appropriate communities.

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Research Ideas about Cultural Heritage

- 1 What is meant by 'cultural heritage'?

- 2 Why is cultural heritage important? How does it relate to our identity and culture?

- 3 How have human activities impacted on cultural heritage in your community, South Australia, Australia and globally?

- 4 What does the State of the Environment report tell us about cultural heritage issues in South Australia?

- 5 What might happen in the future if things continue as they are?

- 6 What are government, business and industry doing to preserve cultural heritage in South Australia?

- 7 What can we do individually, or in communities, to reduce our impact on cultural heritage?

Resources

For more detailed information on the issue and actions you can take see the State of the Environment report for South Australia 2008.

This is available at:
www.epa.sa.gov.au/soe



This fact sheet is part of a set of 20 fact sheets about the key environmental issues identified in the State of the Environment report 2008, produced for the Environment Reporting Education Resource. You can access the fact sheets and learn more about taking action for the environment at the Education Resource website:
www.epa.sa.gov.au/soe.
For more information call the Environmental Education Unit of the Department for Environment and Heritage (08) 8463 3911.



Government of South Australia
Department for Environment
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