



Department of Planning,
Lands and Heritage



HERITAGE
COUNCIL



Aboriginal
Cultural
Heritage
Committee

State Heritage Conference 2025 theme The Heritage Ecosystem

Heritage is at the centre of an ecosystem that connects and interacts with various fields such as environmental sciences, economics, education and technology. These fields have both impacts on heritage as it has matured during the twentieth century and have influenced how practitioners can retain heritage and history for the future.

Heritage places and collections are impacted by changes to the environment but, through their retention, also contribute to the environmental sustainability of a location. Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) from Aboriginal communities offers invaluable insights into sustainable land and water management practices that have been refined over millennia. Environmental measuring techniques/tools can be used alongside TEK to assess future impacts and mitigate disasters. These can inform documents such as Coastal Risk Management and Adaption Plans (CHRMAP) which address coastal erosion and inundation to assets including heritage places or sites. Landscapes surrounding heritage places and significant environments can also be impacted by planning frameworks which advocate for greater infill development to cater for increases to the population.

The economic value of retaining heritage places, collections, and sites is part of the contentious debates surrounding heritage. Heritage can generate economic benefits by adapting and reusing historic heritage places into new commercial spaces, generating opportunities for the surrounding area, and creating jobs. This is especially true for Aboriginal heritage sites, where sustainable tourism and community-led economic initiatives can provide substantial benefits. For example, ranger programs which build capacity within communities. Education on the economic value of heritage within the development of historic heritage places is an important and ongoing issue, as is whether incentivising conservation is feasible in the long term to mitigate the perception of economic hardship.

Education for the next generation of heritage professionals within Australia has become a big issue as less professionals are asked to do more work across many different professions. As more people are engaging with Aboriginal cultural heritage, there is also a greater load placed on Elders to provide cultural knowledge. Many Australian tertiary courses have ceased to run, limiting the opportunities to train the next generation and to train Aboriginal professionals within the ethnographic and archaeological fields. This would increase the capacity for statutory work to be completed by people within the community, rather than by consultants. The task of community education to engage with and value heritage has evolved over time, so the everyday and untold heritage of places, sites and people is now being told. This includes the rich histories and cultures of Aboriginal peoples, whose contributions and stories are integral to Australia's heritage. As people engage with and think about heritage in different ways, they can see themselves being represented.

Technology has revolutionised how heritage can be accessed around the world, minimising physical contact with fragile collections, creating digital images and 3D representations of sites and assisting with the conservation of fabric. Access to information has exploded in the last 10 years and it is important to ensure that the information has integrity and is robust, while adhering to Indigenous data sovereignty protocols so that information isn't used inappropriately. Using technology can celebrate the everyday details of untold stories, particularly those of Aboriginal communities, which audiences can engage with personally and share their own stories, enriching WA's history and heritage.