

Aboriginal Heritage

Committees of Management on the Coast

Series No 7

The Victorian coastline has long been cherished by Victorian Communities. Scattered all along the Victorian Coast are sites of cultural heritage. This fact sheet provides particular information to land managers on Aboriginal Heritage on the coast.

What is Aboriginal Heritage?

The term 'Aboriginal heritage' covers a broad range of activities that help shape Aboriginal culture. Generally, the term refers to objects, places, stories, or any other aspect of Aboriginal culture relating to the past, and/or the present.

Within the realm of land management, the term tends to apply to those aspects of Aboriginal culture that have a physical or spiritual presence on the landscape. For example, activities such as hunting and camping in some cases left behind stone artefacts, animal bone and shells that form discrete signatures of past human activity. These are often referred to as Aboriginal heritage sites, or places. Other places may relate to events or activities that occurred since European occupation, such as Aboriginal mission stations. These are sometimes referred to as Aboriginal historic places.

Similarly, stories forming part of Aboriginal folklore and spiritual beliefs may include references to specific areas of land that remain important to Aboriginal people. These areas are commonly referred to as Aboriginal places.

Aboriginal heritage in Victoria is protected by both State and Commonwealth legislation. The Victorian *Archaeological and Aboriginal Relics Preservation Act 1972* provides 'blanket', or automatic, protection for all Aboriginal 'relics', including sites, artefacts and human remains buried before 1834. The Commonwealth *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984* (Part II A of which applies to Victoria) provides broader blanket protection for Aboriginal 'cultural property', which includes any places, objects and folklore that are 'of particular significance to Aboriginals in accordance with Aboriginal tradition'. Both Acts work concurrently and are administered by Aboriginal Affairs Victoria (AAV).

How do we know when a reserve has heritage value?

Land managers would need to seek expert advice to determine whether a reserve is, or contains, a site of heritage significance. An expert assessment is required where any large-scale ground-disturbing works are proposed within a reserve. Such works would include road or track building and construction of buildings. Conservation works may also require an assessment if they involve substantial disturbance to the ground, particularly disturbance of sand dunes.

The first point of contact should be the Regional Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Program organisation, who can advise land managers on: the presence and location of any recorded sites within a reserve, other cultural significance associated with a reserve and/or contact details for any local Indigenous groups who could provide such advice.



Aboriginal Heritage

The Aboriginal community is the sole arbiter for determining the heritage value of an Aboriginal heritage site. It is therefore important they are consulted. Funding for cultural heritage assessments and protection works need to be built into project budgets.

What are the responsibilities of the Land Manager?

The Land Manager is responsible for the protection of all values, including Aboriginal heritage values, on the land being managed. At a minimum, the Land Manager needs to comply with Aboriginal heritage legislation. This includes reporting a suspected discovery of an Aboriginal heritage site to AAV (suspected human remains should be reported to the Police or Coroner) and not disturbing or otherwise interfering with an Aboriginal heritage site or place, unless prior consent has been obtained from the relevant local Aboriginal community.

The Land Manager should make contact with the relevant Regional Aboriginal Cultural Heritage organisation to discuss any land management works and proposed use of land, and to find out about the presence and likelihood of Aboriginal cultural heritage sites and places in a given area.

Working with Indigenous groups

There are many groups within Aboriginal communities who may have interests in cultural heritage and broader land management activities. It is therefore important to ensure that all relevant groups are provided an opportunity to be consulted.

As stated above, the relevant Regional Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Program organisation can assist the Land Manager in identifying Aboriginal heritage issues and relevant Aboriginal groups.

The Australian Heritage Commission has produced a useful publication called *Ask First - A Guide to Respecting Indigenous Heritage Places and Values* (refer to www.ahc.gov.au) to assist people in undertaking consultations with Indigenous communities. It's a good idea for Land Managers to establish an ongoing relationship with relevant

Aboriginal groups so that any issues can be considered and dealt with in a mutually beneficial manner.

Grants/funding available to assist in heritage conservation

Generally, it is the Land Manager's responsibility to ensure that funds for Aboriginal cultural heritage management are built into land management project budgets and to seek alternative sources for funding through avenues such as the National Heritage Trust. Opportunities to develop joint projects with relevant Aboriginal groups should also be explored.

Contacts for more information

Further information on aboriginal cultural heritage issues and contacts for the Regional Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Program organisations, local Aboriginal community organisations and AAV may be found at <http://www.dvc.vic.gov.au/aav.htm>.



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