The Burra Charter
The Australia ICOMOS charter for the conservation of places of cultural significance

Preamble

Considering the International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (Venice 1964), and the Resolutions of the 5th General Assembly of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) (Moscow 1978), the Burra Charter was adopted by Australia ICOMOS (the Australian National Committee of ICOMOS) on 19 August 1979 at Burra, South Australia. Revisions were adopted on 23 February 1981, 23 April 1988 and 26 November 1999.

The Burra Charter provides guidance for the conservation and management of places of cultural significance (cultural heritage places), and is based on the knowledge and experience of Australia ICOMOS members.

Conservation is an integral part of the management of places of cultural significance and is an ongoing responsibility.

Who is the Charter for?

The Charter sets a standard of practice for those who provide advice, make decisions about, or undertake works to places of cultural significance, including owners, managers and custodians.

Using the Charter

The Charter should be read as a whole. Many articles are interdependent. Articles in the Conservation Principles section are often further developed in the Conservation Processes and Conservation Practice sections. Headings have been included for ease of reading but do not form part of the Charter.

The Charter is self-contained, but aspects of its use and application are further explained in the following Australia ICOMOS documents:

• Guidelines to the Burra Charter: Cultural Significance;

• Guidelines to the Burra Charter: Conservation Policy;

• Guidelines to the Burra Charter: Procedures for Undertaking Studies and Reports;

• Code on the Ethics of Coexistence in Conserving Significant Places.

What places does the Charter apply to?

The Charter can be applied to all types of places of cultural significance including natural, indigenous and historic places with cultural values.

The standards of other organisations may also be relevant. These include the Australian Natural Heritage Charter and the Draft Guidelines for the Protection, Management and Use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Heritage Places.
Why conserve?

Places of cultural significance enrich people’s lives, often providing a deep and inspirational sense of connection to community and landscape, to the past and to lived experiences. They are historical records, that are important as tangible expressions of Australian identity and experience. Places of cultural significance reflect the diversity of our communities, telling us about who we are and the past that has formed us and the Australian landscape. They are irreplaceable and precious.

These places of cultural significance must be conserved for present and future generations.

The Burra Charter advocates a cautious approach to change: do as much as necessary to care for the place and to make it useable, but otherwise change it as little as possible so that its cultural significance is retained.

Article 1 Definitions

For the purpose of this Charter:

1.1 Place means site, area, land, landscape, building or other work, group of buildings or other works, and may include components,
Cultural significance means aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value for past, present or future generations. The term cultural significance is synonymous with heritage significance and cultural heritage value.

Cultural significance may change as a result of the continuing history of the place.

Understanding of cultural significance may change as a result of new information.

Fabric includes building interiors and sub-surface remains, as well as excavated material.

Fabric may define spaces and these may be important elements of the significance of the place.

The distinctions referred to, for example in relation to roof gutters, are

- maintenance Ñ regular inspection and cleaning of gutters;
- repair involving restoration Ñ returning of dislodged gutters;
- repair involving reconstruction Ñ replacing decayed gutters.

It is recognised that all places and their components change over time at varying rates.

New material may include recycled material salvaged from other places. This should not be to the detriment of any place of cultural significance.
1.11 Compatible use means a use which respects the cultural significance of a place. Such a use involves no, or minimal, impact on cultural significance.

1.12 Setting means the area around a place, which may include the visual catchment.

1.13 Related place means a place that contributes to the cultural significance of another place.

1.14 Related object means an object that contributes to the cultural significance of a place but is not at the place.

1.15 Associations mean the special connections that exist between people and a place. Associations may include social or spiritual values and cultural responsibilities for a place.

1.16 Meanings denote what a place signifies, indicates, evokes or expresses. Meanings generally relate to intangible aspects such as symbolic qualities and memories.

1.17 Interpretation means all the ways of presenting the cultural significance of a place. Interpretation may be a combination of the treatment of the fabric (e.g. maintenance, restoration, reconstruction); the use of and activities at the place; and the use of introduced explanatory material.

**Conservation Principles**

**Article 2 Conservation and management**

2.1 Places of cultural significance should be conserved.

2.2 The aim of conservation is to retain the cultural significance of a place.

2.3 Conservation is an integral part of good management of places of cultural significance.

2.4 Places of cultural significance should be safeguarded and not put at risk or left in a vulnerable state.

**Article 3 Cautious approach**

3.1 Conservation is based on a respect for the existing fabric, use, associations and meanings. It requires a cautious approach of changing as much as necessary but as little as possible. The traces of additions, alterations and earlier treatments to the fabric of a place are evidence of its history and uses which may be part of its significance. Conservation action should assist and not impede their understanding.

3.2 Changes to a place should not distort the physical or other evidence it provides, nor be based on conjecture.

**Article 4 Knowledge, skills and techniques**
4.1 *Conservation* should make use of all the knowledge, skills and disciplines which can contribute to the study and care of the *place*.

4.2 Traditional techniques and materials are preferred for the *conservation* of significant *fabric*. In some circumstances modern techniques and materials which offer substantial conservation benefits may be appropriate.

**Article 5 Values**

5.1 *Conservation of a place* should identify and take into consideration all aspects of cultural and natural significance without unwarranted emphasis on any one value at the expense of others.

5.2 Relative degrees of *cultural significance* may lead to different *conservation* actions at a place.

**Article 6 Burra Charter Process**

6.1 The *cultural significance* of a *place* and other issues affecting its future are best understood by a sequence of collecting and analysing information before making decisions. Understanding cultural significance comes first, then development of policy and finally management of the place in accordance with the policy.

6.2 The policy for managing a *place* must be based on an understanding of its *cultural significance*.

6.3 Policy development should also include consideration of other factors affecting the future of a *place* such as the owner’s needs, resources, external constraints and its physical condition.

**Article 7 Use**

7.1 Where the *use* of a *place* is of *cultural significance* it should be retained.

7.2 A *place* should have a *compatible use*.

*The use of modern materials and techniques must be supported by firm scientific evidence or by a body of experience.*

Conservation of places with natural significance is explained in the Australian Natural Heritage Charter. This Charter defines natural significance to mean the importance of ecosystems, biological diversity and geodiversity for their existence value, or for present or future generations in terms of their scientific, social, aesthetic and life-support value.

A cautious approach is needed, as understanding of cultural significance may change. This article should not be used to justify actions which do not retain cultural significance.

The Burra Charter process, or sequence of investigations, decisions and actions, is illustrated in the accompanying flowchart.

The policy should identify a use or combination of uses or constraints on uses that retain the cultural significance of the place. New use of a place should involve minimal change, to significant fabric and use; should respect associations and meanings; and where
Article 8 Setting

Conservation requires the retention of an appropriate visual setting and other relationships that contribute to the cultural significance of the place.

New construction, demolition, intrusions or other changes which would adversely affect the setting or relationships are not appropriate.

Aspects of the visual setting may include use, siting, bulk, form, scale, character, colour, texture and materials.

Other relationships, such as historical connections, may contribute to interpretation, appreciation, enjoyment or experience of the place.

Article 9 Location

9.1 The physical location of a place is part of its cultural significance. A building, work or other component of a place should remain in its historical location. Relocation is generally unacceptable unless this is the sole practical means of ensuring its survival.

9.2 Some buildings, works or other components of places were designed to be readily removable or already have a history of relocation. Provided such buildings, works or other components do not have significant links with their present location, removal may be appropriate.

9.3 If any building, work or other component is moved, it should be moved to an appropriate location and given an appropriate use. Such action should not be to the detriment of any place of cultural significance.

Article 10 Contents

Contents, fixtures and objects which contribute to the cultural significance of a place should be retained at that place. Their removal is unacceptable unless it is: the sole means of ensuring their security and preservation; on a temporary basis for treatment or exhibition; for cultural reasons; for health and safety; or to protect the place. Such contents, fixtures and objects should be returned where circumstances permit and it is culturally appropriate.

Article 11 Related places and objects

The contribution which related places...
and related objects make to the cultural significance of the place should be retained.

**Article 12 Participation**

Conservation, interpretation and management of a place should provide for the participation of people for whom the place has special associations and meanings, or who have social, spiritual or other cultural responsibilities for the place.

**Article 13 Co-existence of cultural values**

Co-existence of cultural values should be recognised, respected and encouraged, especially in cases where they conflict. For some places, conflicting cultural values may affect policy development and management decisions. In this article, the term cultural values refers to those beliefs which are important to a cultural group, including but not limited to political, religious, spiritual and moral beliefs. This is broader than values associated with cultural significance.

**Conservation Processes**

**Article 14 Conservation processes**

Conservation may, according to circumstance, include the processes of: retention or reintroduction of a use; retention of associations and meanings; maintenance, preservation, restoration, reconstruction, adaptation and interpretation; and will commonly include a combination of more than one of these. There may be circumstances where no action is required to achieve conservation.

**Article 15 Change**

15.1 Change may be necessary to retain cultural significance, but is undesirable where it reduces cultural significance. The amount of change to a place should be guided by the cultural significance of the place and its appropriate interpretation. When change is being considered, a range of options should be explored to seek the option which minimises the reduction of cultural significance.

15.2 Changes which reduce cultural significance should be reversible, and be reversed when circumstances permit. Reversible changes should be considered temporary. Non-reversible change should only be used as a last resort and should not prevent future conservation action.

15.3 Demolition of significant fabric of a place is generally not acceptable. However, in some cases minor demolition may be appropriate as part of conservation. Removed significant fabric should be reinstated when circumstances permit.
15.4 The contributions of all aspects of cultural significance of a place should be respected. If a place includes fabric, uses, associations or meanings of different periods, or different aspects of cultural significance, emphasising or interpreting one period or aspect at the expense of another can only be justified when what is left out, removed or diminished is of slight cultural significance and that which is emphasised or interpreted is of much greater cultural significance.

Article 16 Maintenance

Maintenance is fundamental to conservation and should be undertaken where fabric is of cultural significance and its maintenance is necessary to retain that cultural significance.

Article 17 Preservation

Preservation is appropriate where the existing fabric or its condition constitutes evidence of cultural significance, or where insufficient evidence is available to allow other conservation processes to be carried out.

Preservation protects fabric without obscuring the evidence of its construction and use. The process should always be applied:

• where the evidence of the fabric is of such significance that it should not be altered;
• where insufficient investigation has been carried out to permit policy decisions to be taken in accord with Articles 26 to 28.

New work (e.g. stabilisation) may be carried out in association with preservation when its purpose is the physical protection of the fabric and when it is consistent with Article 22.

Article 18 Restoration and reconstruction

Restoration and reconstruction should reveal culturally significant aspects of the place.

Article 19 Restoration

Restoration is appropriate only if there is sufficient evidence of an earlier state of the fabric.

Article 20 Reconstruction

20.1 Reconstruction is appropriate only where a place is incomplete through damage or alteration, and only where there is sufficient evidence to
reproduce an earlier state of the fabric. In rare cases, reconstruction may also be appropriate as part of a use or practice that retains the cultural significance of the place.

20.2 Reconstruction should be identifiable on close inspection or through additional interpretation.

Article 21 Adaptation must be limited to that which is essential to a use for the place determined in accordance with Articles 6 and 7.

21.1 Adaptation is acceptable only where the adaptation has minimal impact on the cultural significance of the place.

21.2 Adaptation should involve minimal change to significant fabric, achieved only after considering alternatives.

Article 22 New work

22.1 New work such as additions to the place may be acceptable where it does not distort or obscure the cultural significance of the place, or detract from its interpretation and appreciation.

22.2 New work should be readily identifiable as such.

Article 23 Conserving use

Continuing, modifying or reinstating a significant use may be appropriate and preferred forms of conservation. These may require changes to significant fabric but they should be minimised. In some cases, continuing a significant use or practice may involve substantial new work.

Article 24 Retaining associations and meanings

24.1 Significant associations between people and a place should be respected, retained and not obscured. Opportunities for the interpretation, commemoration and celebration of these associations should be investigated and implemented.

24.2 Significant meanings, including spiritual values, of a place should be respected. Opportunities for the continuation or revival of these meanings should be investigated and implemented.

Article 25 Interpretation

The cultural significance of many places is not readily apparent, and
should be explained by *interpretation*. Interpretation should enhance understanding and enjoyment, and be culturally appropriate.

**Article 26 Applying the Burra Charter process**

26.1 Work on a *place* should be preceded by studies to understand the place which should include analysis of physical, documentary, oral and other evidence, drawing on appropriate knowledge, skills and disciplines.

The results of studies should be up to date, regularly reviewed and revised as necessary.

26.2 Written statements of *cultural significance* and policy for the *place* should be prepared, justified and accompanied by supporting evidence. The statements of significance and policy should be incorporated into a management plan for the place.

Statements of significance and policy should be kept up to date by regular review and revision as necessary. The management plan may deal with other matters related to the management of the place.

26.3 Groups and individuals with *associations* with a *place* as well as those involved in its management should be provided with opportunities to contribute to and participate in understanding the *cultural significance* of the place. Where appropriate they should also have opportunities to participate in its *conservation* and management.

**Article 27 Managing change**

27.1 The impact of proposed changes on the *cultural significance* of a *place* should be analysed with reference to the statement of significance and the policy for managing the place. It may be necessary to modify proposed changes following analysis to better retain cultural significance.

27.2 Existing *fabric, use, associations* and *meanings* should be adequately recorded before any changes are made to the *place*.

**Article 28 Disturbance of fabric**

Disturbance of significant *fabric* for study, or to obtain evidence, should be minimised. Study of a *place* by any disturbance of the fabric, including archaeological excavation, should only be undertaken to provide data essential for decisions on the *conservation* of the place, or to obtain important evidence about to
be lost or made inaccessible.
Investigation of a place which requires disturbance of the fabric, apart from that necessary to make decisions, may be appropriate provided that it is consistent with the policy for the place. Such investigation should be based on important research questions which have potential to substantially add to knowledge, which cannot be answered in other ways and which minimises disturbance of significant fabric.

Article 29 Responsibility for decisions
The organisations and individuals responsible for management decisions should be named and specific responsibility taken for each such decision.

Article 30 Direction, supervision and implementation
Competent direction and supervision should be maintained at all stages, and any changes should be implemented by people with appropriate knowledge and skills.

Article 31 Documenting evidence and decisions
A log of new evidence and additional decisions should be kept.

Article 32 Records
32.1 The records associated with the conservation of a place should be placed in a permanent archive and made publicly available, subject to requirements of security and privacy, and where this is culturally appropriate.

32.2 Records about the history of a place should be protected and made publicly available, subject to requirements of security and privacy, and where this is culturally appropriate.

Article 33 Removed fabric
Significant fabric which has been removed from a place including contents, fixtures and objects, should be catalogued, and protected in accordance with its cultural
Where possible and culturally appropriate, removed significant fabric including contents, fixtures and objects, should be kept at the place.

**Article 34 Resources**

Adequate resources should be provided for conservation. The best conservation often involves the least work and can be inexpensive.

*Words in italics are defined in Article 1.*

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**The Burra Charter Process**

Sequence of investigations, decisions and actions
IDENTIFY PLACE AND ASSOCIATIONS
Secure the place and make it safe

GATHER AND RECORD INFORMATION ABOUT THE PLACE SUFFICIENT TO UNDERSTAND SIGNIFICANCE
Documentary  Oral  Physical

ASSESS SIGNIFICANCE

PREPARE A STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

IDENTIFY OBLIGATIONS ARISING FROM SIGNIFICANCE

GATHER INFORMATION ABOUT OTHER FACTORS AFFECTING THE FUTURE OF THE PLACE
Owner/manager’s needs and resources
External factors  Physical condition

DEVELOP POLICY
Identify options
Consider options and test their impact on significance

PREPARE A STATEMENT OF POLICY

MANAGE PLACE IN ACCORDANCE WITH POLICY
Develop strategies
Implement strategies through a management plan
Record place prior to any change

MONITOR AND REVIEW

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