

FACT SHEET

Aboriginal Heritage Council

The Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council (the Council) was created under the *Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* to ensure the preservation and protection of Victoria's rich Aboriginal cultural heritage. It is the first all Aboriginal Council created under Victorian law which recognises Aboriginal people as the primary guardians, keepers and knowledge holders of their heritage.

Who are the members of the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council?

The Council is made up of 11 Traditional Owners who have been appointed by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. Members of the Council must be resident in Victoria and have demonstrated traditional or family links to an area in Victoria. They are also required to have relevant knowledge or experience in the management of Aboriginal cultural heritage in Victoria.



The current Council members are:

- Jim Berg (Chairperson)
- Denise Lovett
- Eleanor Bourke
- Graham Atkinson
- Karen Jackson
- Mick Harding
- Ricky Mullett
- Rodney Carter
- Tim Chatfield

What does the Council do?

The Council implements the *Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*. The Council seeks to strengthen the roles of Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities to manage and protect their heritage. The Council also influences the development of cultural heritage policy and works with key partners to build a better understanding and appreciation of Victoria's rich Aboriginal cultural heritage amongst the broader community.

Appoints Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs)

One of the first priorities of the Council is to consider applications from Aboriginal groups to become Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs). RAPs are organisations that hold decision making responsibilities for protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage in a specified geographical area.

Groups lodge an application and the Council makes a comprehensive assessment before appointing the RAP for an area. The Council determines applications by following guidelines in the Act and the principles it adopts, and relies on:

- Council's own knowledge as a group of Traditional Owners.
- Information from the RAP applicant and neighbouring Aboriginal groups.
- Research material - historical, anthropological and genealogical material, including research commissioned by Council.

The Council can offer mediation if there are disputes with overlapping boundaries between RAP applicants.

As the Council progressively appoints RAPs, Council will focus its work on activities that support RAPs' development and operations.

Provides Advice to the Minister

The Council provides advice to the Minister, both voluntarily and on request, on the protection and management of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage in Victoria, such as:

- Significance of any Aboriginal human remains, place or object;
- Protection and management of culturally sensitive places and information;
- Promoting the participation of Aboriginal people in Cultural Heritage; protection and management of Aboriginal cultural heritage;
- Standards of knowledge, experience, conduct and practice required of persons engaged in research into Aboriginal Cultural Heritage;
- Training and appointment of inspectors who enforce the Act; and
- Other matters referred to Council by the Minister.

The Minister can also request advice and/or recommendations from the Council on the exercise of his or her powers under the Act including;

- Applications of interim or ongoing protection declarations;
- Preparation of Cultural Heritage management plans;
- Appropriateness of a Cultural Heritage audit;
- Appropriateness of a compulsory acquisition of land in a particular case; and
- Other matter relating to the exercise of the Minister's powers under the Act.

Provides Advice to the Government Departments

The Council also advises the Secretary of the Department of Planning and Community Development on:

- Establishing standards and fee guidelines for sponsors to pay RAPs for their consultation when preparing cultural heritage management plans and assessments
- The exercise of his or her powers in relation to cultural heritage permit, cultural heritage management plans and cultural heritage agreements.

Evaluates Cultural Heritage Management plans

Large developments and other high impact activities in culturally sensitive landscapes can cause significant harm to Aboriginal cultural heritage. In these instances, under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, a Cultural Heritage Management Plan must be developed to protect and manage cultural heritage, with the involvement of RAPs, while allowing the development to proceed.

The Plan must be approved by the relevant RAP, where one exists. Where no RAP has been appointed, the Secretary of the Department of Planning and Community Development or in certain circumstances, the Aboriginal Heritage Council, may approve the Plan.

Educates all Victorians

The Council plays an active role in educating Victorians about the importance of Aboriginal cultural heritage and how it can be preserved, protected and ensure it remains an intrinsic part of Victoria's identity for future generations.

The Council has established a website to provide updates and news of interest on Aboriginal cultural heritage. This can be found by visiting:

<http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/indigenous/aboriginal-cultural-heritage/>

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