



Blue Shield Australia submission to the Australian Government Inquiry into the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, March 2018

About Blue Shield Australia

Blue Shield is also the name of an international committee set up in 1996 to work to protect the world's cultural heritage threatened by disasters of all types. The international body and its affiliated national committees (such as Blue Shield Australia) work together as the cultural equivalent of the Red Cross internationally. The name Blue Shield comes from the UNESCO 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, which specifies a blue shield as the symbol for marking protected cultural property.

The Blue Shield brings together the knowledge, experience and international networks of the expert organisations dealing with cultural heritage: an unrivalled body of expertise which is available to advise and assist in responding to events such as war, tsunamis and earthquakes.

Blue Shield Australia (BSA) was established in 2005 as a federation of four non-governmental organisations which represent professionals active in the fields of archives, libraries, monuments and sites, and museums. The BSA committee comprises representatives from the following Australian peak industry organisations:

- ICA: the International Council on Archives, represented in Australia by the Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities
- ICOM: the International Council of Museums, represented in Australia by ICOM Australia
- ICOMOS: International Council on Monuments and Sites, represented in Australia by Australia ICOMOS
- IFLA: the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, represented in Australia by the Australian Library and Information Association

These four organisations work together to prevent, prepare for, and respond to emergency situations in case of armed conflict or natural disasters that could affect Australia's cultural heritage.

Blue Shield Australia achievements

Over the last 12 years, BSA has actively pursued the goals of the Blue Shield through:

- Cross-sector conferences for industry leaders and policy makers at the Australian War Memorial (2010) and National Library of Australia (2018)
- Australian Government funded disaster planning events in regional Australia for industry practitioners, local government and emergency services (2012)
- Annual national May Day campaigns promoting disaster preparedness, aligned with international peers
- Support for Asia-Pacific neighbours (NZ and Japan) in their development of Blue Shield committees

In addition, BSA helped seed GLAM Peak, an industry body which has successfully delivered Australian Government funded digital access to collections programs and has worked with the government to achieve copyright law reform to support preservation and online dissemination of cultural collections.



Australia's cultural heritage and the Sustainable Development Goals

Culture, heritage and access to information are threaded through the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, however, the focus for BSA and ARC is target 11.4.

With Sustainable Development Goal 11 ([SDG 11](#)), countries have pledged to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”. Within this goal, target 11.4 aims to “strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage”.

Goal 11 will one of the five goals reviewed in depth at the [2018 UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development](#) in New York, 9-18 July, at which Australia will launch its Voluntary National Review.

Opportunity for Australia to demonstrate its active commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals

Australia is a signatory to the 1954 Hague Convention Protection of Cultural Property in Armed Conflict, but has yet to adopt the First and Second Protocols.

At a meeting at Old Parliament House, Canberra, on 31 January, 2018, representatives from the Departments of Defence, Home Affairs, Foreign Affairs and Trade, Communications and the Arts, and Environment and Energy met with BSA, ARC, the International Committee of the Red Cross, peak bodies and international observers from the UK, Japan and the Pacific. This followed a meeting in Adelaide in 2016 with a similarly broad range of government and civil society participants.

In the time between the 2016 and 2018 meetings, there had been substantial inter-agency discussion and consultation. There had also been some activity in the areas of legal investigation by Defence and the Arts.

While all agreed that work would be needed to ensure that commitments are consistent with other legal requirements, and to draft the appropriate legislation, there were no significant impediments to Australia adopting the Protocols.

Based on the UK experience, it would be a relatively simple process for a Bill to be drafted. It seems the main reason we haven't adopted the Protocols to date is that there has been no political imperative.

This is an opportunity to put Australia on a level with the 108 nations that are parties to the First Protocol, including Myanmar (1956), Thailand (1958), Malaysia (1960), Indonesia (1967), China (2000), Canada (2005), New Zealand (2013) and the UK (2017); and the 75 nations that are parties to the Second Protocol, including Canada (2005) New Zealand (2013) and the UK (2017).

In summary

Consultation between government departments and civil society organisations regarding Australia adopting the 1954 Hague Convention First and Second Protocols has already revealed that there are no major obstacles. It would be a relatively simple matter for the Australian Government to introduce the appropriate legislation. All that is required is the political imperative.

Blue Shield Australia is supported by the Blue Shield international body, the Australian Red Cross and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

This is a good fit with the leadership Australia has shown around global goals – endorsing the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015), committing to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (2015), being elected to the UN Human Rights Council (2017) and sitting on the World Heritage Committee. It would also support the UN Security Council Resolution 2347, adopted in 2017 in response to the unlawful destruction of cultural heritage, religious sites and artefacts, and

the smuggling of cultural property by terrorist groups during armed conflict. The Resolution is based on the principle that such attacks might constitute a war crime and must be brought to justice.

Recommendation

That the Inquiry committee recommend that the Australian Government actively pursue the legislation which would allow it to adopt the 1954 Hague Convention Protection of Cultural Property in Armed Conflict First and Second Protocols, as a symbol of the nation's commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and to target 11.4 in particular.