



3 August 2009

The Secretary
Senate Select Committee on Agricultural and Related Industries
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir / Madam,

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO BUSHFIRES IN AUSTRALIA

Blue Shield Australia is always willing to contribute advice on matters that relate to the preservation of cultural heritage. Thank you for providing this opportunity to participate as you consider the incidence and severity of bushfires across Australia.

1 About the Blue Shield

The Blue Shield is the cultural equivalent of the Red Cross. It is the symbol specified in the 1954 Hague Convention for marking cultural sites to give them protection from attack in the event of armed conflict. It is also the name of an international committee set up in 1996 to work to protect the world's cultural heritage threatened by war and natural disaster.

The International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS) covers archives (including audio-visual archives), libraries, monuments and sites, and museums (including art museums and galleries). The ICBS is international, independent and professional. In September 2005, the ICBS approved an application by the expert cultural heritage organisations in Australia to establish an Australian national committee, Blue Shield Australia.

2 About Blue Shield Australia

Blue Shield Australia (<http://www.blueshieldaustralia.org.au>) brings together in a federated association the knowledge, experience and international networks of the expert organisations dealing with cultural heritage in Australia:

- International Council on Archives, represented in Australia by the Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities
- International Council of Museums, represented in Australia by ICOM Australia

- International Council on Monuments and Sites, represented in Australia by Australia ICOMOS
- International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, represented in Australia by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA)

Our vision is to influence disaster preparedness and emergency management in Australia in relation to threats of all kinds, in order to ensure the preservation of cultural heritage in Australia's areas of responsibility and influence.

Blue Shield Australia is supported by funds contributed as required by its four member bodies, and by in-kind assistance from its Secretariat, the Collections Council of Australia Ltd.

At the time of the Victorian bushfires in February 2009, Blue Shield Australia – in collaboration with both the Collections Council and the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Materials – provided web-based advice on the appropriate recovery of fire-damaged items, and issued media releases to help alert communities to the importance of this recovery work. (See: www.blueshieldaustralia.org.au, and the announcements posted on 10 and 26 February, and also on 2 March 2009.)

3 This submission

Blue Shield Australia is pleased to respond to your current Inquiry into the incidence and severity of bushfires across Australia. We wish to offer comments on sections (a), (d) and (h) of your Terms of Reference.

Our submission is not confidential, and I authorise its publication via your website.

a) The impact of bushfires on human and animal life, agricultural land, the environment, public and private assets and local communities

Cultural heritage includes a wide range of assets that can be impacted by bushfires. Examples can be identified in all categories listed in this Term of Reference, including:

Human life

People carry memories and information that are yet to be passed on or documented / recorded. They may also carry specialised knowledge of intangible heritage practices, and expertise and skills in heritage trades.

Animal life

Rare and endangered animals are conserved in zoos, wildlife parks and natural reserves.

Agricultural land

Most farming properties carry evidence of their own history via the infrastructure of fences and buildings, and via the outmoded equipment that frequently survives in sheds and fields. Some

agricultural properties are deliberately managed as heritage sites to preserve the evidence of past farming techniques.

Environment

Landscaped environments and deliberate plantings (such as Avenues of Honour and historic gardens) are part of cultural heritage.

Public assets

Streetscapes, public buildings and monuments are tangible elements of cultural heritage. Movable cultural heritage can be gathered in public collections that operate as archives, historical societies, galleries, libraries and museums. These collections are housed in diverse locations, frequently – but not always – they are held in historic buildings. Significant cultural heritage (fixed or movable) may be recognised through listing under legislation and regulation (e.g. by national, state or territory jurisdictions, or by local government authorities) or via community designation (e.g. by the National Trust).

Private assets

Most of the elements of cultural heritage described in the previous paragraph can also be found in private ownership. Across Australia there are individuals, families, businesses and corporations who own and manage historic buildings and significant items and collections. Private libraries, art collections, museums and archives are not always made available to the public, but are usually accessible to researchers, and contribute to the 'Distributed National Collection' (i.e. the sum of all heritage collections of significance to the nation).

Local communities

Many community groups are actively engaged in the recognition and conservation of cultural heritage in its various manifestations (as outlined in the preceding paragraphs). Even when not formally involved in heritage management, communities benefit from the preservation of heritage places and items, because these contribute to a sense of cultural identity.

Why protect cultural heritage?

Cultural heritage is both tangible and intangible. It embodies the collective memories and beliefs which underlie social systems and cohesion. A community's cultural heritage is a fundamental part of its way of life, history, traditions, civilisation and identity and provides links between the past, the present and (potentially) the future. Cultural heritage contributes substantially to a community's long-term economic sustainability, stability and welfare, and strengthens the will to live, recover and grow after trauma. When individual places (buildings, precincts, cultural landscapes, etc.) and memorabilia (documents, objects, traditional items, etc.) are lost, communities can begin to disintegrate and ultimately may never recover. Preservation of cultural heritage is a significant aspect of ensuring societal continuity by handing cultural identity on to future generations.

Cultural heritage needs a rapid response

Given the fragility, unique and vulnerable nature, and often priceless value of cultural heritage places and objects, the initial disaster response should include a pro-active specialist team which

can focus on – and respond to threats to – cultural heritage. At the outset, the survival, recovery and restoration of historic buildings, sites and collections needs appropriate expert care which will lead to longer-term recovery strategies and ultimately preservation. A delay in an appropriate emergency response inevitably leads to irreparable damage, diminished or complete loss of recovery capacity of cultural items, ongoing physical degradation and potential looting. For example, mould can break out on organic materials (paper, textiles, leather etc.) within the first 48 hours of exposure to moisture. The remediation treatment can be long and painstaking and in some cases may not be possible. The ‘first five minutes’ and the ‘golden hour’ principles applicable to saving lives are similarly applicable to cultural heritage, particularly fragile items, and a rapid response can increase the chances of reversal of damage and long-term survival quite significantly. (For example, specialist conservators in the USA were escorted onto various sites after Cyclone Katrina as a first response strategy, with the long-term objective being to save cultural heritage.)

Arts Victoria has an established protocol for immediate responses to disasters impacting collections of cultural heritage. Three peak bodies are signatories to this protocol: Museums Australia Inc (Victoria), the Public Galleries Association of Victoria, and the Royal Historical Society of Victoria. Under the terms of this protocol, these peak bodies can spend up to \$5,000 per affected organisation on emergency conservation work to conserve damaged historical / cultural collections.

(See: http://www.arts.vic.gov.au/content/Public/About_Us/News/Media_Releases/2009/Bushfire_Information/Conservation_of_Collections_in_Affected_Areas.aspx)

d) The identification of measures that can be undertaken by government, industry and the community and the effectiveness of these measures in protecting agricultural industries, service industries, small business, tourism and water catchments

Measures that can be undertaken by the cultural heritage sector

Protection of cultural heritage through disaster preparedness is a significant objective of all custodians who hold heritage items in trust for future generations. Lessons learned from the 2003 Canberra firestorm demonstrate that preparation is vital and that every cultural heritage institution needs a ‘disaster plan’ which must cover:

1. Prevention
2. Preparedness
3. Response
4. Recovery

Established standards and guidelines within the cultural heritage sector already exist to guide heritage managers in planning for prevention, response and recovery. Many cultural heritage organisations have a disaster plan and some have planned for business continuity.

Blue Shield Australia actively encourages all cultural heritage organisations to ensure that their disaster planning is up-to-date and is well-informed by current thinking and experience.

Launched in May 2007, *MayDay* is a campaign by Blue Shield Australia to raise awareness in the cultural heritage sector about disaster preparedness. Through this campaign, Blue Shield

Australia urges all Australian archives, galleries, libraries, museums, cultural heritage sites and organisations to perform at least one disaster-preparedness task during the month of May.

In May 2009, people in cultural heritage organisations were encouraged to act upon one or more of the activities suggested via the campaign flier (see: <http://www.collectionscouncil.com.au/thirteenth+announcement+24+march+2009.aspx>), including:

- If you have a disaster plan, dust it off and make sure it's up to date or make a timeline for developing one.
- Get to know your local firefighters and police, and invite them to tour your organisation and give your pointers on safety and preparedness.
- Identify the three biggest risks to your collection or heritage site.
- Meet with the people working in the other cultural organisations in your area and find out how you can share resources in the event of a disaster

Blue Shield Australia would welcome contributions from governments and businesses to endorse, support or sponsor elements of the annual *MayDay* campaign.

Measures that can be undertaken by the governments and the emergency services

Blue Shield Australia notes that the 30 April 2009 meeting of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) resolved to re-examine Australia's arrangements for managing natural disasters, and commends COAG's decision to include the local government sector as a member of the working group and to give local government a key role in future emergency planning.

Blue Shield Australia is aware of a need for increased awareness-raising about cultural heritage assets among all emergency managers and responders.

Blue Shield Australia believes that 'cultural heritage awareness' should be included in all curriculum guidelines, manuals and course materials associated with training programs for emergency managers and responders.

The need for integrated training and disaster response

Blue Shield Australia believes that the integration of a cultural heritage response into a broader Australian government response to national, state or regional disasters is a fundamental to the protection of cultural heritage. A cultural heritage response would be a good fit with a wider integrated response, adding another level of professional expertise in parallel to the other response targets e.g. human life, animals, commercial assets, etc.

In various countries, cultural heritage personnel undertake training alongside professional emergency responders and defence personnel to facilitate an integrated response in times of warfare and natural disaster. In The Netherlands and Japan, for example, the cultural heritage professionals may be the first responders, such as at remote or hard to access sites (e.g. a castle surrounded by a moat) or when an earthquake or broad-based disaster occurs, dislocating road and rail links. United States and Australian defence personnel receive some training in cultural heritage responses before tours of duty overseas.

There are already some local councils, recognised volunteer/community groups and frontline emergency management response and recovery agencies in Australia which have programs for recruitment, retention and training of volunteers in emergency response procedures. One model for personnel who are not normally engaged in disaster-response comes from the Victorian Department of Justice which developed specialised training in appropriate disaster response and safety procedures for members of the media, enabling them to operate professionally in active disaster areas. This model is considered appropriate for cultural heritage personnel as it would enable an early response which may prove to be vital in relation to long-term recovery of cultural heritage places and collections.

The need for co-ordination of disaster response

While most cultural organisations have their own disaster plans, these are not necessarily integrated with other emergency response plans such as those of Emergency Management Australia, fire brigades, rural fire authorities, state and territory fire services (e.g. in national parks), the voluntary State Emergency Service (SES), and so on. Without co-ordination there is a risk that multiple sets of disaster plans and responses may be in conflict in times of emergency.

In Victoria, at least, there appear to be few (if any) municipal disaster plans which mention cultural heritage. However, also in Victoria, the Department of Justice has included a layer on their fire hazard maps which identifies cultural heritage up to a point. Blue Shield Australia sees this as a useful initiative which has great potential for further development.

Blue Shield Australia commends the co-operative efforts of the major cultural heritage organisations in several capital cities and in one regional centre that have developed 'mutual aid agreements' – often expressed through Memoranda of Understanding – to ensure alignment of disaster plans to prepare for co-operative response in the event of an emergency. A well-organised example is DISACT ('Disaster ACT'), established by cultural and scientific collecting institutions in the ACT to improve disaster preparedness and to provide local mutual assistance in the event of emergencies affecting public collections. DISACT maintains a website (see: <http://www.anbg.gov.au/disact>), promotes disaster management awareness and standards, facilitates contact between those with disaster management responsibilities for collections, and, inter alia, arranges annual joint training in disaster management relevant to collections. Blue Shield Australia is aware of similar agreements being in place (or emerging) for cultural heritage organisations in Adelaide, Melbourne, Ballarat, Tasmania and the Northern Territory.

The need to improve connections between cultural heritage workers and disaster responders

Through its Australia-wide membership, Blue Shield Australia has the capacity to develop a communications strategy which links cultural heritage practitioners with existing emergency networks. For example, in almost every municipality in Victoria and New South Wales, there is a heritage advisor employed by the local council who deals with heritage planning and development applications. Similarly, there are many regional towns and cities which have libraries, galleries and museums with professionally trained curatorial and conservation staff. Many of these cultural heritage practitioners live in the municipality where they work. With appropriate training in emergency response procedures, these heritage workers could play a vital role in bushfire response and recovery, particularly in rural and regional areas. The role of such cultural heritage professionals could be pivotal in the first response to a disaster by making an initial damage assessment on heritage buildings and items which are either in public and or private collections.

They may also be able to identify safe environments and appropriate facilities for the relocation and treatment of items of movable cultural heritage.

The need to incorporate cultural heritage research into ‘Disaster and Hazard Test-Bed’ research

Released in August 2008, the Australian Government’s policy for research infrastructure, the *Strategic Roadmap for Australian Research Infrastructure* (see: http://ncris.innovation.gov.au/Documents/2008_Roadmap.pdf), urges collaboration between science and humanities knowledge networks to increase knowledge and skill in the following areas:

- disaster reduction and security
- preparedness, mitigation and response to natural and man-made disasters, emergencies and hazards

A ‘Disaster and Hazard Test-bed’ model is proposed to focus research and evaluation in this field (*Strategic Roadmap*, p 75).

It is essential that cultural heritage experience and knowledge contributes to this work. Areas of expertise in the cultural heritage field that relate directly to the Disaster and Hazard Test-bed Model are:

- the physical and chemical behaviour of materials, particularly of heritage materials
- the role of cultural heritage in building community resilience
- specialized risk assessment and management

h) The role of volunteers

Volunteer emergency responders

Blue Shield Australia applauds the work undertaken by voluntary firefighters through services such as the SES and the rural fire authorities, and commends those volunteer firefighters who are proactive in encouraging better disaster preparedness within their own communities.

Blue Shield Australia reiterates the need to include ‘cultural heritage awareness’ in curriculum guidelines, manuals and course materials associated with training programs for voluntary emergency managers and responders.

Volunteer cultural heritage workers

Blue Shield Australia is committed to the importance of training of voluntary personnel who work with cultural heritage to protect their own heritage assets.

As part of *MayDay* in 2008, Blue Shield Australia partnered with CAVAL (a not-for-profit company that specialised library services are for university libraries, public libraries, special and government libraries) and ALIA to run a series of training workshops in disaster response for heritage materials. These workshops were offered in most of the capital cities around Australia, and enabled participation from volunteer-initiated collecting organisations.

Arts Victoria’s protocol for immediate responses to disasters impacting collections of cultural heritage (see page 4, above) was developed particularly for small, often volunteer-initiated

collections that lack suitable financial reserves, and would otherwise not be able to support a prompt recovery process for disaster-affected collections.

Recommendations

To improve the integration of cultural heritage with the work of others involved in bushfire prevention, preparedness, response and recovery in Australia, Blue Shield Australia recommends that steps be taken in the following areas of activity:

Research

- Ensure that cultural heritage knowledge and research contributes to the 'Disaster and Hazard Test-bed' element of the 'Safeguarding Australia' capability, funded through the *Strategic Roadmap for Australian Research Infrastructure*.

Planning

- Ensure that risks and hazards to cultural heritage are identified in an integrated manner in all conservation management, disaster and similar plans for individual heritage places and collections, and also in all national, state and municipal disaster plans and business recovery plans.
- Ensure that all cultural heritage organisations are appropriately prepared for emergencies such as through the preparation of a disaster plan, a disaster response kit and a communications plan.
- Ensure that disaster prevention, preparedness, response and recovery objectives are integrated into existing professional and organisational accreditation processes for the cultural heritage sector.

Training

- Ensure that cultural heritage is included in all procedural manuals for both the training of disaster response personnel and also for the management of disasters.
- Provide cultural heritage training to disaster response and defence personnel as part of an integrated response strategy.
- Provide disaster response training to cultural heritage professionals, preferably through an accredited national training program.
- Ensure that at least two persons in each cultural heritage organisation are appropriately trained, and are replaced in a timely manner when a vacancy occurs.

Funding

- Encourage the development of grants and other funded protocols to support the prompt recovery of cultural heritage impacted by disasters.

Networks and information

- Encourage the development of Mutual Aid Agreements between relevant organisations in identified regions, with a view to developing an integrated disaster planning and response regime for those organisations.

- Investigate the suitability of existing databases for capturing the impact of disasters that affect cultural heritage.
- Foster civilian – military co-operation through existing networks and structures such as CIMIC (Civil Military Co-operation Unit).

Education

- Raise awareness of the fundamental importance of cultural heritage at all levels.
- Heighten cultural heritage awareness and disaster planning in all disaster plans, ranging from national to personal, through existing emergency response and cultural heritage networks, organisations and websites.

Subject to resourcing, Blue Shield Australia is keen to participate and assist in the implementation of the above recommendations.

Blue Shield Australia will be pleased to discuss this submission further, if required.

Yours faithfully,



Detlev Lueth
Chair
Blue Shield Australia