## Document Control

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Policy, Information and Research Branch  
Country, Culture and Heritage Division |
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Introduction

Once in receipt of Aboriginal cultural material, the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) will temporarily store Aboriginal cultural material within facilities referred to as Ready to Return Centres (RTRC). Aboriginal cultural material that has been transferred back to Aboriginal communities will permanently be stored in facilities known as Keeping Places.

This document will provide guidance for OEH staff in the professional and culturally appropriate care and control of Aboriginal cultural material stored within OEH Ready to Return Centres. This guideline will:

1. Identify minimum standards that each OEH RTRC must adhere to.
2. Outline a standardised approach to the cataloguing of all Aboriginal cultural materials held within OEH RTRC.

For the purpose of this Guideline, Aboriginal objects are defined in accordance with section 5 of the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 as any deposit, object or material evidence (not being a handicraft made for sale) relating to the Aboriginal habitation of the area that comprises New South Wales, being habitation before or concurrent with (or both) the occupation of that area by persons of non-Aboriginal extraction, and includes Aboriginal remains.

Application

The OEH Management of Cultural Materials Guideline applies to all Aboriginal cultural material temporarily housed within OEH RTRC.

This guideline should be read in conjunction with the OEH Management of Cultural Materials Policy. A copy of the OEH Management of Cultural Materials Policy can be downloaded from the OEH website at www.environment.nsw.gov.au or requested from the OEH on (02) 9995 5000.

Procedural guidelines

1. Identification of Aboriginal Cultural Material

Recognising that the term Aboriginal cultural material is commonly used to refer more broadly to heritage items that are of significance to Aboriginal communities; this guideline and related policy define Aboriginal cultural material as objects that are produced by Aboriginal communities and/or that have particular cultural significance to Aboriginal communities. This can include both culturally modified and unmodified objects¹. Photographs are a common example of material that may be held by OEH that is not ‘legally’ an Aboriginal object, but may be of importance to Aboriginal communities.

2. Cataloguing of Aboriginal Cultural Material

Cataloguing an Aboriginal object involves the compilation and maintenance of key information to identify and describe an object. The following information is usually collected before the Aboriginal cultural material is accepted into the OEH RTRC:

- Date that the material was received.
- How the object was acquired.
- Who it was acquired from.
- Where the object was collected or found.
- Any additional information related to the provenance of the material.

In order to accurately manage material, the following information should be recorded during the cataloguing process. An example of a catalogue record can be found on page 10 of this Guideline.

- **Registration number:** The registration number assigned to the material must be written on the catalogue record, on the object and on an object tag.
- **The object name:** The name by which the object is known.
- **Date registered:** The date the object was catalogued.
- **Storage location:** The Ready to Return Centre where the material will be located.
- **Description of the object:** This information should make reference to the physical appearance of the object.
- **Measurements:** This information should include the length, height, width and diameter of the material.
- **Condition of the object:** The physical condition of the object.
- **Photograph:** A photograph of each object in the collection should be taken from directly above and the object should fill as much of the viewfinder as possible. Additional photographs that capture all distinguishing features of the material should also be taken. Each photograph should include the object tag and a colour chart.

Additionally, an object tag must also be attached and may either be tied or placed inside a sealed bag with the material. The object tag must note the registration number, object name, where the object came from, the date the object was acquired by OEH and who the object was acquired from.

Each individual object must be labelled with the objects description registration number in a discrete position, using either a black or white archival ink pen, depending on which colour would be more visible. Clear nail polish should be applied on the spot where the object will be labelled. In addition to the object, the shelving where the material will be stored should also be labelled to assist with managing and locating material.

If any information about the material is unknown, the record should be left blank. Once the above information is collected, the catalogue information must be entered into the AHIMS Movable Heritage Module.
3. AHIMS Moveable Heritage Module

The Moveable Heritage Module is designed to catalogue, record and display information about individual items and collections of Aboriginal objects and moveable heritage that OEH has acquired through various sources (acquisition of land, donation, excavation etc). Each entry saved to the module represents a digital record of either an entire collection or a single item.

The basic data fields of the Moveable Heritage Module are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moveable Heritage Item ID</strong></td>
<td>This is an automated field that cannot be manipulated by AHIMS users. The ID number the system gives to the item/collection when it is saved into AHIMS is composed of the financial year, the letter A and a 5-digit numerical sequence (e.g.: 2005-A-0002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group Type</strong></td>
<td>An entry can be classed as either a single ‘item’ or a ‘collection’ of items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name</strong></td>
<td>The name of the item or collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description</strong></td>
<td>A brief description of the item or collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Material</strong></td>
<td>The type of item or collection – either an ‘object’ (stone artefact etc) or ‘information’ (photograph etc.) or ‘other’ referring to any other material rather than stone (soil etc.) This section also has another drop down menu for Material</td>
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</table>
When dealing with Aboriginal cultural materials, the AHIMS Moveable Heritage Module must be updated in the following circumstances:

- If the condition of the Aboriginal cultural material changes.
- Acquisition of cultural materials.
- In the event materials are transferred between locations.
- Materials are subject to an approved *transfer for safe keeping arrangement*.

In the event that Aboriginal objects relate to a site on AHIMS, photographs must be uploaded to the relevant site card via the AHIMS Site Module. All other digital images taken throughout the cataloguing process should be immediately transferred from the cameras memory to a computer hard disk and backed up with external storage sources such as CD-ROMs.

4. **Storage of Aboriginal Cultural Materials**

Each Country, Culture and Heritage Division Regional Manager must ensure that their respective Ready to Return Centre is:

- Only used for the storage of Aboriginal cultural material.
- Located in a stable part of the building (i.e. no extremes in temperature and relative humidity, is in a dry location and is well ventilated).
- Always locked with the key in a secure location.
- Sealed from pests. Note that materials that are found to contain pests should be isolated from the rest of the collection.
- Always clean and tidy.
- Spacious, with adequate room to carry out all functions that are necessary.
- Clearly marked with appropriate signage. Each RTRC will contain a list of “Do’s and Don’ts” as well as a list of contacts in case of a collection emergency. The contact list will identify key points of contact responsible for the management of the collection.

**Packing Aboriginal Cultural Material**

- Small objects should be carefully wrapped separately in resealable bags with the Object Tag included.
- All materials should be stored in sturdy storage containers such as archival standard cardboard boxes or plastic containers. The weight of an individual box,
including the contents and any other packing materials contained within, should not exceed 5kg.

- Small objects may be stored in boxes with other small objects from the same collection.
- Large and heavy cultural material should be stored on the lower shelves and labelled to indicate the weight.
- Separate incompatible objects based on the weight, size, shape, and fragile objects, to avoid the risk of damaging objects.
- Fragile objects should be stored separately and inside padded boxes.
- Paintings and framed photographs should be carried by the frame or stretcher, so contact with the painted surface is avoided.
- Never carry a basket, bag, hafted tool or shield by the handle. Always support the entire object, especially the heaviest parts of the object.
- All flat delicate objects should be support and protected by strong, inert backing boards. This includes paintings, photographs, maps, stretched textiles
- Always distribute the weight evenly when packing the container to help with handling and carrying the container.
- Always write a box contents list and place it in as the last item in the container. This will enable the container to be checked for all objects, when the box is unpacked.
- Always label the container with the appropriate handling instructions, such as: “THIS WAY UP” “FRAGILE” “HANDLE WITH CARE”.
- The packed storage container should be sealed and covered to protect the objects from moisture, extreme temperatures and humidity.

5. Inventory of Aboriginal Cultural Materials

A designated OEH officer will conduct an inventory of the collection every 12 months in order to monitor the conservation needs of materials. This is in addition to the basic inspection that will take place every 3 months to monitor the storage condition of the material.

Accordingly, staff members undertaking inventory must:

- Immediately report any material that is missing to the relevant Country, Culture and Heritage Division Regional Manager.
- Forward information gathered during the inventory to the Regional Heritage Information Officer in order to update the Moveable Heritage Module on AHIMS.
- Note any changes in the physical condition of the cultural material and if necessary, develop and implement appropriate protection management strategies.
- Update the AHIMS Module when material is repatriated.
6. **Ready to Return Centre Best Practice Rules**

- Supervise both staff and visitors who are working or visiting the Ready to Return Centre.

- Handling of objects should be kept to a minimum as this can cause damage and deterioration. If possible rubber gloves should be used.

- Food or drink is NOT permitted in any Ready to Return Centre.

- Large bags or umbrellas are NOT permitted in any Ready to Return Centre.

- No cultural material is to be removed from any Ready to Return Centres without the appropriate written approvals and agreements.

- All electrical appliances and equipment in Ready to Return Centres should be switched off at the power points every night.
Definitions

**Registration Number**: A unique identification number allocated as part of the cataloguing process (note: this is not the AHIMS Module Number).

Contacts for further advice

Further information can be obtained from Aboriginal Heritage Conservation Officers within the Country, Culture and Heritage Division Regions:

- Central Region: (02) 9995 5000
- Far West Region: (02) 6969 0700
- North West Region: (02) 6881 4611
- Northern Region: (02) 6659 8294
- Southern Region: (02) 6229 7177
## Catalogue Record

**Catalogued by:**

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<th>Registration No:</th>
<th>Object Name:</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other Comments:</th>
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</table>
Cultural Material Checklist

**Have you:**

☑ Identified the cultural material?

☑ Assigned the material a registration number?

☑ Clearly labelled the material?

☑ Recorded all relevant information on the catalogue form?

☑ Taken photographs of the material?

☑ Entered the item/collection onto AHIMS?

☑ Noted if the material can be used for educational purposes on AHIMS?

☑ Correctly stored the material within a CCHD Ready to Return Centre?