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Heritage significance evaluation in Australia

# Summary

Heritage Forum 3 (17-18 November 1015) requested forum members to submit information/examples to Jo van der Eynden on how their country evaluates historical lighthouses with a view to deciding which are the most important.

This paper provides details on this subject from an Australian perspective.

## Purpose of the document

Provide input to work the Heritage Forum is doing on evaluation of historical significance of lighthouses.

## Related documents

Nil

# Background

Australia has an indigenous history dating back at least 50,000 years before the first European settlers arrived in 1788. The oldest still standing European building in Australia is Elizabeth Farm in Sydney built in 1793. So as a country we have a modern European history and an ancient indigenous history.

AMSA manages some of Australia’s oldest European built buildings. Interestingly lighthouses are the oldest industrial buildings in Australia still being used as they were intended.

The oldest lighthouse still standing is the Iron Pot located close to Hobart in Tasmania and built in 1832. Like most of Australia’s oldest buildings it was built by convict labor.

There are a number of heritage lists in Australia, and they can have different names – such as register or inventory. The lists that AMSA lighthouses are on include Commonwealth Heritage Lists; State and Territory heritage registers; and local government lists. AMSA also has its own AMSA Heritage Register which lists all 61 AMSA lighthouses of heritage importance (values can include cultural, environmental or indigenous). Of these 61 lighthouses 25 have Commonwealth Heritage Listings, 23 have State Listings, and 6 are located within Commonwealth Listed Forest or Nature Reserves. The remaining 7 sites AMSA consider of heritage importance but are not listed on any other official Lists.



Australia’s oldest lighthouse- the *Iron Pot*, located on an island in the Derwent River, Tasmania and built in 1832

# Discussion

While all of the places on the heritage lists are important, the Commonwealth, state/territory and local government heritage systems distinguish between these levels for legal and practical reasons. To be nominated for any heritage list the site must first meet various criteria and thresholds.  One or more of the following criteria should apply to a place considered for listing;

*Criteria for identifying heritage significance taking into account aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or other special values to all generations.*

* Importance to the course, or pattern, of our cultural or natural history.
* Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of our cultural or natural history.
* Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of our cultural or natural history.
* Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or environments.
* Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.
* Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.
* Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions.
* Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in our history.

The various states and territories of Australia (of which there are 8) each have their own State heritage registers. For a site to be added to a State register it first needs to be nominated to that State’s heritage office. The nomination is then investigated and if deemed worthy moves to the next stage of the process - community consultation. The next stage is recommendation by the State Heritage Council to the responsible State Minister.

Commonwealth listings comprise of heritage places owned or controlled (including leased) by the Commonwealth. AMSA being a Commonwealth Agency falls within this category. All nominations for the Commonwealth Heritage List need to be assessed by the Australian Heritage Council which decides whether a Commonwealth place has significant heritage values, it is then required to advise the responsible Minister (currently the for the Environment) if the place meets one or more of the criteria.

The highest level of listing is the National Heritage List which includes such environmental icons as Kakadu National Park, The Great Barrier Reef and Uluru (Ayers Rock).

To reach the threshold for the National Heritage List, a place must have 'outstanding' heritage value to the nation. To be entered on the Commonwealth List, a place must have 'significant' heritage value.

In Australia no lighthouse is yet listed on the National Heritage List. However, recently an entire headland including a c.1888 AMSA lighthouse has been nominated for inclusion and we currently await the decision.



Low Head lightstation in Tasmania. Built in 1888 this lighthouse could soon have the highest possible heritage listing on the National Heritage List.

For further information on Australian Government heritage regulation refer to the following links to:

* [Relevant legislation provisions (EPBC Act 1999)](https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2015C00422/Html/Volume_2#_Toc427588347)
* [Heritage guidance](http://www.environment.gov.au/)

1. Input document number, to be assigned by the Committee Secretary [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Leave open if uncertain [↑](#footnote-ref-2)