



MEDIA RELEASE 4 May 2010

Australia ICOMOS inspects damage to cultural heritage sites in Boulder WA

Australia ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) expresses its concern at the damage to many cultural heritage buildings as a consequence of the magnitude 5.0 earthquake which struck Boulder (W.A.) on the morning of 20th April. At least four buildings and the Burt Street heritage precinct, all dating from the gold rush era of the 1890s, have sustained some degree of damage.

Our cultural heritage is fundamental to our social fabric, history and sense of place. Protecting and rescuing our heritage places is essential for maintaining links to the past for future generations.

Australia ICOMOS, a non-government professional organisation that promotes expertise in the conservation of cultural heritage, stresses the need to co-ordinate all initial heritage response actions and develop a coordinated plan of assistance by all relevant authorities. Initial damage assessments should not only assess the structural damage but should also assess the potential for reconstruction, salvage of materials and the likelihood of unrecorded archaeological deposits occurring. As a response to the often urgent problem of structural adequacy of damaged buildings and public safety, the rapid demolition, bulldozing and clearing of building fabric of cultural significance, and any contents, can result in unnecessary secondary loss of valuable elements.

“When the initial damage assessment is undertaken by architects, archaeologists, structural engineers and building surveyors with heritage experience and also by cultural heritage custodians and conservators there will be fewer avoidable losses as a result of a more thorough identification of rehabilitation potential” said ICOMOS President Dr Susan McIntyre-Tamwoy. “Many losses occur unnecessarily during clearing operations. Heritage sites often also have archaeological deposits associated with them that can be inadvertently damaged in cleanup operations. The inclusion of heritage expertise at the start of the response phase will help to avoid the loss of many valuable and significant cultural and historic resources”.

ICOMOS is one of the pillar members of the International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS) and Australia ICOMOS is a pillar of the national committee, Blue Shield Australia. The Blue Shield is the cultural equivalent of the Red Cross and 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. 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 disasters such as the Indian Ocean tsunami in December 2005 and earthquake damage in China.

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