

Rapid Assessment – Damage to Heritage Places

Context

Over the spring and summer months of 2019 and 2020, bushfires have raged across large areas of the Australian continent, with particularly devastating impacts in NSW, Victoria and South Australia. In addition to the loss of lives, houses, farms, towns, schools, businesses, research facilities, infrastructure, livelihoods and more, there have been immense losses of the nation's natural and cultural heritage.

Purpose

The purpose of this rapid assessment is to identify the extent of heritage losses and the risks that need to be addressed to protect the surviving heritage and prevent further loss. The form recognises that not all heritage places are included on local or state inventories and that places that are recognised by local communities as culturally significant should also be included in the census.

The purpose of a rapid assessment is to:

- provide a brief overview of the damage to a place - the extent of loss and the type of damage,
- identify the continuing threats or risks to the place that exist as a consequence of the fires, or the ongoing threat to the place from fire and other hazards (natural and human),
- identify and prioritise actions to address the risks to prevent further loss, and
- identify the immediate needs of property owners for assistance in relation to emergency remedial actions to stabilise or salvage their heritage.

A rapid assessment is not a detailed damage assessment. This will be undertaken at a later date by property owners after the immediate emergency has been dealt with.

Who should complete this form?

In order to avoid adding to the trauma of property owners, this rapid assessment form has been designed to be filled in by council heritage officers or heritage specialists. Property owners can contribute information to the form and should be given a copy of the completed form for their own records.

How to Fill in this form

A Rapid Assessment is a fairly quick assessment.

The form allows for simple tick box answers, but also provides sufficient space for short notes for clarification (eg key words relating to significance could be added).

Record the type of damage (eg. charring, water damage, smoke damage) and the extent (to which elements – eg. outbuildings, roof, rear wing, etc).

Draw a quick site plan showing the structures and mark up where damage is (destroyed, damaged or surviving) and any risks/hazards that are apparent. Notes should be specific to the situation and type of damage or the hazard. Hazards may include potential building collapse, roofing could blow away in high winds, not weathertight, asbestos contamination, previously covered elements are now exposed to the elements and potential vandalism or water damage, dispersed shattered glass or solar cells, etc)

Attach photographs of the place – destroyed, damaged and surviving elements.
Also include photos of hazards where appropriate.

Priorities for site stabilisation, salvage and remediation must be identified.

Privacy

No personal information is required other than the name of the owner (which the Council should already have) and their contact details for providing information on the types or assistance that may become available.

Private details will not be shared beyond this.

Insurance and financial information

The form does not expect financial details to be added.

It is seeking to understand the property owner's circumstances and potential needs as these relate to recovery. Thus, responses may be a tick in the relevant box based on the owner's understanding of their situation. Some additional notes may be added where the owner wants to give that information.

This is only a preliminary assessment to enable the owner, the council and heritage authorities to understand the capacity of owners to recover their property and to assess the type of assistance that may be required. It will be up to the authorities to work out ways of providing that assistance (eg. through recovery grants or loans).

Copies of this Form

Please return this form to _____ (nominate a central collection point for the council). The form will also be sent to the state heritage authority and a copy will be given to the property owner.

This is not a legal document that holds the owner to account for recovery of their heritage property. It is for general information purposes.