

**“HERITAGE AT RISK”:**  
CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT IN THE ANTARCTIC

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The Heritage of Polar Landscapes

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*Abstract*

Currently, the greatest threat to Antarctic heritage sites comes not from climate change but from the management of these sites by Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties (ATCP's) – in particular, by their implementation of Annex III of the Madrid Protocol.

The Protocol generated a political urgency to ‘clean up the environment’ which has increased the risk of damage to cultural resources. While, the cleanup requirements in Annex III stipulate that cleanup should not damage historic items, the lack of an adequate definition of what constitutes an ‘historic item’ (particularly in relation to archaeological deposits composed of discarded items) continues to put historic resources at risk of being removed as rubbish.

A case study of the history of the Australian Government Antarctic Division's (AGAD) management of Wilkes Station as a cultural heritage resource reflects the history of the engagement of the Antarctic Treaty System, and of the AGAD in particular, with the management of Antarctic heritage in general. The heritage values of the Wilkes station currently have no legislative protection under either Australian or international law, but the Australian Government Antarctic Division (AGAD) remains committed to progressing a long term plan for the clean up of the Site.

This paper argues for the crucial importance of a legislative and management regime for Antarctic heritage conservation which is based on an understanding of the cultural heritage significance of sites.

**Background**

The Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties have recognized the value of the Historic Resources of the Antarctic from the first Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM) convened in Canberra in 1961, as evidenced by Recommendation I-IX on Historic Sites.

The early history of the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties approach to the designation and management of Historic Resources is summarised by Warren (1989). Warren (1989 p.2) undertook to provide a theoretical and organizational basis for the

treatment of cultural and historic sites, structures and objects in the Antarctic and to provide a guideline against which specific sites reports could be evaluated. Warren concluded that *“the designation of Historic Monuments by the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties under the Antarctic Treaty does not adequately protect the Historic Resources of the Antarctic”* (Warren 1989 p.7). Warren’s review of the situation, at the time, identified a number of problems including:

- a lack of designation criteria and systematic evaluation, which had led to some critical aspects of Antarctic activity, early resource exploitation and maritime exploration, not being well represented within the designated sites;
- a lack of scientific expertise, significantly a lack of involvement by professional archaeologists and conservators, arguably reflected by the fact that neither the range of sites designated nor the majority of the field work conducted on them recognised the scientific value of the resource – and in fact, cleaning up and other site disturbance had significantly damaged the information value of these sites;
- an existing structure within the Antarctic Treaty System which served to limit the involvement of historic resource professionals, in particular the reliance on the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) for technical advice when SCAR had no representatives from disciplines which deal with historic resources;
- a lack of funding for research and conservation activity as regularly budgeted items, which raised the question of the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties joint responsibility to the resource – inherent in declaring it worthy of preservation; and
- implementation of management recommendations, with typically historic resources receiving low priority in overall program planning and also not being included within the planning process for many scientific organizations.

Warren concluded, *“It would be appropriate for the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties, having declared this a valuable resource, to request assistance from appropriate expert organizations to prepare a more complete and in depth report on the subject of Historic Monuments.”*(Warren 1989 p.21).

Since the period covered by Warren’s review, the Madrid Protocol (1991) has been signed and its Annexes adopted. The signatories to the Antarctic Treaty have particular responsibility under Annex V of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty (the Madrid Protocol) to ensure that Historic Sites are not damaged, removed or destroyed. Therefore conservation strategies which required, for example, the repatriation of building elements of an Historic Site, would be in breach of the Madrid Protocol.

The Antarctic Treaty requires that sites included on the Antarctic Treaty list of Historic Sites and Monuments be identified by on-site signage in several languages.

Article 8 and Annex 1 of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty set out the requirements for Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA's). In looking at potential environmental impacts, the Madrid Protocol takes a broad interpretation of what constitutes the environment. It specifically requires that activities be planned and conducted so as to *avoid degradation of areas of historic significance* (Articles 2 & 3 Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty 1991 Article 3 Environmental Principles 2. b) (vi). The Protocol does not define 'historic values', but there is no reason to suggest that that an 'historic value' must be a listed site to be subject to this principle. Accordingly, a major implication of the Protocol is a requirement to consider the affect on historic values of all activities contemplated in Antarctica

Annex 11 of the Protocol addresses waste disposal and waste management. Article 1 of the Annex specifies that past and present waste disposal sites shall be cleaned up by the generator of such wastes and the user of such sites. While this Article does not require the removal of designated historic sites and monuments, it does beg the question of how sites are assessed for nomination in the first place. An area of potential conflict has developed, over the recognition of archaeological deposit as cultural resource rather than rubbish, with the adoption of Annex III of the Madrid Protocol. The provisions for waste management and removal are a potential threat to the conservation of archaeological deposits in-situ.

A fifth annex, relating to area protection and management, which made specific provisions for historic sites and monuments, was adopted by the Treaty parties at the 16<sup>th</sup> Consultative Meeting (1991). Annex V established a new protected area system for Antarctica. It provided that, with few exceptions, all protected areas would be subject to a management plan. The former multiplicity of categories of protected areas was reduced to two, and significantly, if parties wished, historic values could now be given equal status to any other values. In the past heritage values could only be recognised by including them in the list of historic sites and monuments, and no special management provisions could be made for them. The requirement for management plans to be prepared was a significant development from the point of view of protecting the historic values of recognised historic sites. Annex V gave Treaty parties the capability to require permits for visits, particularly to vulnerable historic sites and monuments.

The annex does not impose an obligation to include listed historic sites and monuments in the protected area categories. In this case the sites simply remain listed with no requirement for a management plan. However, Annex V also introduced a new provision, Article 8 which prohibits the damage, removal or destruction of all listed sites, whether or not they are in one of the categories of protected area.

Although, damage to historic sites is prohibited, the definition of what constitutes 'damage' to an historic site was not addressed in the annex.

Another provision introduced by Annex V is the obligation on parties to identify, within a systematic framework sites or monuments of recognised historic value and to include

them in the series of Antarctic Specially Protected Areas (ASPAs). This is a provision which no ATCP has yet completed. No time limit is set on this requirement, and there is little guidance given on what constitutes the framework.

However, the 1995 Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting Resolution 8 and Resolution 5 (2001) did set out criteria for the identification of historic sites.

The Protocol did not set out to resolve heritage matters. However, the Protocol did impose an obligation that historic values be respected, and the Protocol's annexes must be taken into account in decisions relating to historic sites - in particular, the requirements of Annex I on environmental assessment. Annex V also provided substantial improvements in the way in which historic values can be managed, and imposed some significant additional obligations on Treaty parties.

### **Relic vs. Rubbish**

The potentially conflicting demands of conserving cultural resources (Annex V) and removing waste (Annex III) inherent in the Madrid Protocol have been identified within the context of Antarctic cultural resource management in an Australian, New Zealand, Norwegian, United Kingdom and American context. However, in most cases this identification has been inferred from actions undertaken by these Parties. It is evident that the area of concern is a developing issue with very little formal published discussion or debate yet available.

The IPHC "Heritage at Risk" reports to ICOMOS for 2001 & 2003 are one of the few articulated expressions of the issue, to appear in print, that were identified by the review.

A report of Working Group 1 Management of Historic Sites and Areas which is part of the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) sponsored group developing a management plan for Deception Island clearly acknowledges the current area of conflict for cultural resource management:

*5. The value of artefacts was discussed in their relation to the distinction between waste and garbage. The point was made that the value of waste lies in its record of many of the activities present at Whalers Bay. It was agreed that before artefacts are considered for clean up or removal, they should be inventoried and documented (including mapping) for their historical and cultural value. Also, waste whose risk to the environment or to human or wildlife safety outweighs its historical benefits (i.e. toxic waste) should be identified and disposed of properly. (Spletstoessr & Rossnes 2002).*

The working group comprises representatives from Argentina, Chile, Spain, UK, USA, as well as the tourist organisation IAATO and the Antarctic nature conservation organisation ASOC (IPHC 2002).

Norway has taken the lead on providing guidelines for the use of all Treaty Members to address the area of potential conflict between cultural resource conservation and waste removal. The Norwegians have taken a proactive role with regard to the issue of recognition of cultural resources with the submission of a resolution at the 2001 Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM) Resolution 5 - Guidelines *for handling of pre-1958 historic remains*. The draft resolution reads, in part, that “*Noting that increased activity in Antarctica has increased the pressure on historic and cultural sites and artefacts not protected by current measures, it is recommended that The Guidelines for handling of pre-1958 historic remains,....be used by Parties as a guidance in questions relating to protection of historic remains in Antarctica.*”

The Guidelines have taken a precautionary approach to ensuring that the adequate assessment and conservation of cultural resources in Antarctica takes place by:

- granting all pre-1958 historic artefacts/sites automatic protection, prior to assessment;
- providing that historic artefacts/sites should be disturbed as little as possible until they have been properly recorded and evaluated; and
- stipulating that the guidelines pertain to historic artefacts/sites for which the existence or present location has not been established.

### **Wilkes Case Study**

The history of the Australian Government Antarctic Division's (AGAD) management of Wilkes Station as a cultural heritage resource reflects the history of the engagement of the Antarctic Treaty System, and of the AGAD in particular, with the management of Antarctic heritage in general.

Wilkes station was established on the 29th of January 1957, as one of a group of six bases constructed in Antarctic by the United States of America, as part of the International Geophysical Year (IGY) program in Antarctica. It was taken over by Australia on 7 February 1959 and closed down in 1969. While, some work remains to be done on a comparative assessment of Wilkes with IGY stations built elsewhere in Antarctica, it would appear that Wilkes may be the most intact of all the IGY stations remaining in Antarctica.

The site consists of a central building complex partially buried in snow, consisting of accommodation, work areas, scientific laboratories, a generator building and a Chapel. To the west of the main complex lies the meteorological buildings, balloon release platform and associated hazardous chemicals used in the generation of hydrogen. On the ice free rocky ridges to the north and south are

the fuel bladder platforms, radome and the food and materials supply platforms. Immediately to the east are a number of radio antennae, remains of a geodesic dome, dog lines, four James way huts (part of the temporary construction camp, later used as stores) and the Jolly hut (transmitter building). The landing area lies to the south-east of the site and a large quantity of material, some still in its original packing crates, lies buried in the snow there. Two crosses on a nearby hill mark the graves of an Australian and American who died while stationed at Wilkes. The main rubbish dump is concentrated further east, approximately 0.5km from the main station. The main bulk of the estimated 7,000 oil and fuel drums, many hidden under snow, lie here. North-east of the Jolly hut, there is an explosive dump that now lies widely scattered after an unsuccessful attempt to detonate it

(Extract from listing, Register of the National Estate 1990)

Wilkes station is now almost permanently frozen in ice and is only occasionally revealed during a big thaw every four or five years. Many objects remain embedded in the ice, and visitors are often able to see the remains of the station through the ice, seemingly exactly as it was left.

At a very early stage in the history of the AGAD's management of the abandoned Wilkes station a number of themes emerge:

- a stated recognition that the site has some heritage value, and
- an identified need for a professional assessment of the site's heritage values,
- coupled with a lack of recognition or lack of acknowledgement that 'rubbish' may be a component of heritage value.

The AGAD was aware of a need to clean-up the abandoned Wilkes station. The issue was considered in late 1984 by the Division's Environment Committee which recommended a clean-up; limited restoration of the transmitter building and radome for use as a refuge and display centre; installation of a commemorative plaque; installation of a small display if possible; and allowing the remaining buildings to decay under the effect of the elements, apart from a "clean up the site from time to time" – ie windblown debris.

The proposal to 'clean up' the former Wilkes Base was brought to the attention of Ivar Nelsen, Regional Heritage Architect and Environmental Officer for the Department of Housing and Construction. Nelsen's subsequent minute on the subject clearly identifies Wilkes Base as "*an important historical and archaeological resource*" and points out that "*any works there should recognise the principles and procedures as outlined in the Australia ICOMOS 'Burra Charter' with which the Commonwealth and this Department has aligned itself. .... Article 23 states 'work on a place must be proceeded by professionally prepared studies of the physical, documentary and other evidence, and the existing fabric recorded before any disturbance of the place', and it is this aspect*

*which should be addressed prior to the proposed 'clean up' (Nelsen 1986). Nelsen also identifies, as a key issue, that "the subtle difference between 'rubbish' and 'artefact' must be clarified first'.*

Following on from the Nelsen minute, the matter was referred to the Antarctic Historic Sites and Monuments Advisory Committee (AHSMAC) for their recommendations. AHSMAC had been formed in mid 1986 to advise on conservation and management of Cape Denison Historic Site and conservation of all monuments and sites in the Australian Antarctic Territory (AAT). The Committee was appointed for a two year term and included representatives from the Australian Heritage Division, the Antarctic Division, Project Blizzard, National Museum of Australia, Canberra CAE and a heritage architect. The Committee's agenda included the development of a Statement of Cultural Significance for Mawson's Hut, Wilkes Station and documentation of Old Casey Station.

AHSMAC met on 13 February 1987 to consider, among other matters, a report from a member – Dr Michael Pearson of the Australian Heritage Commission (AHC), who visited Wilkes on 4 January 1987. Dr Pearson's report made various recommendations on the management of the Site, essentially recommending that appropriate documentation and survey of the site be undertaken and that only dangerous or environmentally unacceptable items be removed from the Site (Pearson 1987).

The matter of cleaning up Wilkes Station was further discussed by the AHSMAC on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1987. At the meeting it was decided that the existing policy on Wilkes should be merged with the recommendations from the report by Pearson, as *"Dr Pearson's recommendations are in keeping with the policy statement formulated by the Division's Environment Committee and agreed with the Bureau of Meteorology and the US Government in 1985, that statement has been left intact. Dr Pearson's recommendations have been added to provide more detailed information. The spirit of the policy suggests that where possible only dangerous or environmentally unacceptable items should be removed."* (AHSMAC 1987)

As a result of all these consultations a policy was developed in 1987, in conjunction with the Antarctic Historic Sites and Monuments Advisory Committee, which envisaged a limited cleanup (but not removal) of Wilkes buildings with basic restoration of one building to act as a refuge and house a historic display, leaving the remaining buildings to the elements and conducting a cleanup from time to time (Hay 1995 p.3).

Cleanup activity occurred in the 1987/88, 1990/91, 1992/93, and 1993/94 summers at a considerable cost with wastes removed including 110,000 litres of various fuels, 10m<sup>3</sup> of caustic soda, 4.5m<sup>3</sup> of ferrous silicate, various drums (eg lubricants and oils) and other wastes being returned to Australia. Additionally, about 350 gas cylinders were vented, and explosives and detonators destroyed *in situ* (Hay 1995 p. 3).

Some site survey work was undertaken at Wilkes in 1987. In 1989 field archaeologists from the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston, were contracted by the

AGAD to conduct a thorough documentary and photographic survey of Wilkes and the old Casey bases. This resulted in a report by Linda Clark and Elspeth Wishart entitled *Historical Documentation of Wilkes Station, Antarctica 1988/99*.

An Initial Environmental Evaluation (IEE) for the Wilkes Clean-Up Proposal 1990/91 was completed by the AGAD. The document does not include an evaluation of the proposed activities on the heritage values of the site, but does refer to the Division's policy on Wilkes (stated on 23/11/87).

1990/91 Limited Contaminated Sites identification and cleanup operations were undertaken by Australian Army engineers at Wilkes, including the identification of several sources of hazardous materials and several items being 'made safe' or returned to Australia for disposal.

### **AGAD response to Madrid Protocol requirements**

Recognition that fully meeting waste management obligations under the Protocol would require a sizeable commitment in expenditure and resources was acknowledged by the AGAD. The AGAD has always argued that "an escalation of waste removal and site rehabilitation effort is not a move by Australia to raise the standard for environmental stewardship in the Antarctic – instead it is a demonstration of Australia's commitment to achieving the standards established by the Protocol." However, an integrated waste management and site rehabilitation program was certainly seen as an opportunity to "show leadership in the Treaty System, .....and "demonstrate our credibility to bodies within the system including COMNAP, SCALOP, CEP in these critical years after the establishment of the CEP." (Yarnall, et al ud.)

Other motives/drivers for AGAD activity in this area include:

- some countries had indicated reluctance to commit resources to their environmental obligations. Australia could demonstrate leadership and influence within the Antarctic Treaty System by proceeding with clean-up; and
- other Antarctic Treaty nations were fully supportive of moves to clean up and if Australia did not act it could be perceived as one of the countries that was not fulfilling its obligations.

The entry into force of Annex V of the Madrid Protocol, and subsequent implementation by Australia and other Treaty Parties of domestic measures governing Designated Historic Sites, had the potential to prompt calls for greater action by the Division with respect to Antarctic historic sites and materials. The Protocol and the Act required Australia to proclaim the sites nominated by it and listed under the Agreed Measures as a Historic Site or Monument under the ATEP Act.



In 1990 the Australian Heritage Commission received a nomination for entry of Wilkes onto the Register of the National Estate, from a third party. If listed on the Register, the implications would be that any proposal which would have a significant impact on the site would need to be approved by the AHC.

The AHC referred the nomination to the relevant departmental Secretary, who in turn referred it to the AGAD for a response. The AGAD's response, in part, indicated that:

*".....You should note however that the buildings and many of the stores at the site remain the property of the United States. It would therefore be inappropriate to consider inclusion of the site in the Register of the National Estate without seeking the views of the US authorities. Because the US does not recognise Australian sovereignty in the Australian Antarctic Territory I would expect the US to have reservations about National Estate listing...."*

(Moncur 1991)

Wilkes station was listed as an 'indicative' place on the Register of the National Estate.

The legal status of an 'indicative' place is that "Data provided to or obtained by the Australian Heritage Council or the former Australian Heritage Commission has been entered into the database and the place is at some stage in the assessment process. A decision on whether the place should be entered in the Register has not been made." (AHC database website: <http://www.deh.gov.au/heritage/ahdb/legalstatus.html#rne> )

The statement of significance for Wilkes, which formed part of the nomination, described its historic value as:

Wilkes is one of the few Antarctic Stations to retain its integrity as a station built specifically for the International Geophysical Year (IGY). It was built by the United States of America and occupied at different times by both American and Australian expeditions and it is therefore possible to make direct comparisons between the building design, construction techniques and living facilities provided by the two countries. It was occupied for only ten years and still retains most of the equipment used there. It was the origin of the important Wilkes-Vostok traverses. Physical value the site remains virtually as it was when abandoned in 1969. The buildings and artefacts are still in their original context, although the condition of the buildings has deteriorated. The buildings reflect all periods of occupation. The physical remains, including those hidden under snow have considerable research potential in the information they can tell about the lifestyle of expeditioners who lived and worked at Wilkes.

(Extract from listing, Register of the National Estate 1990)

In August 1992 the AGAD conducted an “Antarctic Heritage Values Seminar”. The seminar was prompted, in part, by comments the Division had received from the AHC on draft management plans for Mawson and Davis stations.

The stated objectives and outcomes of the seminar were:

*Objective: To provide a forum in which heritage values and issues as they apply to the Australian Antarctic Territory (and Macquarie and Heard Islands) can be raised and discussed.*

*Outcomes: To develop a Divisional philosophy (or criteria) for the identification of heritage values within the Australian Antarctic Territory (and heritage values associated with ANARE operations on Macquarie and Heard Islands) with a view to formulate conservation plans for identified items.*

(AGAD 1992 preface)

One of the guests at the AGAD seminar, Dr Michael Pearson, of the AHC, gave an outline of the development of recent conservation philosophy and the work of the AHC. Dr Pearson concluded by calling on the AGAD to:

*“look critically at the heritage it has in its custody, at the resource available to it to actively or passively protect that heritage, and at the role it has to ensure the continued safe and effective operation of Australia’s Antarctic research programs, and balance these potentially conflicting demands based on the best information it can get. The first step is to adopt an approach to the identification and assessment of that heritage, and to implement it.”*

(Pearson 1992 p.7)

In 1993, in response to recommendations from the Antarctic Heritage Values Seminar, the AGAD developed interim heritage significance assessment guidelines – designed to quickly identify cultural heritage impacts of proposed activities and any need for a more detailed assessment.

A Preliminary Assessment of Environmental Impacts, under the Antarctic Treaty (Environment Protection) Act (ATEP) 1980, for the proposed Wilkes cleanup operation scheduled for the period 11 December 1993 to 14 January 1994 was prepared by the AGAD. The assessment of likely impact on the heritage value of the area was rated as nil, on the basis that *“The tasks will concentrate on the reduction of hazard, but will not disturb or remove any heritage item. Heritage values of fuel dumps, station layout etc. will be preserved in that it is not expected that many fuel drums, or any quantity of refuse from the tip sites, will be removed.....”* (Maggs 1993).

In 1994 a report by Hay recognised that a number of further cleanup options were possible, nearly all of which required a multi-year commitment. The Hay report considered that a 'no further action' option was unjustifiable 'as further cleanup activity can reasonably be expected to reduce the adverse environmental impacts currently occurring, with little if any adverse impacts arising from properly managed cleanup activity.' The report also states that:

*"Regardless of which course of cleanup action is chosen, the following aspects should be assessed:*

- *the heritage significance of the site, for Australia and the US, including agreement about how heritage values will be managed. Are they sufficient to warrant declaring part or all of Wilkes an historic site? .....*"  
(Hay 1995 p.4)

In February 1994 an overall philosophy for the management of Australian cultural heritage in the subantarctic and the AAT was completed. The paper included the identification of a number of tasks for implementation, subject to the availability of resources to undertake them, including:

- progressively nominate historic sites for Antarctic Specially Protected Area status and develop management plans for each area, including Wilkes as a priority site;
  - identify all sites or monuments of historic value within the AAT – there are a number of sites of historic value within the AAT which have no formal protection and have not yet been formally recognised as historic sites (eg Wilkes); and
  - development of a heritage and site management plan for Wilkes.
- (Hay 1994)

On 6<sup>th</sup> June 1997 the Minister received correspondence from Mr Alec Marr of the Wilderness Society (following a visit to the AAT in connection with his work on the Foresight Intrinsic Values Committee) in relation to the clean up of waste and enhanced management of cultural sites in the AAT. Marr opined that "At this point in time there seems to be a bit of a stalemate between the Heritage Commission and the Antarctic Division regarding the removal of non-heritage superseded buildings which could and should be removed from the Antarctic and Heard Island." Marr suggested that:

- *a decision that any buildings kept in Antarctica for cultural heritage reasons have a dedicated maintenance budget. Any buildings without a dedicated maintenance budget be removed to Australia either for storage or disposal, and that*

- *a joint Antarctic Division and Heritage Commission Committee be established to oversee the implementation of a program with a clear short timetable to remove all buildings which have little heritage value and implement a maintenance program for those which it is decided to keep on site in Antarctica.*

(Marr 1997)

At this stage, the AGAD was required to consult with the AHC before deciding to carry out any construction activity likely to affect either 'adversely' or 'significantly' any place listed on the Register of the National Estate.

By 1998 there had been ongoing discussion between the AHC and the AGAD regarding a variety of heritage issues within the AAT. In particular, given an extensive rebuilding program being undertaken by the AGAD, the AHC was 'concerned to ensure that the heritage values within the Antarctic and sub-Antarctic islands are identified and protected' and 'considered in any decisions about rebuilding or removal activities' The AHC suggested that 'any clean up or demolition of structures at Wilkes Station be delayed until the conservation plan is complete and there are clear guidelines on the best way to conserve any highly significant components.' (Babington 23/1/98). In responding to Marr's letter Babington refutes the suggestion of a stalemate on the clean up of "non-heritage" buildings and "fully supports the clean up of any non-heritage aspects of the stations". Babington also supports Marr's suggestion of a dedicated maintenance budget for buildings retained for cultural values but points out that "the absence of a maintenance budget, however, should not be automatic grounds for removal of such structures."

The exchange highlights some of the fundamental issues in the ongoing debate about the management of Antarctic heritage, including:

- the role of NGO's in applying pressure to the Government to clean up Antarctic sites, as required under Annex III of the Madrid Protocol,
- who decides what is heritage, and
- who pays for it.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> June 1998 the AHC and the AGAD met to discuss a range of Antarctic and sub-Antarctic heritage issues. The Commission advised at this meeting, and reiterated in subsequent correspondence, that:

*"a strategic plan for the future identification and management of both Antarctic and sub-Antarctic heritage places should be implemented as a matter of priority. Such a strategy would ensure that measures are taken to identify and conserve heritage places which are being destroyed by current ad hoc, site by site decision making."* and

*“Before any clean up at Atlas Cove or at Wilkes Station proceeds, a heritage study should be completed for these sites.”*

(Reville 1998)

In 1998 the Minister for the Antarctic (Senator McDonald) set the assessment of heritage and remediation of contaminated sites generated by past Australian National Antarctic Research Expeditions (ANARE) activity as a Government priority. As a result the AGAD initiated a program of progressively assessing the Antarctic and sub-Antarctic historic and cultural heritage resources associated with ANARE. The heritage assessments were to be undertaken in conjunction with studies into the environmental impacts of ANARE activities at these sites to provide a framework for future management of activities at the sites. Priority was given to assessing the abandoned Wilkes Station near Casey Station (Maggs 1999).

The Government instructed the AGAD to allocate \$90,000 to the clean up project at Wilkes in 1998-99, including additional survey work at Wilkes in 1999-2000.

The AGAD planned to coordinate heritage assessments of Wilkes, Macquarie and Heard in the 1999/2000 season, including the recruitment of a temporary heritage officer. The project was envisaged as a desk top exercise, with research into the history and documentation associated with the three bases, visits to the sites and an update of the inventory and information before completion of a report on the cultural significance and conservation policy options.

An archaeologist (Ms Elspeth Wishart) was contracted in December 1999 to undertake a site inventory, physical survey and fabric assessment, and truthing and updating of existing information at Wilkes Station. The assessment was to be “set in the context of the Guidelines for the Designation of Historic Sites and/or Monuments recommended by Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting 1995, and in accordance with the procedures laid down in the Burra Charter and Kerr’s Conservation Plan as well as the Commonwealth’s Draft Heritage Assessment Manual.

The AGAD commenced a thorough assessment of the Site including the nature and disposition of wastes, site contamination, and the environmental implications of the project. At the same time the AGAD commenced discussions with the Heritage Commission and with the USA – the original owners – to try to resolve the issues associated with the heritage aspects of Wilkes.

During the 1999/2000 season an environmental impact assessment for a proposed clean up project at Wilkes was undertaken. In order to prepare the conservation plan, site and feature identification and recording were carried out to ensure that the cultural heritage of the area was identified and assessed. In February 2000 mapping, recording and photography commenced, undertaken by Elspeth Wishart with field assistance from Bruce Hull. The results were provided in the form of site and feature locations. These

records provide an Appendix of recording sheets and photographs. In March 2001 this survey was followed up by Robert Vincent (AGAD).

In 2001 the AGAD's approach to the conservation of cultural heritage, as stated in the Director's preface to the Conservation Management Plan for Mawson's Huts Historic Site was that:

*“Conservation of cultural heritage is not currently a core function of the AAD and priority for the allocation of AAD resources must be to achieve the Government's goals for the (Australian Antarctic) Program. “*

(Dr Tony Press, Director AAD in Godden Mackay Logan 2001 p.iii)

In June 2002 the AHC advised the AGAD that it was in the process of upgrading places on the Register of the National Estate, and 'would like to complete an assessment of the Wilkes base'. (Reville 2002). The AGAD response to this letter reiterated that "ownership of Wilkes Station,...has not been resolved. Even though Australia will undertake remediation works at Wilkes, Australia maintains that the United States is the legal owner of the station." The AGAD also advised that "draft conservation management plans ...for Wilkes station are in preparation ..." (Press 2002)

By September 2002, the AGAD had a draft Cultural Heritage Management Plan for Wilkes Station well underway (Vincent 2002). This plan has not been completed or adopted by the AGAD, at this time (July 2007).

A step towards the systematic heritage assessment of sites in the Australian Antarctic Territory was taken in September 2003 when significant heritage legislation and amendments to the existing *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation* (EPBC) Act were passed by Parliament, introducing a new national heritage management system in Australia. The amendments to the EPBC Act placed specific requirements on Australian Government agencies that own or lease heritage places to assist the Minister for Environment and Heritage and the Australian Heritage Council to identify and assess the heritage values of these places. In particular, the EPBC Act requires that the Department of Environment and Water Resources (DEWR, formally the Department of Environment and Heritage) and the AGAD as a division of DEWR will:

- Develop heritage strategies,
- Produce a register of the heritage places under their control,
- Develop a management plan to manage these places consistent with the new Commonwealth Heritage Management Principles prescribed in regulations to the Act, and
- Ask the Minister for advice about taking an action, if the action has, will have, or is likely to have, a significant impact on a Commonwealth heritage place.

A key implication of the heritage amendments to the EPBC Act, for the AGAD, is that conservation of cultural heritage is now clearly a legislated responsibility and therefore a core function of the AGAD.

The DEWR have developed a Heritage Strategy in accordance with the requirements of the EPBC Act and commits to its heritage management responsibility by stating within its Corporate Plan that:

*“We take responsibility for the heritage properties in our control. The department is actively identifying and caring for Commonwealth heritage property in its control through the development and implementation of a departmental Heritage Strategy and best practice management plans for Commonwealth Heritage places.”*

(DEWR Corporate Plan 2005)

DEWR heritage management responsibilities are further reinforced in the Heritage Strategy:

*“As the department responsible for the administration of the heritage provisions of the EPBC Act, DEH recognises that it has a particular responsibility to set a leading example in protecting and conserving Commonwealth Heritage values and incorporating heritage obligations within the department’s overall corporate planning framework.”*

(DEWR Heritage Strategy 2005)

The commitment made in the department’s corporate plan (above) is further reflected in the AGAD’s *Strategic Directions*, and its Environmental Policy.

The implementation of the AGAD component of the DEWR Heritage Strategy, which is currently underway, requires:

1. A comprehensive assessment of all places owned or controlled by the AGAD against the Commonwealth Heritage criteria in order to identify Commonwealth Heritage values.
2. Revision and updating of the AGAD Heritage Register to include information from the assessment process.
3. Completion of an assessment report outlining the identification and assessment process.
4. Completion of management plans for existing listed Commonwealth Heritage places, and

5. Completion of management plans for places which are listed as a result of the assessment process.

## **AGAD CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT POLICIES**

A number of themes have been identified in tracing the history of cultural heritage management within the AGAD, being:

1. The importance of legislation as a key driver in initiating action by the AGAD (eg. a recognition that a site might have heritage values, surveys, heritage assessments, conservation management plans, the contracting of qualified consultants).
2. An abiding concern with the potential costs and ongoing commitment, to the organisation (or the taxpayer), of undertaking cultural heritage management in the Antarctic.
3. A conflict of values between 'heritage' and the vision of "the pristine wilderness of Antarctica", exacerbated by the requirements of Annex 3 of the Madrid Protocol concerning waste removal – and the sub-issue of definition 'rubbish' verses 'artefact' or 'archaeological deposit'.
4. The importance of outside pressures, from other government agencies or proactive individuals or groups, in identifying the heritage values of sites and acting as drivers to pressure the AGAD into action.

## **FUTURE OF THE SITE?**

The heritage values of the Wilkes station currently have no legislative protection under either Australian or international law.

The AGAD's policy on the management of Wilkes station was formulated in the 1980's by the Antarctic Historic Sites and Monuments Advisory Committee and negotiations with the US. However, some recommendations of the policy were never implemented. In the meantime, the AGAD has become committed to progressing a long term plan for the clean up of the Site.

In any discussion about the future management of the Site, a distinction has been made in the past between Wilkes in general and the station buildings in particular, because ownership of the buildings (and hence responsibility) may prove to be different from the 'waste' associated with station occupation. The question of station ownership and hence responsibility arises because Wilkes was never formally transferred from the US to Australia, whereas the responsibility for the removal of 'waste' lies with the generator of



such 'waste'. The bulk of the 'waste' around the station and in the tip is therefore predominantly but not entirely, the responsibility of Australia.

In 2002 the AGAD's position was that:

*"...ownership of Wilkes Station (Database Number 016100), a former United States of America facility, has not been resolved. Even though Australia will undertake remediation works at Wilkes, Australia maintains that the United States is the legal owner of the station."*

(Press 2002)

However, despite that stated position, the same letter goes on to state that:

*"Draft conservation management plans .... for Wilkes station are in preparation and copies will be forwarded when they are completed."*

implying the acceptance of some level of cultural heritage management responsibility.

A heritage survey and documentation of the Site, as well as the development of a conservation plan, should now be completed and adopted before any further significant removal of material occurs.

While Australia may not 'own' the Site, it could be argued that the AGAD, as the relevant Commonwealth government agency, certainly 'controls' activity at the Site and therefore has a responsibility under the EPBC Act and the DEH Heritage Strategy to undertake an assessment of the Commonwealth Heritage values of the Site.

It could also be argued that, as the owner of the Station, the US should consider nomination, either independently or jointly with Australia, of Wilkes Station as an Historic Site under the Antarctic Treaty, and designation as an Antarctic Specially Protected Area (ASPA) under the provisions of the Madrid Protocol. The preparation of a management plan for such an ASPA would provide a level of international legal protection and recognition for the cultural heritage values of the Site and allow for the integration of the conservation of the Site's cultural heritage significance with the Australian clean up programme.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

While, some work remains to be done on a comparative assessment of Wilkes with IGY stations built elsewhere in Antarctica, it would appear that Wilkes may be the most intact of all the IGY stations remaining in Antarctica. As such the Site would have international cultural heritage significance.

The future management of Wilkes would appear to rest on a resolution of the question of who owns or is in control of the Site, and therefore who is responsible for the assessment and conservation of any cultural heritage values which the Site may possess, and the development of management strategies and procedures for the Site's protection. These steps are necessary to ensure prevention of the continued deterioration and erosion of the heritage values of the Site through a combination of natural and human actions.

A number of the problems, which Warren (1989) identified in her original review of the early history of the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties approach to the designation and management of historic resources, remain unresolved. There are significant omissions in the Madrid Protocol and annexes, relating to heritage management, in particular the lack of definition for 'historic values' or what constitutes a 'site' and the lack of a systematic framework for the assessment of sites; which have hampered progress on heritage management in Antarctica. The extent, to which these problems have been addressed in the Australian Antarctic Territory by the significant heritage legislation and amendments to the existing *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation* (EPBC) Act passed in 2003, remains to be assessed.

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