

Practice Notes

for Aboriginal Heritage Officers

Edition 1, April 2009

Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania (AHT) is committed to a continuing and increasing high standard of consultancy work. From time to time AHT will issue Practice Notes for Aboriginal Heritage Officers. These Notes will address specific issues as they arise. They will provide additional guidance to consultants regarding the standards expected for work on Aboriginal heritage in Tasmania. These Notes should be read in conjunction with the Consultancy Brief and the Aboriginal Heritage Investigation Report Proforma.

Note AHO 09.1 TASI Searches

TASI searches must be completed prior to undertaking surveys. This must include coming in to AHT and reviewing all previous survey reports for the area as well as TASI site record files. You will need to allow up to 10 working days to have TASI searches completed (this can not be fast tracked) – larger areas may take longer. Similarly, AHT need at least 5 working days notice to arrange your viewing of reports and files. Appointments need to be made and kept. Files must not leave AHT premises and copyright laws allow only 10% to be photocopied. You may take as many notes as you require.

Note AHO 09.2 TASI Access Forms

All TASI search requests must be emailed to aboriginal@heritage.tas.gov.au (this email can only be checked by Aboriginal Heritage Advisors) or posted to Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania Operations, GPO 771 Hobart Tasmania 7000, using the current TASI Access Form. This method of requesting access will enable the first available Advisor to process your request, thereby alleviating delays caused by leave, field work and individual work loads.

TASI information will, under no circumstances, be given over the phone. AHT require TASI Access Forms to be completed and lodged, with appropriate maps and/or grid references and a clear outline of the purpose of the search (preferably with a copy of your consultancy brief).

When proponents (e.g. Councils) request a TASI search regarding a particular development AHT complete the search and provide a recommendation as to whether an on ground investigation is required. AHT do not provide them with specific site location information. Therefore, whenever you are engaged as a consultant you will need to complete a full TASI

search that will give you the specific background information (such as the type and location of sites within and close to the project area) required as part of the research component of your investigation.

Note AHO 09.3 Reporting Aboriginal Heritage Sites

It is a requirement under the Aboriginal Relics Act 1975, that Aboriginal heritage sites in Tasmania are reported to the Director of National Parks and Wildlife as soon as practicable. This means that TASI Site Recording Forms must be completed and forwarded to AHT in a timely manner. If you identify a potentially significant or complex site, phone AHT as soon as possible and forward Site Recording Forms when practical.

Do not leave Site Recording Forms with the proponent. It is your responsibility to forward these to AHT.

Note AHO 09.4 TASI Numbers

All figures, tables and references to sites recorded during the project/survey must show TASI numbers, not field designations. TASI numbers will be allocated by AHT and will, under no circumstances, be given out until site recording forms are completed accurately and lodged with AHT. It may take up to 5 working days for TASI numbers to be allocated.

Site Recording Forms that are not completed correctly will not be allocated TASI numbers and will be returned for clarification.

Note AHO 09.5 Mud Maps or Photographs

TASI Site Recording Forms must include mud maps and/or photographs – these are really important for relocating sites. Mud maps of site locations should be hand drawn and place the site in relation to geographical features that are unlikely to move in the next few decades – streams, roads, bridges and to a lesser extent fences and gates. Do not use a photocopied 1:25,000 map for your mud map. The scale is too small to be of use at a local level.

Photographs may be used if mud maps are not possible, however it must be remembered that the intention of a photograph is to describe the landscape/area within which the site is located. Site boundaries must be indicated with appropriate markers/scales (a person, yellow arrows or so on). All images must be labelled correctly.

Do not move artefacts (i.e. group them together) for photos, this creates a false landscape.

Note AHO 09.6 TASI Site Updating or Upgrading

When completing Site Recording Forms, double check TASI information to ensure you are not re-recording a site when you should simply be upgrading (e.g. from an isolated artefact to an artefact scatter) or updating site information.

Note AHO 09.7 GPS

Site locations should be defined by GPS.

Eastings and northings should be recorded as six and seven figure numbers respectively and must always be given on GDA 94. Grid references and the datum used should be clearly defined on TASI Site Recording Forms and in your report.

The “tracking” function on your GPS must be used to identify the transects walked. These GPS “tracks” together with site locations must be presented as files on a CD and incorporated in a map in the final report.

The datum of your GPS should be checked regularly – there are numerous occurrences of incorrect datum being used and quoted.

Note AHO 09.8 Aboriginal Heritage Investigation Reports

Copies of investigation reports need to be forwarded to AHT at the same time they are presented to the proponent. AHT rely on information from your reports to make accurate and timely desk-top decisions and recommendations about the requirement of further investigation or the future management of sites.

Regardless of whether any sites are identified during your investigation, reports must still be completed and a copy logged with AHT. The fact that nothing has been found is still important information.

Note AHO 09.9 The Aboriginal Relics Act 1975

Misinterpreting and misquoting the Aboriginal Relics Act 1975 (the Act) is misleading. It is not acceptable, for example, to make statements such as; “The provisions of the Aboriginal Relics Act 1975 requires you to have a survey...???”

When quoting the Act you must do so word for word. If you are unsure about the interpretation of the Act contact AHT for advice.

Note AHO 09.10 Terminology

Do not misuse the term “archaeological”. AHOs conduct Aboriginal heritage assessment from a Community perspective. Archaeologists conduct Aboriginal heritage assessment from a scientific perspective. To avoid confusion between the two roles, the acceptable terminology for an assessment by an AHO is “Aboriginal heritage investigation” as opposed to an “archaeological assessment”.

Note AHO 09.11 AHO Roles

In most cases, the purpose of conducting an Aboriginal heritage investigation is to:

- locate indicators of (known or previously unrecorded) Aboriginal heritage within a specific project area
- help protect Aboriginal heritage by offering mitigation advice
- provide recommendations regarding the need for further investigation
- inform the proponent as to their obligations under the Act.

Therefore the most important part of a survey report is to clearly state:

- what the proposed project is
- if and how the project will impact any Aboriginal heritage
- whether there are any alternatives to impacting Aboriginal heritage or options for mitigating damage.

This information is then used by AHT to:

- keep an accurate record of Aboriginal heritage sites
- make desk-top decisions about the requirement of further investigations, the requirement for a permit under the Act and/or the future management of sites
- ensure that the proponent is complying with the Act
- make decisions and recommendations to the Minister regarding permit applications.

It is the role of AHOs to determine whether Aboriginal heritage will be impacted by the proponents proposed project/activities. AHT need accurate reports with adequate information to be able to make decisions and provide further advice to proponents regarding legislative requirements.

Note AHO 09.12 Working with an Archaeologist

It is best practice for any archaeologist working on Aboriginal heritage to be accompanied by an Aboriginal community representative. When you are working with an archaeologist it is your role to:

- assist the archaeologist in their field survey
- conduct Community consultation
- provide an Aboriginal Community perspective for inclusion in the archaeologist's final report.

Note AHO 09.13 Record Keeping

For record keeping purposes we request that all survey reports are sent to AHT in colour hard copy as well as electronically (either emailed to aboriginal@heritage.tas.gov.au or sent on a CD to Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania Operations, GPO Box 771, Hobart, Tasmania 7001).

Note AHO 09.14 Consultation

Many AHOs make statements in their survey reports about consulting with AHT as part of their service to clients. The only time it is acceptable to include this in your report is if you have:

- arranged a formal meeting with staff from AHT,

resulting in formal written comment stating AHT opinion
OR

- presented your draft report for comment, resulting in formal written comment stating AHT opinion.

Any comment provided from AHT must be represented in full and must not be taken out of context.

Under no circumstances does a phone call, brief discussion or TASI search constitute adequate consultation with AHT. If you choose not to consult with AHT prior to final reports being completed, do not include blanket statements (which are ambiguous and misleading) such as "the writer has consulted with TALSC, AHT and any other relevant Aboriginal Organisations".

Similarly if you state that you have consulted with relevant Aboriginal organisations you must state exactly who was consulted and when, and provide evidence of this – including a summary of the outcome of this consultation.

If you have not undertaken consultation as outlined above, you must clearly state that you have not discussed the issues with AHT and that the proponent must do so directly.

Note AHO 09.15 Research

Researching your own previous reports is acceptable but should not be the only research you conduct. It is important to be aware that there may be other reports of the same or nearby areas that you should review prior to undertaking your field investigation.

Note AHO 09.16 Referencing

It is not appropriate to simply make statements about the history of an area and then qualify it with "...this has been noted in a variety of current and historical media records" without referencing which records etc. All research must be referenced and all media reviewed must be included in a reference list at the end of your report.

Note AHO 09.17 Quality

Remember that the length of a survey report does not reflect quality – AHT only need facts.

Note AHO 09.18 Methodology

In order for AHT to make accurate decisions, your report needs to include a clear description of your survey methodologies, including the reasons behind your chosen method. Simply stating that the survey was "...conducted by walking the area and conducting sub-soil testing" is not adequate.

Note AHO 09.19 Transects

You must achieve adequate survey coverage by walking transects of sufficient density. Do not over-estimate your capacity of observance. For example, figures as high as 25 metres wide for single transects have been quoted. Most observers are only capable of seeing artefacts 2-3 metres either side of them in good visibility. The figure reduces in poor visibility.

Note AHO 09.20 Maps

All survey reports must include an accurate map of the survey area.

Note AHO 09.21 Sub-soil Investigations

Sub-soil investigations must not be undertaken during initial investigations. Any requirement to dig must be discussed with AHT.

Note AHO 09.22 Recommendations by Aboriginal Heritage Officers

It is important to remember that recommendations made by AHOs are not legally binding under the Act. As a private consultant you have no authority to grant permission for a project to proceed on the basis of conditions/recommendations developed and imposed by yourself.

Recommendations are to inform the proponent of their responsibility under the Act and to protect Aboriginal heritage through offering mitigation options/advice.

All recommendations must be justified.

Note AHO 09.23 Monitoring

Recommendations for monitoring will not be accepted unless clearly justified.

Note AHO 09.24 Complex Issues

It is not acceptable to 'sit on the fence' and make no recommendations or to simply 'pass the buck' by directing your client to AHT for recommendations. You are employed to give your opinion. If the issue is complex and you are having difficulty coming up with reasonable recommendations this is when you need to undertake appropriate consultation with AHT (see Note AHO 09.14).

Note AHO 09.25 Recommendation Templates

When making recommendations (see Aboriginal Heritage Investigation Report template), to avoid confusion, please state the following;

"The above/below recommendations represent the opinion of the writer only. To ensure compliance with the Aboriginal Relics Act 1975, Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania must be contacted prior to any works proceeding."

If no sites are to be impacted there are no immediate issues but you should state;

"If at any time you suspect Aboriginal heritage you must cease works immediately and inform Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania (ph 6233 6613) of the discovery. AHT will advise of the necessary arrangements for the further assessment of the discovery. Based on the findings of the assessment, appropriate management recommendations will be developed for the cultural heritage find"

Note AHO 09.26 Unanticipated Discoveries

As a commercial operator it is not appropriate for you to list yourself as the first point of contact if unanticipated discoveries of Aboriginal heritage are made during development (e.g. during ground disturbing works). AHT must be the first point of contact so that the Minister can be informed and appropriate action can be taken.

Note AHO 09.27 Report Accuracy

You (or someone else) must proof read your reports. If investigation reports are not professionally presented, with correct spelling and grammar, the credibility of the report is jeopardised.

Note AHO 09.28 Images

All images must be relevant, include an appropriate measuring scale and be labelled properly. It is not acceptable to re-use images from previous surveys, particularly if they are irrelevant to the report. Images are to be included in investigation reports as an appendix.

Note AHO 09.29 Consultancy Briefs

It is in your best interest to have a written brief from the proponent outlining the specifics of the project, the survey area and what they expect from you (see the Consultancy Brief template document).

Consultancy Briefs should be included as an appendix to your report.

Note AHO 09.30 Required Knowledge

Aboriginal heritage investigations should not be undertaken unless you have appropriate/accurate maps of the survey area and a clear understanding of the project. For example, if you are surveying for a farm dam it is imperative that you understand how the dam is going to be constructed and are aware of all associated works/impacts (such as spillways, access roads, offsite construction impacts, borrow pits, pipelines, pumping stations, etc). If you do not understand these issues then you can not accurately provide mitigation advice.

Note AHO 09.31 Standards

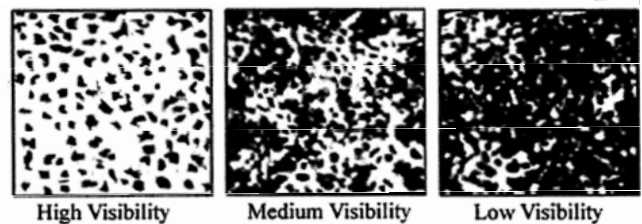
Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania will not accept reports that do not meet the set standards from any Consultant in the future. Inadequate investigation reports will be sent back to the project proponent for clarification with consultants.

Note AHO 09.32 Visibility Estimations

Visibility estimations could be a useful gauge of survey coverage. However, if visibility estimations are not undertaken with any rigour or standardised manner there is great inter-observer variability. It is impossible for observers to estimate in a replicable manner and without careful measurement more than five classes of visibility; full, high, medium, low and no visibility.

Consultants are required, therefore, to employ the following visibility guide in order to estimate visibility:

Ground Visibility Guide



Low = 25%; Medium = 50%; High = 75%. Two additional designations of "Full" visibility = 100% and "None" = 0% should be used.