

A Vision for Leading Practice in Cultural Heritage – Dhawura Ngilan: A Framework Shaped by Indigenous Australians and its Role in Business

Dhawura Ngilan in Cultural Heritage

Dhawura Ngilan sets a forward-looking vision for how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Heritage is recognised, protected, and engaged with by future generations. Developed through extensive First Nations consultation and endorsed by the Heritage Chairs of Australia and New Zealand, Dhawura Ngilan—like the Burra Charter—offers a non-legislated but authoritative framework for best practice.

Its release invites industry, heritage professionals and all Australians to critically reflect on current practices and align more closely with culturally informed standards. This is especially relevant for sectors with significant and lasting impacts on Country, such as mining and resource extraction. While physical site management and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) are often prioritised across Australia, Dhawura Ngilan also calls for deeper engagement with principles like Truth Telling, Cultural Authority, and Community-led decision-making—areas that remain under-addressed in many industry contexts.



Kokatha Country – People and Knowledge



Antakirinja Matu-Yankunytajara (AMY) Country - Cultural Heritage Recording



The Role of Cultural Heritage Professionals in Driving Dhawura Ngilan

As Cultural Heritage professionals we hold a unique and essential role in driving Dhawura Ngilan principles in our practices. One of the simplest ways to achieve this, particularly for embedded industry professionals, is to seek to ensure cultural heritage is meaningfully considered and involved throughout all project phases – from inception to execution. The provision of Cultural Heritage advice and approvals is a key step that provides an opportunity to amplify the voice of Community, as Heritage practitioners are frequently the mouthpiece through which Aboriginal knowledge is translated into action. The onus therefore rests upon us to seek to ensure that Aboriginal people and Communities are part of the journey and that the advice we provide aligns with businesses' obligations and Community expectations. Our aim is to foster continuous and open dialogue to enable co-design, incorporation of new information, and ongoing management of Cultural Heritage in line with Community expectation. Heritage professionals undertaking Cultural Heritage work should feel empowered to have access to and obtain an understanding of the Reconciliation Action Plans or Dhawura Ngilan targets within the company they are working with.

Practical Steps Cultural Heritage Professional can take to drive Dhawura Ngilan?

-  **Providing Expertise:** Offer guidance matters and develop strategies for Cultural Heritage management.
-  **Facilitating First Nations Led Projects:** Support the creation and implementation of projects that are guided by First Nations Peoples.
-  **Promote Early Cultural Heritage Engagement:** Incorporate Cultural Heritage considerations throughout project lifespans and facilitate processes for obtaining FPIC.
-  **Building Partnerships:** Act as a conduit to foster respectful and effective partnerships between First Nations Communities and businesses.
-  **Translating Dhawura Ngilan Principles:** Assist to develop practical actions and policies to encourage adoption by the private sector.
-  **Facilitate Inclusive Definitions of Heritage:** By conducting cultural mapping and community consultations, consultants can help define Cultural Heritage in ways that honour living connections between Indigenous Peoples and their lands.
-  **Enhance Compliance:** Assist in the development of monitoring plans and training programs to empower Indigenous Communities with tools for oversight of Cultural Heritage management.
-  **Discerning and Empowered Engagement:** Assist in the development of monitoring plans and training programs to empower Indigenous Communities with tools for oversight of Cultural Heritage management.

Implementing Dhawura Ngilan Principles in Business

Implementing the Dhawura Ngilan principles requires a whole-of-organisation approach underpinned by strong governance and leadership. When leaders actively support Cultural Heritage and elevate Community voices, a culture of care naturally emerges and becomes embedded in business practices.



Key Enablers:

- Top-down policy frameworks that prioritise Cultural Heritage.
- Leadership advocacy and belief in the importance of Community engagement.
- Training and lived experiences that normalise Cultural Heritage values.
- Shared accountability across all levels of the organisation.
- Culture that values Indigenous Cultural Heritage as Australian Cultural Heritage.



Strategic Tools:

- Reconciliation Action Plans: These provide a structured mechanism to integrate Dhawura Ngilan principles into business goals, set measurable targets, and extend impact beyond Cultural Heritage into broader social value programs.
- Mechanisms: to embed Dhawura Ngilan principles into management plans and heritage reports seeking to ensure that Aboriginal voices and Community expectations are central to project planning, consent processes, and ongoing management.



Best Practice Considerations:

- Clearly define tangible, intangible, and environmental Cultural Heritage values.
- Cultural Heritage principles inform project design and closure, not just execution.
- Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is satisfied from a Cultural Heritage standpoint as well as for the project.
- Establish a framework for transparent and accountable decision-making.
- Incorporate Cultural Heritage as Land Assets.

Jessica Olofsson, Jade Pervan, Jacob Vis, Robin Twaddle, Simon Trinder
 Cultural Heritage Governance, Assurance and Advocacy, BHP Group Ltd.
 Corresponding Authors jessica.olofsson@bhp.com, jade.pervan@bhp.com

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Sunrise on Ngadju Country – Credit: Andrew Pearson

We acknowledge the diverse Indigenous cultures of this National Community and their enduring connection to the land, seas and sky in which we live and work. We pay respect to the invaluable and ongoing contribution of First Nations Peoples in Cultural Heritage management practice.

The artwork depicted throughout this document was a commissioned piece designed by Pat Caruso of We Create Print Deliver. Pat is an Eastern Arrernte man who says of the artwork: "Pulling back on the piece of artwork, the detail in the background represents the Australian landscape, rich in Culture and connection. The lines from the various circles represent the songlines/storylines of our ancient civilisation which holds significance in Sovereignty and identity today. These songlines have existed before us, and will out live us, they connect people from one side of the continent to other, unifying Community and practice." BHP acknowledges that Pat owns own all intellectual property (IP) rights, including copyright and moral rights to this work. Pat has consented for his artwork to be displayed at professional industry events such as Australian Archaeological Association annual conference.

