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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
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Re: Recent trends in and preparedness for extreme weather events

To the Committee Secretary

On behalf of the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material (AICCM) Victoria Division, I would like to make a submission to the Senate Inquiry into 'Recent trends in and preparedness for extreme weather events'. Weather conditions have a profound impact on the long-term preservation of cultural and heritage materials. As weather events become more extreme, the impacts become more devastating on cultural collections.

Cultural materials are extremely important to communities - artefacts embody memory and cultural knowledge. Local, state and national institutions as well as private collections serve as repositories of these cumulative memories and provide a tangible connection to the past. AICCM is committed to ensuring that these collections are prepared to negotiate an increase in extreme weather events and support those affected after such an event.

1. Our organisation

The AICCM is the professional organisation for conservators in Australia. Our members specialise in areas as diverse as Antarctic heritage, photographs, digital media and contemporary media and public sculpture. Conservators also specialise in collection management, preventive conservation and environmental analysis. Conservation is about the long-term preservation of cultural heritage. Conservation aims to protect items from the adverse effects of climate and chemical deterioration, and to safeguard our heritage not only for ourselves but for future generations.

AICCM have been involved with extreme weather condition activities in the past, through both preventive and remedial conservation efforts.

Preventive measures undertaken include:

- Disaster Preparedness Planning
- Collections risk management
- Educational and outreach programs

Remedial measures undertaken include:

- Disaster clean-up of private, regional and state collections

- Heritage Emergency Action Response Team (HEART) – AICCM’s national response network developed following 2009 with bushfires in Victoria and the Queensland floods

2. The AICCM’s response to an extreme weather event

The preparedness of the conservation sector for extreme weather events and climate trends has increased since the 2009 Victorian bushfires. The AICCM Victorian Division Committee developed and implemented a response to the Victorian bushfires of 2009 with the support of conservators, major Victorian arts, heritage, archiving and collecting institutions, the National Australian Archives and Blue Shield Australia (AICCM 2009).

These resources are now available for future responses. Contributions made to the disaster included:

- Press Release ‘Fire damaged memorabilia – advice for bushfire victims’ (CCA & AICCM 2009).
- Relevant documents concerning salvage of fire and water damaged cultural heritage items (there were floods occurring at the same time in Queensland) onto the AICCM website.
- Visits to recovery centres, community briefing and planning meetings, conservation/disaster clinics. Distribution of fliers, storage materials and AICCM stickers to so that people had contact information for conservation advice with their possessions to follow up when they were ready (Allem 2012).
- ‘After a fire’ brochure (Söderlund 2009).

3. Preparing the industry for future extreme weather events

As part of future AICCM activities, HEART will assist local community and regional collections with preventive and remedial activities. In addition to the projects previously outlined, the AICCM plans to:

- Co-ordinate volunteers to salvage public collections including collection retrieval, remedial conservation, and cataloguing.
- Host Conservation Clinics to educate the public in how to handle and care for salvaged items. Many people discard valuable possessions that can be recovered.
- Distribute storage materials to safely house recovered treasures until owners are ready to consider further treatment.

The resources needed by AICCM to prevent and respond to extreme weather events include:

- Access to a linked network of government, commercial and community support groups e.g. Council Cultural Officers in preparation months and material clean-up organisations such as Grocon after the event.
- The provision of space and financial support to undertake conservation work, workshops, information sessions, clinics in the event of such disasters.

Similar key projects and programs run internationally include the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC) and their response to Hurricane Sandy in the USA. For instance a Cultural Recovery Center (CRC) has been set up in Brooklyn, NY to provide guidance and assistance in the cleaning and stabilisation of art and cultural materials (AIC 2012).

Thank you for your consideration of this submission.

Yours sincerely,

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