

FACT SHEET

Reporting Damage to Sacred Sites



How are sacred sites in the NT protected?

All sacred sites in the Northern Territory are protected by the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act*. The Act defines sacred sites to mean any site of significance according to Aboriginal tradition, and can include places like art sites, significant rock formations, sacred trees, ceremony grounds, billabongs and mountains. Some sacred sites may be places where only the right Aboriginal women or men can enter, while others might be places that anyone can go and visit. The places do not have to be dangerous or restricted places only — all sacred sites are protected under the Act.

The Act has a number of protections for sites, including protecting them from unauthorised entry and damage, and gives the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (AAPA) the power to prosecute people or organisations that damage a sacred site. For more information on protecting sacred sites, download the *Protecting Sacred Sites in the NT Fact Sheet* from our website at www.aapant.org.au.

What does the AAPA do to help prevent site damage?

The AAPA works with custodians of sacred sites to prevent damage to them through two main procedures.

The first of these procedures is the issuing of **Authority Certificates**. When someone wants to undertake any kind of work on land or sea anywhere in the Territory, they should seek an Authority Certificate. Once an application is made to the AAPA, a researcher is sent to talk to the Aboriginal people responsible for that area about any sacred sites that would need to be protected when the work takes place. All of the sacred sites where the work must be restricted in some way are identified during the research, and then a letter and a map are given to the applicant that shows them how they can proceed with their works while protecting any sacred sites in the area.

For more information on Authority Certificates, download the *Authority Certificates Fact Sheet* from our website at www.aapant.org.au.

The second procedure that protects sacred sites is the **registration** of the sites. The Aboriginal people responsible for a site can request that the site be placed on the **Register of Sacred Sites**, which means that some basic information about the site will be put in a public register,



so that people can find out that there is a site that needs to be protected. A sign can also be erected close to the sacred site telling people to keep out of the site area, and other protective measures like fencing can be used when necessary.

For more information on the Register of Sacred Sites, download the **Request for Information Fact Sheet** from our website at www.aapant.org.au.

What should I do if I am concerned about damage to a sacred site?

If at any time you have concerns that a sacred site has been damaged, or is under threat of being damaged, you should notify the AAPA as soon as possible at the contacts shown below. The more information you can provide to us, the better we will be able to quickly investigate the situation. Some kinds of information that will help us to investigate the site damage include:

- The name of the site.
- The location of the site.
- What kind of damage has occurred.
- Who discovered the damage.
- Who has caused the damage.
- If anyone has witnessed the damage being caused.
- Whether any actions were taken to try to stop the damage being caused, and by whom.
- Whether the site is still under threat from further damage.

The AAPA will send a researcher to investigate the damage as soon as possible, and will act as quickly as possible to prevent further damage from occurring.

