

Historical Archaeology and Fast Track



Archaeological sites in Parramatta and Mittagong. Image credit: Heritage NSW.

This information sheet supports applicants to assess whether proposed works would have a minor impact on archaeology ('relics') under the Heritage Act 1977 (the Act) and decide when such activities/work may be suitable for a section 60 (s60) fast track application under the Act.

Standard Exemptions do not cover works that impact relics

The Heritage Council of NSW is committed to conserving archaeology, particularly when it is an identified State significant value within a State Heritage Register (SHR) listed item. The best form of conservation for below-ground archaeology may be to leave it undisturbed, so an option not to excavate should always be considered.

Standard Exemptions apply to all SHR items and items subject to an Interim Heritage Order (IHO) and aim to make it easier for owners of heritage items to maintain their property. Standard Exemption 8: Excavation enables some excavation or ground disturbance activities without notification but does not allow the disturbance or removal of historical archaeological 'relics'.

Refer to the [Standard Exemptions page](#) for more information. your activity/ work may discover, disturb or remove relics and is not covered by an exemption, you must apply and obtain heritage approval before commencing work.

This information should be read along with Heritage NSW [s60 fast track pathway guidance](#).

Some archaeological works can be fast tracked

Minor works that may affect archaeology ('relics' under the Act) may be eligible for fast track approval. Excavation, like archaeological test excavations, trenching for services, and archaeological monitoring, may be eligible.

Disturbance, excavation or minor impact to archaeological relics may be possible through the fast track pathway if:

- the affected archaeology is not directly related to the heritage significance of the item or the reasons why a place is listed in the SHR Statement of Significance
- the archaeology is not of State heritage significance
- works would have no more than a minor impact on the heritage significance of the item

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- works would not compromise the structural integrity of any heritage structure or significant landscape elements.

If you are unsure if the fast track pathway is right for your work, or need clarification of the application requirements, [you can request pre-lodgement comments](#).

Supporting Information will be required for works involving excavation or archaeology

For activities/ works involving excavation or archaeology, you need:

- An Archaeological Assessment, archaeological zoning plan, archaeological management plan, statement or letter assessing the archaeology (including the nature and degree of impact the proposed activities/works may have, and how it relates to cumulative impact on the archaeological resource of the place). Refer to Heritage NSW [website](#) for more information.
- An Archaeological Research Design and Excavation Methodology or Archaeological Work Method Statement outlining the proposed methodology for the excavation or archaeological work (this may include test excavation and/or monitoring). This needs to include:
 - consideration of other legislative requirements, such as the requirements of Section 146 of the Act to notify the Heritage Council if relics are discovered,
 - other appropriate contingencies for instances where a greater amount of intact archaeology and ‘relics’ is encountered, or the significance of the archaeology is reconsidered,
 - a commitment and timeframe for post excavation works including artefact cataloguing and post-excavation analysis,
 - a commitment for the submission of a final report to the Heritage Council which describes the project and all outcomes.
- Nomination of a suitably qualified Excavation Director for the project who must:
 - prepare and support the proposed archaeological methodology for the application
 - sign the application form in the nomination section.

Refer to the [Criteria for the Assessment of Excavation Directors](#) to ensure you nominate a suitably qualified person.



Archaeological sites in Port Macquarie. Image credit: Heritage NSW

Impacts to relics must be clearly demonstrated

The information presented in your application needs to demonstrate the excavation or disturbance would have no more than a minor impact on the SHR listed values of the place. This will need to consider:

- the archaeological research potential of the item or its archaeology, and
- whether the archaeology identified is a State significant value for the item.

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It would also need to demonstrate that:

- the scale or nature of the proposed excavation would not affect significant areas, relics and deposits related to the SHR values of the item and/or known archaeological sites. For example, the excavation would only affect peripheral areas of a significant archaeological site or would occur in areas known to have been previously disturbed and where archaeology has already been removed.
- proposed testing to verify the existence of relics would not disturb, destroy or remove State significant relics.
- the amount of works (including archaeological program and extent of excavation) is otherwise consistent with a minor impact, assessed by:
 - the amount of area affected by the proposal versus the total known area of archaeological potential.
 - the overall amount of area to be disturbed and the methods to be used, for example in the case of the precise location of the archaeology being unknown.
 - the cumulative impact of the works has been considered.

State significant relics contribute to our understanding of heritage items

State significant archaeology can be one of the reasons a place is listed on the SHR. Alternatively, archaeology within an SHR curtilage may not necessarily be of State significance.

Archaeological relics which contribute to an understanding of the heritage item, or to its specific State significant values, are likely to be of State heritage significance.

For archaeology to be a State significance it must be:

- specified in the Statement of Significance for the item,
- specified against the NSW Heritage Assessment Criteria within an archaeological assessment,
- identified as such in a conservation management plan or strategy.

An archaeological resource may also be identified in an Archaeological Management Plan or Archaeological Zoning Plan; however, these are generally high-level overview documents and usually further assessment is required when works are proposed.

Archaeology within an SHR or IHO item may be of local significance or not have any research potential. An IHO is a protective mechanism to allow further assessment when not all values are known, so specific assessment may be required. If the archaeology is of local significance, it may not be directly related to the values for which the place is listed on the SHR and hold insufficient significance to reach the State significance threshold. If the archaeology has no research potential it may have insufficient significance to reach the local threshold. Only relics of local or no significance, where specified in an approval, may be removed.

Cumulative Impacts must be assessed

As archaeology is a non-renewable resource and excavation and disturbance of archaeology depletes this resource, the cumulative impact of activities/works on archaeology must be assessed.

The cumulative impact assessment should carefully analyse any previous works at the site and their impact over time along with the proposed activities/works being applied for.

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One project by itself may be of minor impact, however repeated or several activities/works that remove archaeology (even with minor impacts individually), when combined, may present an unreasonable overall impact by ultimately eroding or entirely removing the resource or listed value.

Therefore, while the proposed impact may have been permitted in the past, it may not be approved again, as the scale or quantum of that impact being repeated would have an unreasonable cumulative impact on the archaeological values and reduce the significance of the site.

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