

Guide to completing the AHIMS Site Recording Form

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1. Introduction

Under section 89 of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* (the Act), the Chief Executive of the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) – as the delegate of the Director-General of the Department of Premier and Cabinet – is responsible for the proper care, preservation and protection of Aboriginal objects and places and is required to ‘establish and keep a database to be known as the Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System (AHIMS)’. The specific purpose of AHIMS is to:

- (a) maintain a record of Aboriginal objects whose existence and location have been reported to the Director-General, and
- (b) maintain a copy of any report that has been provided to the Director-General relating to the assessment of objects, places and features that are or are likely to be of significance to Aboriginal people, and
- (c) maintain a record of the details of any other report (of which the Director-General is aware) relating to the assessment of objects, places and features that are or are likely to be of significance to Aboriginal people.

Section 89A of the Act also requires that Aboriginal objects must be reported to OEH in the prescribed manner within a reasonable time:

A person who is aware of the location of an Aboriginal object that is the property of the Crown or, not being the property of the Crown, is real property, and does not, in the prescribed manner, notify the Director-General thereof within a reasonable time after the person first becomes aware of that location is guilty of an offence against this Act..

The AHIMS Aboriginal Site Recording Form should be used for reporting and recording Aboriginal objects as well as other features that are likely to be of significance to Aboriginal people such as ceremonial and spiritual sites. These objects and features are collectively referred to as Aboriginal Sites.

The form allows for primary site recording as well as a description of the five most common site features found in NSW – pages for describing another 13 site features less commonly encountered are available by contacting the AHIMS Registrar.

This guide explains the structure of the Aboriginal Site Recording Form and describes the essential information required to complete the recording such as site location, recorder information, context, contents and restrictions.

2. Adding, updating or reporting impacts to a site

Use the Aboriginal Site Recording Form to record a new site on the AHIMS database or to update an existing record.

2.1 Adding a site

To add a new site record to the AHIMS database:

- Go to www.environment.nsw.gov.au/awssapp/login.aspx
- Conduct an AHIMS site search in the vicinity of the site location to make sure that the site is not already recorded on the database (site duplication must be avoided).
- Complete the Aboriginal site recording form
- Submit the form to ahims@environment.nsw.gov.au

2.2 Updating a site

Site updates are useful to monitor the condition of sites overtime or to correct original recording errors.

To update sites already registered in the AHIMS database:

- Identify the original site number (this can be done by conducting an AHIMS site search)
- Insert the original site number in the first field of the form (to avoid duplication). This field is marked 'for office use only', but it can be used when recorders are updating sites)
- Complete and submit the form to ahims@environment.nsw.gov.au

2.3 Impacts to sites

An [Aboriginal Site Impact Recording Form](#) must be completed if reporting impacts to AHIMS sites that are:

- a result of test excavation carried out in accordance with the Code of Practice for the Archaeological Investigation of Aboriginal Objects in NSW
- authorised by an Aboriginal Heritage Impact Permit (AHIP) issued by OEH
- undertaken for the purpose of complying with the Director-General's requirements issued by the Department of Planning and Infrastructure for:
 - State Significant Development (SSD - Part 4),
 - State Significant Infrastructure (SSI - Part 5.1), or
 - a Major Project (Part 3A – now repealed) under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (EP&A Act), or
- authorised by a SSD/SSI/Part 3A consent/approval under the EP&A Act.

3. AHIMS Aboriginal Site Recording forms

The **Aboriginal Site Recording form** is available at:

www.environment.nsw.gov.au/licences/DECCAHIMSSiteRecordingForm.htm

The **Aboriginal Site Impact Recording form** is available at:

www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/cultureheritage/101022asirf.pdf.

Alternatively, request a copy of the form via email from ahims@environment.nsw.gov.au or phone 02 9585 6345.

4. AHIMS Aboriginal Site Recording form structure

The Aboriginal site recording form allows for recording primary site details as well as more detailed descriptions of the five most common site features found in NSW – pages for describing another 13 site features less commonly encountered are available by contacting the AHIMS Registrar.

All site recordings should include the primary site details as well as any combination of feature recordings. Please do not include blank feature attachments when submitting completed forms

The Aboriginal Site Recording form is available in two different formats:

- A pdf version (available at www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/parks/SiteCardMainV1_1.pdf) where you can record details of any of the five most common site features found in NSW. These features usually include most of the site recordings found in NSW. These are:
 - a. Artefacts
 - b. Modified trees
 - c. Grinding grooves
 - d. Art
 - e. Shell
- If you need to record any of the 13 site features less commonly encountered features not included in the form, please email ahims@environment.nsw.gov.au to obtain additional site feature attachments
- A Microsoft Excel version: This version is to be used only when a large number of sites need to be recorded. **It is not a replacement for a standard Aboriginal Site Recording form.** A standard Aboriginal Site Recording form (pdf version) is still required for each individual site. This form is available at www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/parks/SiteCardExcel.xls.

5. Completing the AHIMS Aboriginal site recording form

Completing the AHIMS Aboriginal site recording form is fairly straight forward and intuitive. However recorders should be aware that certain fields are mandatory (as indicated in this guide) and an incomplete Aboriginal Site Recording form will prevent site registration.

5.1 The form (including the five most common features)

Use the pdf form to record primary details and any one of the five most common features, Email ahims@environment.nsw.gov.au to obtain additional site feature attachments.

Use this form to provide general information about the Aboriginal Site, including site name, recorder details, date the site was recorded or updated, details on the knowledge holders (Aboriginal community/organisation); location details, including the relevant 1:25,000 map-sheet and GDA/AGD co-ordinates.

In addition to recording the primary site details, this form allows you to provide a description of the five most common site features found in NSW, which are Art, Artefact, Grinding Groove, Shell and Modified Tree (these five usually include most site recordings). Use only those feature attachments that are required.

To record any of the other 13 site features less commonly encountered, contact the AHIMS Registrar on 9585 6470 or email ahims@environment.nsw.gov.au.

5.1.1 Site number

This number is automatically generated by AHIMS when recording new sites. If you are recording a new site please leave this field blank, but if you are updating an old site please enter the original AHIMS site number in this field.

Note: Before recording a new site, it is recommended that recorders conduct an AHIMS site search (www.environment.nsw.gov.au/awssapp/login.aspx) in the vicinity of the site location to ascertain if the site has been previously recorded.

5.1.2 Information access (restrictions)

This section should only be completed if the Aboriginal Community has requested that access to certain information recorded on the Aboriginal site recording form should have specific restrictions. This restriction does not apply to the physical access to a site or place (e.g. site fencing, signs, etc) but to the information contained in AHIMS.

A restriction means that the site information is limited within bounds and available only to certain authorised groups of people, as requested by the Aboriginal Community. Therefore, all the information about the site may not be visible to all stakeholders.

If a site is restricted in AHIMS, both internal (OEH) and external users are affected by the restriction as follows:

- Only OEH users who are Aboriginal staff members can access information to restricted sites in the system.
- All external users may not be able to see detailed information (depending on the type of restriction) in the search reports they obtain from the system.

Note: OEH has a legal responsibility to provide basic information about sites to all bona fide parties with a legitimate interest such as investigations under the Due Diligence process or other legislative requirements under the Act. Therefore, all restricted sites **must** have contact details of the Aboriginal Community or person that knows about the site and could be contacted if clarification about the site restriction is required.

Restriction type

There are three different types of restrictions to accessing information.

Gender

This restriction refers to whether the information about the site can only be accessed by either males or females. For example, if the 'Male' restriction is indicated it means that the

site information can only be accessed by males. Every AHIMS user is categorised as either male or female when their AHIMS logon is first issued.

Location

This restriction should be used if the Aboriginal Community wishes to keep the map coordinates of the site restricted.

General

This restriction should be applied if the Aboriginal Community wishes to keep all the site details restricted (i.e. not only the map coordinates but also site contents and description).

Further information contacts

This section should contain the contact information of the people who know about the site and can be contacted if OEH determines that the restricted site information may need further clarification.

Knowledge Holder

This is the person that an Aboriginal Community recognises as being able to speak for a place. The knowledge holder has the details of why the site should be restricted. If the knowledge holder cannot or does not want to be contacted, a trustee must be nominated.

Nominated Trustee

This is the person that has been entrusted with information related to a restricted site or place. This person could be the site recorder, interviewer or somebody that can act as an intermediary between the Aboriginal Community and the person requesting access to the information. Please note that it is advisable to always have a nominated trustee so that a person or organisation can continue to be the main contact even after the knowledge holder passes away.

5.1.3 Geographic location

This section includes details about the site such as the map coordinates and the site name.

Site name (mandatory)

In order to clearly identify sites, names must include:

- the geographic location of the site (e.g. Wollondilly)
- reference to the site contents (e.g. Artefact Scatter)
- number, whenever more than one similar site is located in the area.

For example, whole site name could be 'Wollondilly Artefact Scatter 1' or 'Western Highway Isolated Find 1'

Acronyms and other abbreviated names to describe locations and projects (e.g. JC-1, MRN9) should be avoided whenever possible as they create confusion and can be easily repeated in the database. For example 'JC' might mean Jacobs Creek or Jindabyne Creek.

Abbreviations for site contents (e.g. 'TRE' instead of scarred tree) are acceptable but only if space in the form is limited and the abbreviations in Table 1 of this document are used.

Datum: AGD/GDA (mandatory)

A datum is a reference value from which other values in a map can be calculated. It ensures that all the positions in a map are consistent and accurate. It is extremely important that the

correct datum is recorded on the form, otherwise without this information, finding the exact location of the site would be very difficult.

Information about the datum can be obtained from your GPS under properties or settings menus, or near the legend of any appropriate map. Most GPS default settings are GDA94. Similarly, most third generation (or later) maps in Australia are now produced with GDA94 datum.

Coordinates – Easting/Northing (mandatory)

AHIMS accepts only UTM coordinates (i.e. Eastings and Northings format). Geographic coordinates in degrees, minutes and seconds or decimal degrees are not accepted.

Mapsheet (mandatory)

List the 1:25,000 or 1:50,000 mapsheet name for the site location. Also include the version of the mapsheet.

Zone (mandatory)

Worldwide there are 60 UTM zones. The easting measurements are based on these zones. In NSW, there are three zones: zone 54 in the west, zone 55 in the middle and zone 56 along the coast. Therefore it is important that the UTM zone is correctly indicated, otherwise the site would be plotted incorrectly in AHIMS. Please verify your GPS or map when recording the UTM zone.

Location method (mandatory)

This is the method that a recorder has used to derive the site coordinates (e.g. Handheld GPS, Differential GPS, 1:25k Topographic Map or Desktop GIS). This information gives an indication of the relative accuracy of the coordinates.

Other Registration

This field should only be completed if the site has also been registered in the [Register of the National Estate](#), [Heritage Register](#) or [National Trust Register](#) (for more information about these registers please contact the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, the Heritage Office and the National Trust, respectively).

5.1.4 Primary recorder (mandatory)

This section of the form collects contact information about the person recording the site. This is usually the person gathering all the necessary information and filling in the form. It is important that all the contact details are filled in correctly, in case there are difficulties or issues accessioning the site onto AHIMS and the recorder needs to be contacted for clarification.

The form only allows for one recorder; however in AHIMS it is possible to have multiple site recorders. If you wish to include multiple recorders please include additional information in the 'Comments' field on page 4 of the form.

5.1.5 Site context

This information defines the immediate surroundings of the site. It is useful to be able to find/revisit the site and also to understand the site position in the landscape. Information should include the landform, landform unit, slope, vegetation, land use and distance to water.

In this section the following fields are mandatory:

Open/Closed site (mandatory)

'Closed' sites are all associated with rock shelters. This includes the potential archaeological deposits within the shelter, the shell deposits clearly spilling from the shelter, and the art on the rock shelter itself.

All other sites are 'Open'. These include grinding grooves and engravings that are located in open spaces where there is no rock shelter.

Directions for relocation (mandatory)

This field should provide accurate directions on how to find and access the site by referring to clear and visible landmarks. Recorders should make additional observations about the need for 4WD vehicles, remoteness of the site, and community/owner attendance requirements.

Site location map (mandatory)

A map clearly showing the location of the site must be included. The map can use a copy of a 1:25,000/ 1:50,000 topographic map as a base, with sufficient detail to accurately locate the site. All creeks and rivers, towns and roads must be labelled. The map image (jpg, gif, tif) can be inserted into the electronic form by clicking on the map area box and selecting the appropriate file from the dialog box.

5.1.6 Current land tenure

The details of the current owner or administrator of the land should be filled in here and also where the site is located (if known).

Primary report

This is the community, scientific or archaeological report that contains a detailed description of the site and its relation to other sites in the area.

5.1.7 General site information

This information defines the site and its contents. Information about site dimensions, features and basic layout are necessary. Include more details of closed and open sites by selecting formation, condition, ceiling and aspect of closed sites and the orientation of open sites.

In this section there are some fields that are mandatory:

Features (mandatory)

These are the main contents of the site. There are 20 standard site features as shown in the table below:

Table 1: AHIMS site feature definitions and feature name abbreviations

Site features	Abbreviation	Description
<p>Aboriginal Ceremony and Dreaming</p> <p>Note: This is not Aboriginal object and therefore not included in the legislative process.</p>	ACD	Previously referred to as mythological sites these are spiritual/story places where no physical evidence of previous use of the place may occur, e.g. natural unmodified landscape features, ceremonial or spiritual areas, men's/women's sites, dreaming (creation) tracks, marriage places etc
<p>Aboriginal resource and gathering</p> <p>Notes:</p> <p>1. This is not Aboriginal object and therefore not included in the legislative process.</p> <p>2. Not to be used for fish trap, shell or stone quarry.</p>	ARG	Related to everyday activities such as food gathering, hunting, or collection and manufacture of materials and goods for use or trade.
<p>Art*</p>	ART	Art is found in shelters, overhangs and across rock formations. Techniques include painting, drawing, scratching, carving engraving, pitting, conjoining, abrading and the use of a range of binding agents and the use of natural pigments obtained from clays, charcoal and plants.
<p>Artefacts*</p>	AFT	Objects such as stone tools, and associated flaked material, spears, manuports, grindstones, discarded stone flakes, modified glass or shell demonstrating evidence of use of the area by Aboriginal people
<p>Burials</p>	BUR	A traditional or contemporary (post-contact) burial of an Aboriginal person, which may occur outside designated cemeteries and may not be marked, e.g. in caves, marked by stone cairns, in sand areas, along creek banks etc
<p>Ceremonial ring</p> <p>Note: Does not include stone arrangements.</p>	CMR	Raised earth ring(s) associated with ceremony
<p>Conflict</p> <p>Note: This is not Aboriginal object and therefore not included in the legislative process.</p>	CFT	Previously referred to as massacre sites where confrontations occurred between (1) Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, or (2) between different Aboriginal groups
<p>Earth mound</p>	ETM	A mounded deposit of round to oval shape containing baked clay lumps, ash, charcoal and, usually, black or dark grey sediment. The deposit may be compacted or loose and ashy. Mounds may contain various economic remains such as mussel shell and bone as well as stone artefacts. Occasionally they contain burials.

Site features	Abbreviation	Description
Fish trap	FSH	A modified area on watercourses where fish were trapped for short-term storage and gathering.
Grinding grooves*	GDG	A groove in a rock surface resulting from manufacture of stone tools such as ground edge hatchets and spears, may also include rounded depressions resulting from grinding of seeds and grains.
Habitation structure Note: Structures built for Aboriginal people by non-Aboriginal people are non Aboriginal objects and therefore not included in the legislative process.	HAB	Structures constructed by Aboriginal people for short or long term shelter. More temporary structures are commonly preserved away from the NSW coastline, may include historic camps of contemporary significance. Smaller structures may make use of natural materials such as branches, logs and bark sheets or manufactured materials such as corrugated iron to form shelters. Archaeological remains of a former structure such as chimney/fireplace, raised earth building platform, excavated pits, rubble mounds etc.
Hearth	HTH	Cultural deposit sometimes marked by hearth stones, usually also contains charcoal and may also contain heat treated stone fragments.
Modified tree*	TRE	Trees which show the marks of modification as a result of cutting of bark from the trunk for use in the production of shields, canoes, boomerangs, burials shrouds, for medicinal purposes, foot holds etc, or alternately intentional carving of the heartwood of the tree to form a permanent marker to indicate ceremonial use/significance of a nearby area, again these carvings may also act as territorial or burial markers.
Non human bone and organic material	BOM	Objects which can be found within cultural deposits as components of an Aboriginal site such as fish or mammal bones, ochres, cached objects which may otherwise have broken down such as resin, twine, dilly bags, nets etc
Ochre quarry	OCQ	A source of ochre used for ceremonial occasions, burials, trade and artwork
Potential archaeological deposit Note: This is not Aboriginal object and therefore not included in the legislative process unless accompanied by an object.	PAD	An area where Aboriginal objects may occur below the ground surface.

Site features	Abbreviation	Description
Shell*	SHL	An accumulation or deposit of shellfish from beach, estuarine, lacustrine or riverine species resulting from Aboriginal gathering and consumption. Usually found in deposits previously referred to as shell middens. Must be found in association with other objects like stone tools, fish bones, charcoal, fireplaces/hearths, and burials. Will vary greatly in size and components.
Stone arrangement	STA	Human produced arrangements of stone usually associated with ceremonial activities, or used as markers for territorial limits or to mark/protect burials
Stone quarry	STQ	Usually a source of good quality stone which is quarried and used for the production of stone tools
Waterhole Note: This is not Aboriginal object and therefore not included in the legislative process.	WTR	A source of fresh water for Aboriginal groups which may have traditional ceremonial or dreaming significance and/or may also be used to the present day as a rich resource gathering area (e.g. waterbirds, eels, clays, reeds etc)

* The most common site features found in NSW.

Site plan (mandatory)

This field is intended to give a visual representation of the site and its contents so it can be easily identified during revisits. It could be in the form of a simple hand drawn sketch or even a photograph (especially useful for modified trees) depicting the entire site. Photographs should be kept to a maximum of 250kb in size.

5.1.8 Site interpretation and community statement (mandatory)

Aboriginal Community interpretation and management recommendations

In this section statements of interpretation can be included from members of the local Aboriginal Community regarding the site.

If the site is to be restricted, then this section must include an explanation of why the restriction needs to apply to the site. Common reasons for restricting sites are usually birthing sites, male initiation sites, repatriated human remains, sacred, mythological and ceremonial sites.

5.1.9 Preliminary site assessment

Site cultural and scientific analysis and preliminary management recommendations

In this section statements of scientific interpretations management recommendations or comments from the archaeological point of view must be included.

5.1.10 Endorsed by

These are the details of any additional Aboriginal group who participated in the site recording.

5.1.11 Attachments

Include details of any attachments that are submitted with the site recording form.

5.1.12 Comments

In this section any additional comments should be included. If there are any other sites in close proximity the association between them should be noted and explained. Duplication of sites must be avoided.

5.2 Feature attachments

There are 20 different feature attachments that can be added to the Aboriginal Site Recording form. Five of these attachments are already included with the form that can be downloaded from the OEH website at:

www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/parks/SiteCardMainV1_1.pdf.

More details of the five most common site features in the AHIMS database are provided below.

For additional site feature attachment forms please contact ahims@environment.nsw.gov.au

5.2.1 Details of the five most common site features

Artefact

This feature attachment should be used when recording objects such as stone artefacts, spears, manuports, grindstones, modified glass or shell. Particular consideration should be given to the following mandatory fields:

Importance (mandatory)

This field defines how the feature relates to other features within the site. If there are no other features in the site then the best option is 'contributes to primary importance'.

No. of Instances (mandatory)

In this field the recorder must enter the number of artefacts found (or an estimate). If it was an isolated find then the number should be 1.

Feature Plan (mandatory)

Recorders can use this field to show how the feature looks in situ, so the feature can be found during revisits. Photos can be uploaded to this field but they must be below 250kb.

Modified tree

This feature attachment should be used when recording trees which show the marks of modification as a result of cutting of bark from the trunk for use in the production of shields, canoes, boomerangs, burials shrouds, for medicinal purposes, foot holds etc, or alternately intentional carving of the heartwood of the tree to form a permanent marker to indicate ceremonial use/significance of a nearby area. Particular consideration should be given to the following mandatory fields:

Importance (mandatory)

This field defines how the feature relates to other features within the site. If there are no other features in the site then the best option is “contributes to primary importance”.

No. of Instances (mandatory)

In this field the recorder must enter how many trees were found. In most cases it would be just 1.

Feature location plan (mandatory)

Recorders can use this field to show the location of the tree, so it can be found during revisits. Photos can be uploaded to this field but they must be below 250kb.

Scar/carved panel drawing (mandatory)

In this field recorders can include a visual representation of the tree. Photographs are useful as they make the identification of the tree much easier during revisits. Photos can be uploaded to this field but they must be below 250kb

Grooves

Use this feature attachment when recording groove(s) in a rock surface resulting from manufacture of stone tools such as ground edge hatches and spears, may also include rounded depressions resulting from grinding of seeds and grains. Particular consideration should be given to the following mandatory fields:

Importance (mandatory)

This field defines how the feature relates to other features within the site. If there are no other features in the site then the best option is “contributes to primary importance”.

No. of Instances (mandatory)

In this field the recorder must enter how many grooves were found. This is very important as the data allows the condition of the site to be monitored over time.

Feature context and condition (mandatory)

Recorders can use this field to show the condition of the grooves. This information is essential for maintenance/management of the site and evaluation of any possible conservation works.

Feature plan (mandatory)

In this field recorders can include a visual representation of the grooves. Photographs are useful as they make the identification of the grooves much easier during revisits. Sometimes photos are the only record left of groove sites as they progressively decay. Photos can be uploaded to this field but they must be below 250kb

Art

Use this feature attachment when recording art. The variety and complexity of art across NSW is an expression of the complexity of Aboriginal life across this area. There are different styles and techniques, ‘canvasses’ used and a range of different motifs represented in the different areas of NSW. Art is found in shelters, overhangs and across rock formations. Techniques include painting, drawing, scratching, carving engraving, pitting, abrading and the use of a range of binding agents and the use of natural pigments obtained from clays, charcoal and plants.

As Art sites rank among the most significant sites in NSW and recordings should be as complete as possible. Fields of particular importance are:

Importance (mandatory)

This field defines how the feature relates to other features within the site. If there are no other features in the site then the best option is “contributes to primary importance”.

No. of Instances (mandatory)

In this field the recorder must enter the number of motifs that can be accurately estimated. This is very important as the data allows the condition of the site to be monitored over time.

Feature context and condition (mandatory)

Recorders can use this field to show the condition of the art. This information is essential for maintenance/management of the site and evaluation of any possible conservation works.

Art sketch plan (mandatory)

In this field recorders must include a visual representation of the art. Photographs are essential additions to any sketches as they make the identification of the art much easier during revisits. Sometimes photos are the only record left of art sites as they progressively decay. Photos can be uploaded to this field but they must be below 250kb

Art motif (mandatory)

In this section recorders must describe the individual motifs, forms, techniques and colours.

Shell

This feature attachment should be used when recording an accumulation or deposit of shellfish from beach, estuarine, lacustrine or riverine species resulting from Aboriginal gathering and consumption. Usually found in deposits previously referred to as shell middens. May be found in association with other objects like stone artefacts, fish bones, fireplaces/hearths and burials. Will vary greatly in size and components. Particular consideration should be given to the following mandatory fields:

Importance (mandatory)

This field defines how the feature relates to other features within the site. If there are no other features in the site then the best option is “contributes to primary importance”.

No. of Instances

In this field the recorder must enter the number of shell fragments. If it is not possible to know due to the large number of fragments then an estimate should be entered and noted in the comments field.

Feature plan (mandatory)

In this field recorders can include a visual representation of the shell. Photographs are useful as they make the identification of the shell much easier during revisits. Photos can be uploaded to this field but they must be below 250kb

6. Bibliography

Goulding, M. 2001. *Development of a new site card design: NPWS Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System*. Goulding Heritage Consulting Pty Ltd (available on request from www.environment.nsw.gov.au/awssapp/login.aspx).