

# Code of Ethics

## 1.0 Purpose

The Code of Ethics provides a standard for the professional conduct of a conservator of cultural property. This standard enables conservators, their colleagues and the public to appreciate the professional characteristics of conservators and recognise the ethical priorities of their work. It also allows the professional organisation to regulate the conduct of its members, since violation of the Code can lead to revocation of membership.

## 2.0 Definition of Terms

### 2.1 Cultural Property

All objects which have aesthetic, archaeological, historic, scientific, technological, social or spiritual value for any generation.

### 2.2 Conservation

All actions taken to recognise, prevent and retard the loss or deterioration of cultural property.

### 2.3 Preventive Conservation

Measures taken to retard deterioration of cultural property and protect it from damage. It is concerned in particular with control of the environment surrounding an object in use, handling, storage, transport or display.

### 2.4 Conservation Treatment

Action taken to retard deterioration and prevent damage to objects by treatment of their structure in order to maintain them as nearly as possible in an unchanging state, subject to the further requirements of restoration.

### 2.5 Restoration

Treatment to make the cultural significance of a deteriorated object understandable. This may involve modification of the object.

## 3.0 The Conservator

### 3.1 Professional Limitations

Conservators must recognise the limits of their professional competence and of the facilities and equipment available to them.

### 3.2 Professional Development

Every conservator is obligated to remain aware of technical developments in the profession and should strive to improve his or her knowledge and skills.

### 3.3 Technical Disclosure

There must be no secrecy about any techniques or materials used in conservation, particularly amongst members of the profession.

### 3.4 Conflicts of Interest

No conservator should knowingly enter into contractual or other working arrangements or agreements which place the conservator in a position of a conflict of interest.

## 4.0 The Conservator and the Object

The first responsibility of the conservator is to the object and to its long-term preservation.

Conservation is the means by which the true nature of an object is preserved. The true nature of an object includes evidence of its origins, its original construction and materials, information as to the technology used in its manufacture, and the cultural significance of the object. Subsequent modifications may be of such a significant nature that they should be preserved.

Māori customary concepts empower particular knowledge of heritage and conservation values to chosen guardians, with respect to particular places and artefacts. In adhering to this Code of Ethics all members of NZCCM shall recognise the special relationship of Māori to places and artefacts as described in the Treaty of Waitangi.

In order to protect the true nature of an object, certain principles should be observed in its care and maintenance.

#### **4.1 Conservation Standards**

Although the level of expertise and experience may vary from conservator to conservator, the quality of work regardless of the value of the object must always be of the highest possible standard and within the capability of the conservator.

#### **4.2 Technical Examination and Documentation**

Before carrying out any treatment, the conservator should make an examination of the object and all available documentation in order to determine its condition, stability, history, cultural significance and the causes of its deterioration. The results of this examination and of any subsequent treatment must be held as a permanent archival record.

Conservators should not promulgate false or misleading information relating to objects being examined or treated.

#### **4.3 Extent of Treatment and Reversibility**

Preventive conservation such as an improvement in conditions of use, display or storage is preferable to physical intervention. Before intervention, its necessity must be firmly established.

### **5.0 Professional Relationships**

#### **5.1 Owners and Custodians**

The opinions, wishes and views of the owner, custodian or other responsible person must be fully acknowledged and considered when discussing a proposal for conservation. In so much as an owner or custodian is unable to judge the conservation requirements of the object, the conservator should honestly and sincerely advise what is considered the best course of treatment. The final decision as to the best course of action, however, lies with the owner or custodian.

If the owner or custodian requires a conservator to carry out a treatment or procedure which the conservator considers to be unethical, then the conservator must make every effort to convince the owner or custodian, and if need be bring in other conservators to support the case. Ultimately, the conservator may make the decision not to carry out the work requested, the consequences of which will then have to be considered.

The conservator is also responsible for providing advice on the subsequent care of a treated object, in particular in regard to its handling and requirements for storage, transport and display.

#### **5.2 Artists and Craftspeople**

The conservator's professional activities are distinct from those of the artistic or craft professions. A basic criterion of this distinction is that their activities as conservators do not create new cultural objects. Any recommendation as to whether intervention on an object should be undertaken by an artist or craftsman can be made only by a conservator.

#### **5.3 Trainees and Colleagues**

Training and instruction in conservation should only be given within the limits of the conservator's knowledge and competence, and the time and facilities available. The rights and objectives of both trainer and trainee should be clearly stated and mutually agreed upon.

The conservator is directly responsible for all delegated or sub-contract work. This includes work delegated to trainees, volunteers, subordinates or outside agencies. Work should not be delegated unless the conservator can directly supervise it or has sufficient knowledge of the agent.

#### **5.4 Conservation**

No individual engaged in any form of conservation can hope to be expertly informed on all aspects of examination, analysis and treatment. Where necessary, there should be no hesitation in seeking the advice of other professionals or in referring the owner, custodian or other responsible person to a conservator more experienced in the particular problem. If the owner or custodian wishes to seek other opinions regarding any aspect of the work, then every assistance should be provided in order to obtain these other opinions.

A member should not volunteer adverse judgement on the qualifications of, or the procedures rendered by, another NZCCM member except in discussions between the conservators concerned, or through the NZCCM. It is appropriate, however, for a conservator to give conservation advice when it is requested by those fearing negligent or unethical practice. All comments thus made should be based on facts of which the conservator has personal knowledge, rather than hearsay. If such comments are warranted, it is best to first discuss the matter directly with those concerned. If it cannot be resolved in this way, then the legitimate means of raising the matter with the conservation profession is through the NZCCM.

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