

FACT SHEET

Authority Certificates



What is an Authority Certificate?

An Authority Certificate protects sacred sites from damage due to nearby works. It sets out the conditions for using – or carrying out works on – land and sea on or near sacred sites across all of the Northern Territory. It is a legal document issued under the *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act*, and indemnifies the holder against prosecution under the Act for damage to sacred sites in the area of the Certificate **provided** the proposed work or use has been carried out in accordance with the conditions of the Certificate.

How do I get a Certificate?

Persons or organisations wanting an Authority Certificate can apply in writing to the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (AAPA) using the Authority Certificate application form, which is available from the AAPA's offices in Darwin and Alice Springs or by download from the AAPA's website (www.aapant.org.au).

The AAPA will only issue an Authority Certificate when it is satisfied that the use of, or work on, the area in question can proceed without there being a substantive risk of damage to, or interference with, a sacred site on or in the vicinity of the area. A Certificate may also be issued if an agreement has been reached between the Aboriginal custodians of any affected sites and the applicant for the Certificate.

What information is required?

It is important that applicants provide as much detail as possible about the proposed use of, or works on, the land or sea area under application. The final Certificate will be issued only for the proposed use or works specified by the applicant, and any use or works not specified on the Certificate will fall outside of the legal protection afforded by the Certificate.

Applicants must also provide a map (or maps) clearly showing the area to be covered by the Authority Certificate. Applicants are encouraged to submit additional maps in digital form as GIS data files, preferably in a MapInfo-compatible format, specifying datum.

An application **cannot be processed** until a boundary is determined. The AAPA may refuse an application if insufficient information is provided.



Applicants can also request a meeting with the custodians of a sacred site before an Authority Certificate application has been finalised, if they feel this will help them progress their application. However, there are likely to be costs associated with such a meeting, which will be recovered through AAPA fees (see below).

What does it cost?

Based on the information provided by the applicant, the AAPA will classify the application as either 'Standard' or 'Non-Standard'. The AAPA will then advise the applicant of the classification and the charges that will apply. Where an application is classified as 'Non-Standard', an estimate of costs will be provided for the applicant's acceptance prior to the commencement of research by the AAPA.

All applicants must pay an application fee of **\$59** (no GST).

Standard applications

- Most small-medium projects within Alice Springs and Darwin will attract a standard rate of \$1,086 (GST excluded) in addition to the application fee.
- In other regions, Certificates for most small-medium projects will cost \$2,415 (GST excluded) in addition to the application fee.

Non-Standard applications

- Large projects or those incorporating factors which may complicate consultations with Aboriginal custodians will be charged in accordance with the Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Regulations (see **Fees & Charges Fact Sheet**).

Meeting with custodians

- Applicants can ask the AAPA to arrange a meeting with custodians either before or after the issue of a Certificate. Fees for such meetings will be calculated in accordance with the Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Regulations (see **Fees & Charges Fact Sheet**).

How long does an application take to process?

Once the AAPA has accepted an application – or in the case of a Non-Standard application, the applicant has accepted the costs – the AAPA is obliged to consult with custodians of sacred sites on or in the vicinity of the area to which the application relates. By law, these consultations must commence **within 60 days** of the acceptance.

However, depending on the distances and complexity involved, the consultations may take some time to complete. In some cases it may take up to 180 days to process an application from the time it has been accepted by the AAPA. Applicants are encouraged to discuss timeframes applying to their application with AAPA staff.



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