



SOUTH AFRICAN HERITAGE  
RESOURCES AGENCY

111 HARRINGTON STREET, CAPE TOWN, 8001  
PO BOX 4639, CAPE TOWN, 8000  
TEL: 021 462 4502 FAX: 021 462 4509  
Email: info@sahra.org.za

## GUIDELINES TO ETHICAL AND CURATORIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR ACCREDITED REPOSITORIES FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL OR PALAEOONTOLOGICAL MATERIAL

The legislation<sup>1</sup> empowers the Heritage Resources Authorities<sup>2</sup> to approve repositories that curate material acquired in terms of permits for archaeological and palaeontological research and rescue work. This is to ensure that the material recovered is curated, stored and made available for research and that the best possible scientific standards are maintained, based on the following principles:

1. Archaeological and palaeontological material and meteorites belong to the state and are curated by the repository, in its role as custodian. Responsibility rests with the repository and SAHRA may be consulted for policy and legal opinion.
2. Curation policy must aim at maintaining the integrity of the collections.
3. The role of the researchers whose work contributes heritage value to such material and to the sites must be acknowledged.

### *Accredited Repositories*

- Accredited Repositories (collaborating institutions) are museums or universities or other institutions approved by SAHRA which have:
  - a written collection policy acceptable to the Heritage Resources Authorities;
  - a proven capacity to conserve and curate objects; and
  - the will to do so.

### *Guidelines for Repositories*

- Accredited Repositories will endeavour to:
  - promote the highest standards of research;
  - promote and maintain the highest standards of curation;
  - provide a facility allowing access to research material to *bona fide* researchers, excepting only for:
    - considerations affecting the integrity of the collection;
    - codes relating to prior rights of publication;
  - maintain a transparent policy concerning the rights of researchers.

<sup>1</sup> "Legislation" means the National Heritage Resources Act, No 25 of 1999 and the relevant regulations (e.g. *Government Gazette* Vol. 240, No. 21297).

<sup>2</sup> "Heritage Resources Authorities" (HRAs) means the South African Heritage Resources Agency and/or the responsible Provincial Heritage Resources Authorities (PHRAs)

### *Acquisition and Curation*

- An Accredited Repository will:
  - review curation policy at least every five years and inform SAHRA of changes;
  - advise on the recovery of objects;
  - accept objects as part of the collection;
  - accession material and associated documentation as soon as possible and cross-reference it to the site report, where appropriate. Once accessioned, it:
    - may not be sold or otherwise disposed of; and
    - may not be transferred to another repository without consultation with the relevant heritage resources authority (HRA);
    - SAHRA or the HRA must be informed of special circumstances requiring de-accessioning, such as theft or destruction;
  - make clear arrangements with all researchers concerning procedures of acquisition, the processing of finds, labeling, packaging, boxing, documentation, site recording, conservation, inventory control, and access of other researchers to the material, before signing the application for the researcher requesting a permit from the Heritage Resources Authority to conduct the work;
  - enter into a written agreement with an external or foreign researcher concerning the above;
  - establish systems for the long-term management, curation and conservation of the objects;
  - organize the collection in an accessible form that renders the material and data archive available for examination; and
  - where possible and prudent make such data available on the internet.

### *Access*

- The Institution must:
  - make material available for *bona fide* research, under reasonable conditions;
  - give the collector or excavator access to the material at all reasonable times;
  - inform the excavators of the material (where relevant and feasible) when making material they have excavated available to other researchers;
  - be sensitive to the fact that research involves fundraising, slow and painstaking recovery of material, and intensive and time-consuming sorting, analysis and curation and this will require flexibility concerning the needs of researchers in terms of time and access;
  - make clear policy relating to access to sensitive material;
  - set up guidelines concerning the handling or casting of fragile objects, and non-reversible invasive techniques such as sampling, preparation etc.;
- The Institution is advised to:
  - encourage access to collections to other *bona fide* researchers in the interests of the development of science, while still:
    - setting up adequate systems to ensure the safety of the material;
    - ensuring the protection of prior research and publication rights, where necessary, through written agreements.

### *Export*

- The Accredited Repository must:
  - maintain a clear loan policy with regard to the export of research material for study or display;
  - assist the heritage resources authority in ensuring that permit applicants are appropriately qualified for the work they plan to do;
  - note that Export Permits are issued to the person who is to do the work or to the scientific person officer or curator in charge of the collection at the scientific institution housing the material;
  - if the permit is issued to a person not formally associated with the institution the application must be accompanied by a letter of support from the institution;
  - material may be sent only to researchers at recognized scientific institutions abroad;
  - note that if the curator does not have the responsibility for making scientific decisions about the collection the applicant must be the person who does;
  - consult the relevant SAHRA *Guidelines* for policy relating to the export permits for research material and the accreditation of researchers.

### *Guidelines for Researchers*

- Researchers will:
  - comply with the Code of Ethics of their Professional Association; and
  - fulfill their responsibilities within the spirit and goals of the applicable legislation and regulations;
  - carry out professional activities in accordance with the understanding that our palaeontological and archaeological heritage is a non-renewable resource, that excavation is destructive; and thus that:
    - there should be a legitimate purpose behind every project;
    - projects that enhance interpretation should take priority;
  - at all times place the integrity of the heritage resources and the health, safety and welfare of the human community above any commitment to sectoral or private interests;
  - understand that professionalism implies that maximum use will be made of skills and knowledge, that each person will use his or her competence to the full; with honesty and integrity; will avoid all possible conflicts of interest as the profession is often judged by the performance of the individual;
  - strive to use the best possible methods, techniques and procedures;
  - give due credit for work done and ideas developed by colleagues or subordinates;
  - mentor less experienced colleagues and subordinates.

### ***Rights of Permit Holders***

- The permit holder may expect that:
  - where the research justifies this, the permit will be renewed for further periods, except where there has been bad practice or contravention of the Code of Ethics;
  - permits will not be given to other workers on the same site, while they are working there;
  - permitting authorities will be sensitive to the fact that research involves onerous fundraising, slow and painstaking recovery of material, and intensive and time-consuming sorting, analysis and curation and this will require flexibility concerning the needs of researchers in terms of time and access.

### ***Responsibilities of Permit Holders***

- The permit holder must:
  - enter into an agreement with a recognised museum or university department or accredited repository (that has an established archaeological or palaeontological archive and a *Collections Management Policy* approved by SAHRA) to store material after excavation, before applying for a permit from the HRA;
  - provide for the conservation and curation of all recovered objects and associated data records;
  - comply with regulations of the repository regarding curation and conservation;
  - keep full field notes with diagrams and descriptions detailing each stage of the excavation;
  - lodge copies of all field note books, surveying records, maps and photographic records with the repository;
  - comply with the conditions of the permit and submit reports in good time;
  - consult the relevant SAHRA *Guidelines* for policy relating to permits.

### ***Reports to SAHRA and PHRA***

- Permit holders must submit regular annual, interim or progress reports and a final report must usually be submitted within one year of the expiry of the permit (see relevant SAHRA *Guidelines* for details).
- These reports are considered to be confidential during the term of the permits, (although they may be made available with the consent of the authors), but they may be made available to other researchers three years after the permit, or the reporting period, has lapsed.
- In terms of the conditions of the permits, researchers and repositories are requested to note that copies of all publications, reports and theses relating to material acquired in terms of the permit, including work done by other researchers and later students, must be sent to SAHRA for the national heritage library.