IMPORTING OR EXPORTING HUMAN REMAINS OR ASHES

GENERAL INFORMATION
If you intend to bring human remains or ashes into or out of Australia, it may be helpful to contact a funeral director or a Customs broker to assist you with the process. Funeral directors and Customs brokers can be located through local telephone directories or via an internet search.

IMPORT
Generally, there is no need to make an import declaration when human remains or ashes are imported into Australia for cultural or religious ceremonies. However, an import declaration may be required if they are imported for other reasons (see ‘Commercial Acquisitions’). An import permit may also be required for human remains if they are not accompanied by official documentation (see ‘Documents Required for Importing Human Remains’).

If you intend to bring human remains or ashes into Australia you should also contact the Australian Embassy in the country from where the remains are to be exported from, prior to importation. The source country may have specific requirements or conditions associated with the movement or export of human remains or ashes.

EXPORT
There is no need to make an export declaration when human remains or ashes are exported from Australia for cultural or religious ceremonies.

If you intend to export human remains or ashes from Australia you should check with the embassy or health authority of the destination country regarding any requirements or conditions that may be in place. You should also consider if the remains fall under the category of Cultural Heritage (see ‘Moveable Cultural Heritage’).

HUMAN REMAINS
When imported human remains arrive in Australia they will be assessed and cleared by the Biosecurity area of the Department of Agriculture (Agriculture).

The person responsible for making the arrangements to import or export human remains should seek advice from the local health authorities regarding administrative processes and document requirements.

The consignee for imports of human remains must be:
- a licenced funeral director
- an entity approved for disposal of bodies, or
- a scientific institution which will undertake work such as an autopsy.

DOCUMENTS REQUIRED FOR IMPORTING HUMAN REMAINS
To arrange for Australian Customs and Border Protection Service (ACBPS) and Agriculture Biosecurity clearance for human remains, you or a representative will be required to provide a copy of the death certificate or an official register extract stating cause of death.

Human remains not accompanied by official documentation stating cause of death will require an import permit. If required, an import permit should be obtained prior to importation of the remains.

You or a representative may also be required to provide:
- full flight or shipping details of the destination including air waybill or bill of lading
- the name and address of the consignee
- the passport or the passport number of the deceased person
- contact details for the next of kin.

Regulation 8 of the Customs (Prohibited Exports) Regulation does not apply to human remains destined for interment or other religious or cultural ceremonies for the deceased to take place outside Australia.
HUMAN ASHES

There are no permit requirements for the importation of human ashes into Australia. However, the container used to hold the ashes should be free from contaminants such as soil. If you are carrying human ashes with you when travelling to Australia, you must also declare the human ashes to Agriculture Biosecurity on arrival in Australia.

If you plan to carry ashes with you, it is advisable to contact the airline or shipping line prior to travelling. Those organisations may have requirements to be met when human ashes are carried by a passenger.

If human ashes are imported:
- as or with unaccompanied person effects (UPEs), they will be cleared as your UPEs
- through international mail (post), the goods will be cleared without any declaration requirements and will be delivered by Australia Post
- as cargo (with a bill of lading), when necessary ACBPS will facilitate clearance without any declaration being required.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on human quarantine requirements contact the Department of Health on:
- email: enquiries@health.gov.au
- free call: 1800 020 103
- telephone: 02 6289 1555 (switchboard).

For further information regarding Agriculture Biosecurity requirements, including import permits for human remains, visit the Agriculture website or contact Agriculture on:
- email: biological@agriculture.gov.au
- telephone: 1800 020 504 or 02 6272 4578.

For further information on ACBPS matters:
- visit www.customs.gov.au
- email: information@customs.gov.au
- contact the Customs Information and Support Centre on 1300 363 263.

MOVABLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

Certain human remains may fall under the category of Cultural Heritage. Human remains of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent (including bark and log coffins used in ceremonial burial) cannot be exported. Other human remains that have been removed from their place of discovery for 50 years or more may require a permit to be exported.

For more information regarding Cultural Heritage requirements visit the Attorney-General’s Department Ministry for the Arts website.

COMMERCIAL ACQUISITIONS

Human remains (partial or complete) that are acquired commercially, for a commercial purpose or for a purpose other than cultural or religious ceremonies for the deceased, are subject to normal clearance requirements. The value of the goods will determine if a self-assessed clearance (SAC) declaration, an import declaration or export declaration is required. In some cases, permits may be required.

FEES AND CHARGES

An import processing charge will apply if an import declaration is required to be lodged with the ACBPS.

An Agriculture fee will apply to imports of human remains that require an import permit.