Ka Whai Take Ngā Taonga
Tuku Iho o Tāmaki Makaurau 2025

AUCKLAND'S HERITAGE COUNTS 2025

Auckland's Heritage Counts 2025 Annual Summary

Welcome to the 2025 edition of Auckland's Heritage Counts

Launched in 2018, Auckland's Heritage Counts was the first initiative in New Zealand to systematically gather data and research on the public value of heritage. Since its inception, a new report has been published each year. The aim of Auckland's Heritage Counts is to showcase the extent and variety of Auckland's heritage as well as the social, economic and environmental benefits Aucklanders gain from engagement with Auckland's heritage places. This edition features a poster of key statistics, new research on the adaptive reuse of heritage churches, and insights into international heritage management frameworks. **Dr David Bade**, Specialist – Heritage, Auckland Council

2,446 historic heritage places and **22** areas are protected in the Auckland Unitary Plan and the Hauraki Gulf Islands District Plan.

1,808 people have signed up to the quarterly Auckland Council Te Kāhu Heritage Newsletter. This is an increase of **12%** since 2017.

There were **21,856** visits to the Auckland Heritage website in 2024-25, this has **more than doubled** since 2016-17.

In 2024-25, **8%** of those who booked Auckland Council community centres and venues chose the venue specifically for its "heritage / historical value".

Between 2015 and 2025, there were over **4** million visits to heritage community centres and venues managed by Auckland Council.

Between 2015 and 2025, Auckland Council local board grants funded **179** heritage projects (totaling **$720,300**), while regional grants funded **175** projects (**$1,886,400**).

During the same time period, Foundation North funded **76** projects (**$3,703,300**) and Lotteries Grants funded **55** projects (**$12,767,300**).

7,167 people follow the Auckland Heritage Facebook page. This is an increase of **99%** since 2018.

2,175 people follow Auckland Heritage Instagram. This is an increase of **263%** since 2018.

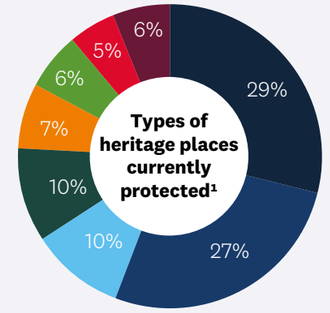
There are at least **60** heritage trails in Auckland, showcasing our local heritage.

There are at least **95** heritage societies in Auckland.

Nearly **4,200** Aucklanders are a member of Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga.

Thousands visit Auckland heritage attractions each year. In 2024-25, there were **770,987** visits to Auckland Museum (-20%*), **278,628** visits to MOTAT (+12%*), **155,778** visits Pah Homestead Art House Trust (+76%*), **86,949** visits to Glenbrook Vintage Railway, **31,573** visits to Howick Historical Village (-3%*), **7,033** visits to Alberton House (+13%*), **2,892** visits to Couldrey House (+4%*) and **2,734** visits to Mansion House at Kawau Island (-31%*).

*Percentage change since last year.



¹ This includes protected heritage places in both the Auckland Unitary Plan and the Hauraki Gulf Islands District Plan.

4 out of 5 Aucklanders live within **1 km** of a protected heritage place.

112 sites and places of significance to mana whenua protected in the Auckland Unitary Plan. **9** Māori heritage sites are protected in the Hauraki Gulf Islands District Plan.

Auckland has **1.37** protected heritage places per **1000** people. Auckland has **0.5** protected heritage places per square kilometre.

There are 1.37 protected heritage places per 1000 people in Auckland

There are 0.5 protected heritage places per square kilometre in Auckland

99.7% of all resource consents related to historic heritage were granted between 2016 and 2025. Applicants are encouraged to seek free advice from the Auckland Council Heritage Unit early in the process, and often proposals are modified after lodgement to ensure that positive heritage outcomes are achieved through the resource consent process.

The annual Auckland Heritage Festival had **125** events in 2022, attracting **23,655** people.

Research: The adaptive re-use of heritage churches in Auckland

This is a summary of a dissertation completed by Elisa A. Aguirre G., Master of Heritage Conservation, University of Auckland, 2025. Find the full report **here**.

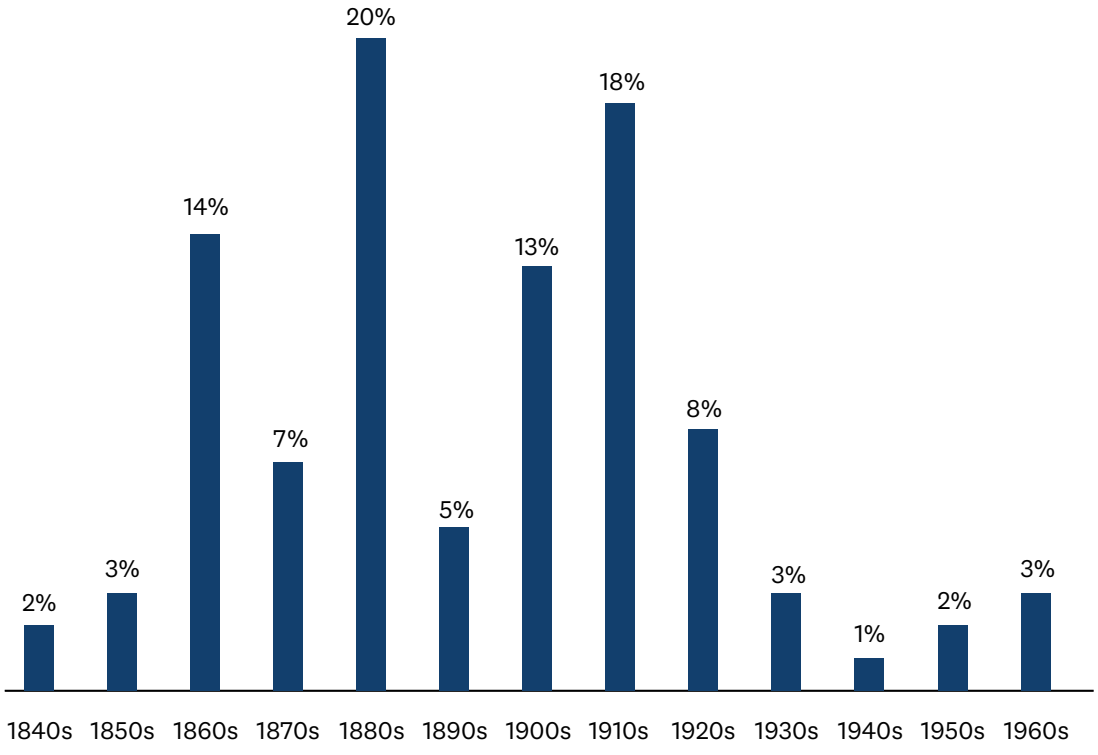
From the 1960s, New Zealand experienced a dramatic decline in the proportion of the population who were regularly attending Christian church services. Many of the churches which had been so central to early settler communities of the 19th and early 20th centuries struggled to maintain congregation numbers, and the ongoing maintenance costs of the buildings became unaffordable. Around 90 per cent of New Zealanders defined themselves as Christians in 1960. Forty years later, this dropped to around 60 per cent, and by the 2023 census, this proportion was around 32 per cent. As a result of this steady decline, many churches had to be sold, and a new use found.

In this context, this research aims to assess how successfully the adaptive reuses of scheduled historic heritage churches in Auckland have balanced heritage values with the requirements of their new use.

Scheduled churches

There are 146 Christian churches scheduled (protected) in the Historic Heritage Schedule of the Auckland Unitary Plan. As shown below, scheduled churches date mainly between the 1860s and the early 20th century.

When protected churches were built, by decade

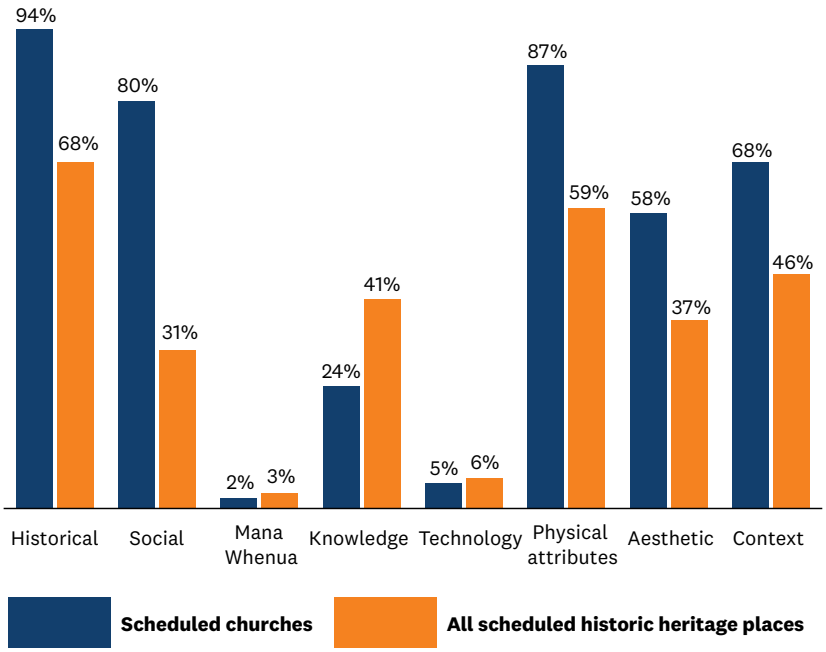


- **12%** are scheduled as category A places (outstanding overall significance)
- **15%** are scheduled as category A* places (an interim category of scheduling)
- **73%** are scheduled as category B places (considerable overall significance)

[1] *There are also other types of religious buildings not included in this number.*
[2] *Category A* is an interim category for heritage places that were protected under the legacy plans (some legacy plans did not have equivalent rules for category A and B scheduled places). These places will be re-evaluated to determine their category status.*

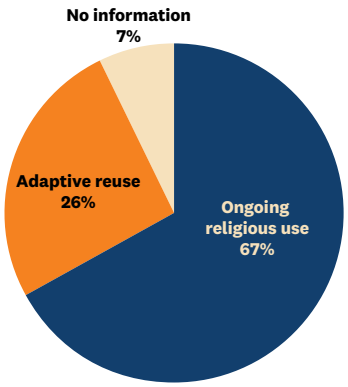
These churches have been typically protected for their values as a centre of communities in the late 19th century and early 20th century. They were often architecturally designed to be prominent landmarks in their local area. Scheduled churches are typically protected for their historic, social, and physical attributes values. As shown in the graph below, churches are much more likely to have social values than other types of heritage places.

Heritage values of churches, compared to all other historic heritage places



As shown in the graph below, most scheduled churches are still used for their original religious purpose, with just over a quarter having another use (adaptive reuse).

Current use of scheduled churches



Of the new uses:

- **27** places have a community use (such as music, religious, or other types of venues, museums, and daycares)
- **9** places have a residential use (with eight becoming single-family residences and one converted into multi-unit apartments)
- **2** places have a commercial use.

Adaptive re-use case studies:

Kohekohe Presbyterian Church

Kohekohe Presbyterian Church is located on 1189 Awhitu Road, in the southern part of the Auckland region. It is positioned in a rural coastal area, with its closest town being Waiuku, around a 10-minute drive away. It was scheduled as a category B historic heritage place in 2019. The church was described in its Historic Heritage Evaluation as having considerable historical significance as it "demonstrates the process and pattern of the spread of Presbyterianism throughout Southern Auckland," and exceptional aesthetic values as a visual landmark, where "the interrelationship between the church and its natural backdrop reinforces the strong picturesque qualities of both."

The Kohekohe Church opened on 14 November 1886. Besides being a place for worship, it was soon used for Sunday School, youth bible study, and temperance meetings. A few decades later, in 1923, the church became a worship centre for Methodists. However, church attendance dwindled. Kohekohe had been the district's main centre, but several factors shifted the population towards the south. As local families grew older and advances in farming technology made southern lands more productive, younger families began relocating, leaving behind only a sparse population.

In 1975, due to diminishing attendance, the Kohekohe Church was deconsecrated and sold. The building stayed in the hands of one family for about forty years and was sometimes used to store farm equipment. It became a wedding venue in 2013 after new owners restored it. This occasional rental use continued until the 2020s, at which point the building was bought by the Auckland-based Quartermain family, who began transforming it into a country retreat with the assistance of architect John Gardiner from Architext.

Image: The Kohekohe Church before its adaptive reuse. Temporary supports were placed to stabilise the building due to the imminent risk of collapse (Photograph courtesy of Guy Quartermain, April 2021).

Image: During the construction of the addition (photograph courtesy of Guy Quartermain, February 2024).

Rather than altering the main space, the design proposal involved an addition on the rear (western) side of the church. According to owner Guy Quartermain, they wanted to ensure the interior space remained almost intact and that the views and vistas were retained as much as possible.

Compatibility of the new use with the heritage values of the church was achieved by preserving the core spatial qualities of the church and locating the modern services in the additional structure, reducing the intervention on the building's original fabric. The building no longer functions as a community gathering space, however, overall, its historical and aesthetic heritage values were not significantly compromised. The public can continue to appreciate the building's aesthetic qualities, particularly through photography.

Image: How the Kohekohe church looks today. The addition at the rear is largely concealed from the road due to its smaller scale and strategic positioning (photograph courtesy of Guy Quartermain, 2025).

St. David's Church, Grafton

St. David's Church is located at 70 Khyber Pass Road, Grafton. In 2018, the church gained heritage status as a category A place due to its exceptional historical, social, physical attributes, and context values, as well as considerable knowledge, technology, and aesthetic values.

During World War I (WWI), over one hundred men connected to St. David's joined the forces, some losing their lives. That loss contributed to the church's decision to open a building fund to raise money for the construction of a new permanent church in 1920, to be dedicated to the soldiers as a memorial. The church was designed by architect Daniel Patterson and was unveiled in 1925.

By 2014, after being used for decades, the congregation had become so small that the church's high maintenance costs were deemed unjustifiable. Realising that the building had no heritage protection and could face demolition, the Friends of St. David's Trust, led by Paul Baragwanath, was founded to try to save the building. The group launched The Art of Remembrance fundraising project in 2015.

This campaign marked the centenary of WWI and raised more than $1 million, the largest amount ever raised through a charitable art project in New Zealand. It involved the installation and sale of 7,000 brass quatrefoils, gifted by artist Max Gimblett.

Image: Quatrefoils placed on the church during fundraising in 2015 (Photograph by Jessica Chloe Gernat, April 2015).

Image: The interior of St David's church today (Photograph by Jessica Chloe Gernat, 2025).

The group also campaigned for the scheduling of the church, commissioning multiple documents, including a business plan and a historic heritage assessment report. Following further professional assessments and significant public backing, St. David's Church gained category A heritage status in 2018. In 2021, the property was put on the market, prompting the Trust to propose transforming the former church into a centre for music. Baragwanath noted this new use would preserve its role as a community gathering space, take advantage of its acoustics to support local choir groups, and honour it as a living memorial. Additional fundraisers allowed the charitable trust to buy the former church and it was renamed Kāhui St. David's – Kāhui meaning 'the gathering' in Te Reo Māori. Today, the building's maintenance and expenses are entirely reliant on grants, donations, and venue bookings.

As part of the process to adapt the building to its new use as a centre for music and community, minimal changes were required, and no substantial work was done besides maintenance and repairs. The new use, however, required an improved and enlarged performance space, which was solved through the extension of the chancel dais (platform) and the careful installation of lighting fixtures in the roof trusses.

Minimal heritage values were compromised, and this new use has enhanced the heritage values by reinvigorating its public use. Above all, St. David's has kept its identity as a gathering place, reinforcing its social value and spirit of place.

St. James Church, Mount Eden

The former St. James Church is located at 31 Esplanade Road, in Mount Eden, one of Auckland's oldest suburbs. It was added to the heritage schedule in the 1990s as a category B place, which included both the exterior and the interior of the building. According to the building's Conservation Plan, the church's significance is attributed to being a representative example of an early 1900s neo-classical brick masonry building, its scale and prominence at a notable corner site, and for symbolising the suburb's transition from rural to residential. In terms of social value, the church had stood as a "symbol of community life," a role it had maintained as both a place of worship and a gathering place for over one hundred years.

The church was opened in 1900, replacing the original Mount Eden Congregational Church which had been built in 1885. It was designed by architects Mitchell and Watt.

In 1968, the Mount Eden Congregational Church merged with the Presbyterians of Beresford Street, who took over the building the following year and renamed it St. James Presbyterian Church. During the following decade, membership diminished, and in 1979, the building was handed over to a Cook Islands Presbyterian community. Later, the building was known as the Mount Eden Pacific Islanders Presbyterian Church.

By the 2010s, the church was showing signs of deterioration. Despite fundraising efforts, the parish was "unable to pay for major repairs, including earthquake strengthening," which led to the closing of the church and its offering for sale. A 2016 resource consent approved the conversion of St. James Church into four residential units, despite initial opposition from the Auckland Council Built Heritage Implementation Team. The project stalled, but in 2021, Gel Architects was approached by a new developer to redesign the four-unit project, with support from a large external consultant team.

Image: Interior work converting the church to four apartment units (Photographs courtesy of Gel Architects, September 2022).

The church has now been converted into four apartments. The much-needed seismic upgrade and restoration work have prevented the church's further decay after its vacancy. The loss of the church's interior wall linings, which are protected under the building's heritage scheduling, was mitigated by the minimal invasion of the new steel beams and ties. The vertical subdivision into three storeys, to allow each unit to have three bedrooms, meant the transformation of the original sloping floor into two different base floor heights, and the repositioning of its ceiling fretwork panels.

While the adaptive reuse of St. James Church has secured the building's long-term viability, the level of internal alteration has impacted its heritage integrity. The design approach has mitigated some impacts through thoughtful structural intervention and small alterations to exterior elements. However, the interior spatial qualities have been mostly lost, and therefore, the former church's sense of place has been altered. Despite efforts to preserve heritage fabric and achieve a balance with modern living requirements, the outcome cannot be considered a completely successful compatible reuse in terms of conserving heritage values. The building no longer functions as a community gathering space, nor does it retain the symbolic or social values once related to its role as a church. While the public can continue to appreciate its external architectural qualities, the adaptation represents a clear example of how intangible heritage values can be diminished, even when exterior physical preservation is effective.

Image: St James Church as it is today (Photographs by Elisa A. Aguirre G., May 2025)

Insights: An overview and comparative analysis of international heritage management frameworks

This insights summary was produced by Georgi Jovner (Policy Planner).

Background

The purpose of this research project was to explore how historic heritage management is regulated in New Zealand and five other jurisdictions: Australia, the United Kingdom (UK), the Republic of Ireland, Canada, and the United States of America (USA), to inform policy development in New Zealand, particularly reforms to the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA).

The motivation for this research came from the release of a cabinet paper titled "Replacing the Resource Management Act 1991". The cabinet paper outlined the principles guiding the reforms to the RMA, notably suggesting that historic heritage management could be more effectively addressed through dedicated policy interventions, separate from the resource management planning and consenting process.

The project was developed in collaboration with the Ministry for Culture and Heritage and Auckland Council and undertaken through a summer heritage internship in Auckland Council's Heritage Policy team. This project aimed to explore and contrast the regulatory frameworks for heritage conservation across the selected jurisdictions, including: who regulates the system, the different tiers of regulation for different significance levels, and whether regulation is integrated within planning or environmental legislation or part of a separate heritage regulatory regime. The research was a desk-top study that involved a documentary analysis of key legal and planning documents, including national and local legislation, planning schemes, codes, by-laws, and ordinances.

Comparative analysis

A comparative analysis of historic heritage management frameworks across New Zealand, Australia, the UK, the Republic of Ireland, Canada, and the USA reveals various conservation strategies with some common aspects and distinct variations. It is evident that there is a shared commitment to conserving historic heritage, however, the specific mechanisms, governance structures and philosophical underpinnings vary between the different jurisdictions.

[7] *Cabinet paper: Replacing the Resource Management Act 1991, Office of the Minister Responsible for RMA Reform, dated 22 October 2024, https://environment.govt.nz/assets/publications/Cabinet-papers-briefings-and-minutes/MfE-Proactive-Release-Replacing-the-RMA.pdf*

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Table comparing New Zealand's historic heritage management system with five other jurisdictions*

KEY:
- feature is present in the historic heritage system
- feature is partly present in the historic heritage system
- feature is not present in the historic heritage system
- N/A feature is not relevant to the historic heritage system

*I wish to acknowledge Greg Mason, Senior Policy Advisor, Ministry for Culture and Heritage, who helped develop this table.

	New Zealand	Australia (VIC, NSW, OLD, WA, SA, TAS, NT, ACT)	United Kingdom (ENG, SCO, WAL, NI)	Republic of Ireland	Canada (NL, PE, NS, NB, QC, ON, MB, SK, AB, BC, YT, NT, NU)	United States of America (CA, AR, NY, AK, HI)
Primary Legislation	• Resource Management Act 1991 • Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014 (HNZPTA)	• Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999 • State/Territory Heritage & Planning Acts	• National level Heritage Acts • Country specific heritage and planning Acts	• Historic and Archaeological Heritage and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023 • Planning and Development Act 2024	• Specific federal acts • Provincial/Territorial Heritage Acts	• National Historic Preservation Act • State Heritage Acts (varies) • Local ordinances
Responsible Bodies	• Local authorities • Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga (HNZPT)	• Australian Heritage Council • State/Territory Heritage agencies • Local authorities	• Historic England • Historic Scotland • Cadw (Wales) • Northern Ireland Environment Agency • Local authorities	• Heritage Council • Local authorities	• Parks Canada • Provincial/Territorial agencies • Local authorities	• National Park Service • State Historic Preservation Officers • Local authorities
Historic heritage protection is provided for in planning legislation	Heritage protection is a matter of national importance under the RMA	Heritage protection is provided for in state planning legislation that local authorities implement	Through country-specific planning legislation, including planning legislation specifically for listed buildings & conservation areas	Through the national Planning and Development Act 2024	Varies between province and territory, but consideration of heritage protection in planning legislation is present	Varies between state, but it can be provided through local planning legislation laws
Local authorities are the main decision-makers for heritage protection	Local authorities develop and implement plans which include provisions to protect historic heritage	Australian Govt regulates commonwealth/national-level protection; State Govt regulates State-level protection; local authorities regulate local-level protection	Protection is addressed in plans which are implemented by local authorities; Historic England decides on works affecting scheduled archaeological sites	Protection is addressed in plans which are implemented by local authorities; Ireland's Govt decides on works affecting archaeological sites	Only provincial and territorial governments have jurisdiction over private property, including for heritage protection	Only local governments have jurisdiction over private property, including for heritage protection
Statutory national direction guides local authority heritage protection	No national direction (such as a national policy statement)	Australian Heritage Strategy 2015 (non-statutory); some States have detailed statutory planning direction, including outcomes, objectives & methods for heritage (e.g., VIC, SA)	England & Wales have detailed statutory planning direction for heritage; Scotland has detailed statutory & non-statutory direction	National Planning Framework 2040 (statutory) includes high-level objectives & outcomes for heritage; Heritage Ireland 2030 (non-statutory)	Govt-owned heritage must comply with 'Standards & Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places'; for other owners' compliance is voluntary	The National Parks Service provides standards and guidelines for historic preservation, but their regulatory power varies. While some are mandatory, especially programs like the NPS Grants-in-Aid, others serve as guidance.

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	New Zealand (With RMA)	Australia (VIC, NSW, OLD, WA, SA, TAS, NT, ACT)	United Kingdom (ENG, SCO, WAL, NI)	Republic of Ireland	Canada (NL, PE, NS, NB, QC, ON, MB, SK, AB, BC, YT, NT, NU)	United States of America (CA, AR, NY, AK, HI)
National heritage organisations also have a statutory role in the heritage protection system	HNZPT operates under the HNZPTA and has advisory, identification, regulatory (for archaeological sites), & funding functions	National and State/Territory level agencies and Heritage Councils have statutory functions (advisory, identification and regulatory)	Historic England, Historic Environment Scotland, Cadw (Wales) have statutory functions (advisory, identification &/or regulatory)	Ireland's Heritage Council has statutory functions (advisory, education & funding); no identification or regulatory role	Historic Sites & Monuments Board of Canada has limited statutory functions (advisory & identification); no regulatory role	National Park Service have statutory functions, regulatory role is restricted to Federal land.
Legislation distinguishes between heritage having national and regional / local significance	The HNZPTA provides for National Historic Landmarks; the HNZPTA List & RMA do not distinguish between national, regional or local significance	Heritage can be identified for its national, State/Territory or local significance; different legislation and registers exist for each level	Legislation provides for nationally significant 'scheduled monuments' & 'listed buildings'; local authorities can identify locally significant heritage	No clear distinction is made in legislation between nationally and locally significant heritage	Legislation provides for nationally significant heritage; provinces & territories can identify provincially and locally significant heritage	Legislation provides for a National Register of Historic Resources, State Registers and local register, but registers can contain all levels of significance.
Listing by national/ state/territory agency provides protection	Listing under HNZPTA does not provide protection (local plans provides protections)	Listing on National or State/Territory register does generally provide protection	Listing does automatically provide protection	Listing does generally provide protection	Federal listing only provides honorary recognition. Province/ Territory and local listing usually provides protection.	National Register listing is primarily honorary (local designation provides protection)
Separate legislation addresses protection of indigenous historic heritage	There is no legislation specifically for Māori place-based cultural heritage	Many States have bespoke legislation for protecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage	N/A	N/A	There is no legislation specifically for indigenous (Inuit, Métis & First Nations') historic heritage places	National legislation provides for the protection of Native American Graves but does not provide protection for other forms of indigenous historic heritage places.

Discussion

New Zealand's system, centred around the RMA, integrates heritage primarily within the planning process, granting local councils the responsibility for regulation and protection. Whereas the national heritage body HNZPT provides guidance and oversees the regulatory process for archaeology. Australia's federated system means they employ a three-tiered system, providing regulatory responsibility to federal, state/territory and local governments. Federal regulation is provided through environmental legislation, state/territory regulation is provided through heritage legislation, while local regulation is directed by state/territory planning legislation. Heritage Councils and local planning authorities are the main governance and regulatory bodies within this system. The UK and the Republic of Ireland, similar to New Zealand, showcase a strong integration of heritage regulation into planning, supplemented by specific heritage legislation. The USA delegates regulatory power to local governments, allowing for the establishment of historic heritage ordinances and zoning laws. Federal and state responsibilities mainly revolve around grants and tax relief. In contrast, Canada primarily utilises provincial/territorial heritage legislation for the regulation of protection of historic heritage. It regulates provincial/territorial significant heritage places and directs local government on the regulation of locally significant heritage places.

Key findings include the consistent and significant role of local government in heritage management across all jurisdictions. The statutory weight of heritage lists emerged as a difference between the jurisdictions. In New Zealand and the USA, national listings are largely symbolic. National designation in Canada is similarly only honorary, whereas in Australia, the UK and the Republic of Ireland, national lists generally provide statutory protection. Additionally, the comparison revealed that while New Zealand's regulatory framework offers a streamlined regulatory landscape where heritage protection is consolidated within planning frameworks, it does lack consistency in the approach taken by local authorities. This approach has the benefit of flexibility to reflect the values of the local community but, at a national level, can undermine confidence in the heritage protection system. New Zealand's system also lacks some of the robust protection mechanisms found in other jurisdictions, such as stop work and maintenance/repair orders.

The research concludes that the integration of heritage regulation within planning legislation offers benefits such as holistic assessment and streamlined processes. However, a separate heritage regime can provide enhanced national standardisation and protection for national historic heritage places. The decision to integrate or separate heritage regulation requires an informed, careful evaluation of potential benefits and costs, the balance between national consistency and local flexibility, private property rights and the public good. Overall, this research project provides a foundational overview and comparative analysis of historic heritage management frameworks across the selected jurisdictions.

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Front cover: World War I Memorial Beacon, Quay Street, Auckland Central (Category B historic heritage place, ID 02727). Built in December 1915, the monument symbolised a beacon of hope and a safe return home of the New Zealand forces. It also served as a functioning light guiding ferries to the city wharves. (Photograph: © Rachel Ford, Heritage Unit, Auckland Council, 2025)

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