



### A86 Forensic Anthropology Down Under: Reflections on the Development and Practice of Forensic Anthropology in Australia

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**Learning Overview:** After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the context in which forensic anthropology is practiced in Australia.

**Impact on the Forensic Science Community:** This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing an improved understanding of the political and geographical context in which forensic anthropology is practiced and researched in Australia, and how such practice and research fits into the global development and advancement of the discipline.

This presentation provides an overview of the development and current practice of forensic anthropology in Australia. Similar to the development of forensic anthropology in many countries, the growth of forensic anthropology in Australia over the past century is closely linked to the history of anatomy and physical anthropology. Although relatively slow to develop, forensic anthropology is now a well-established discipline and is seen as complimentary, rather than supplementary, to forensic medical investigations.

There are currently six professionally endorsed forensic anthropologists covering the six states of Australia. These anthropologists form the Forensic Anthropology Scientific Working Group (FA SWG), which is the professional body of forensic anthropology practitioners in Australia as endorsed by National Institute of Forensic Science. Under the FA SWG, national guidelines for forensic anthropology practice have been established. The various contexts in which Australian forensic anthropologists contribute to medicolegal cases are diverse and involve collaboration with other forensic medical specialists and law enforcement personnel. Such contexts include: locating and recovering human remains; examining domestic cases of skeletonized remains; consulting with pathologists on complex cases of skeletal trauma; contributing to the development of a national missing persons database; working with Indigenous communities for repatriation and reconciliation; working with the Australian Army to recover and identify Australian war dead; recovering and identifying human remains in national and international Disaster Victim Identification situations, and undertaking deployments for international humanitarian organizations, especially for the neighboring Asia-Pacific region, but also the larger global context.

Although Australia has a professionally recognized body of forensic anthropologists, there is no formal accreditation process currently available to Australian anthropologists that is like accreditation processes in North and South America and Europe. The issue of accreditation is currently being reviewed to ensure Australian forensic anthropologists are on par with their international colleagues.

Research in forensic anthropology has significantly expanded over the past 20 years with the development of new resources that allow anthropologists to address relevant questions both in the Australian and international contexts, as well as in associated forensic medical disciplines (e.g., odontology and entomology). These resources comprise clinical radiograph and computed tomography collections within the country's major hospitals; the postmortem computed tomography collection (Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine); the Australian Facility for Taphonomic and Experimental Research (University of Technology Sydney), and the School of Biomedical Sciences Skeletal Collection (University of Queensland). These resources have enabled substantial advancement in the development of population-specific standards for the modern Australian population, have strengthened current understandings of trauma analysis and interpretation, and have also facilitated additional work on estimations of the postmortem interval.

The development of these resources for research has also contributed to a substantial increase in undergraduate and post-graduate student enrollments across all Australian states and territories, with universities increasingly offering forensic anthropology as a specialization within formal anthropology and biological science studies. This increase in students has also recently seen the development of the first master's degree specifically in forensic anthropology (University Of Western Australia) in Australia.

The influence of geography, and therefore the political context, in which forensic anthropologists work in Australia reflects the nature of the anthropologists' involvement in medicolegal cases. This involvement, and subsequent development of the discipline, shows both similarities and differences to how forensic anthropology is practiced across the globe.

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#### Forensic Anthropology, Australia, Context