

## SUBMISSION TO PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION INQUIRY

### CONSERVATION OF AUSTRALIAN HISTORIC

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- 1 This brief submission makes four principal points
  - a. there is a need to move towards a more strategic approach to heritage conservation in Australia, with explicit prioritisation and a wider range of financial and other incentives.
  - b. the principal source of attrition of heritage arises from poor development control at the local government level, because municipalities lack the expertise and powers to deal with issues as they arise.
  - c. there is a need for more research and experimentation via pilot projects to gauge the effectiveness of a range of financial and other initiatives aimed to encourage and support conservation. It is more a matter of strategic deployment of scarce resources than rescuing threatened sites or artefacts.
  - d. conservation partnerships should be encouraged, but if a strategic approach is to occur, coordination at the Commonwealth- State interface is essential.
  
- 2 Historic heritage conservation is a complex field, involving contestable criteria, valuation problems and significant issues about the availability and deployment of scarce financial resources. A large proportion of the public fail to understand the vital role heritage conservation plays in shaping national identity and there is limited comprehension of the scarcity and value of aboriginal culture.
  
- 3 Heritage policy in Australia remains in its initial phases. Stage 1 was The AHC Act 1975, which resulted in the Register of the National Estate, an attempt to identify and collate lists of places and artefacts [buildings] of heritage significance. There were many errors and omissions which have subsequently been partially corrected. Stage 2 purports to be more discriminating in character, but primarily

is an attempt to shift the financial burden from the Commonwealth to the States and local level. The essential Stage 3 is to develop a more strategic and integrated approach involving explicit prioritisation and a wider range of fiscal and other measures to improve cost-effectiveness. While partnership is an important aim, the reality is that a substantial role remains for the public sector to coordinate and fund much of this work. Elaborate bureaucracies of the kind evident in the land management and resource sector should be avoided. Much of the initial groundwork can be achieved by limited term taskforces involving expertise at State-Commonwealth levels. The need at local government levels is more about strengthened development controls and capacity to call- in State authority when needed.

- 4 Heritage experts sometimes tend to regard all sites of equal value, since each is distinctive in character and there may be pressure from a range of interests to prevent each site being lost by creeping attrition. However ravages of time and scarcity of funding means we cannot save all; thus there is a need for reasonably independent experts to engage in prioritisation which will engender some heated debate.  
The end result will be thematic lists of needs, capacity to safeguard and scale of funding required to provide more cost effective conservation.
- 5 Widespread debate has occurred about the spectrum of financial and other incentives which might be adopted in heritage conservation, but insofar as I am aware , very little experimentation or pilot projects to test feasibility and effectiveness. There is a need for action rather than words, so seeding funds may be needed.
- 6 I have not examined the impact of property values and other factors, but consider these matters also require investigation.
- 7 My views may be regarded as simplistic because they are briefly stated, however they arise from considerable experience within government and academe as the outline cv indicates. I commend The Productivity Commission for carrying out the Inquiry.

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