

Comments on Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage Places – Productivity Commission Issues Paper.

I am writing with comments on conserving heritage places based on my experience as the owner of Bendigo Pottery which has the site, buildings and kilns listed on Victoria's Heritage Register. The comments pertain to privately owned significant heritage places which provide access to the public to be appreciated.

Bendigo Pottery is Australia's oldest working pottery, was established on the current site in 1864, and has operated continuously since then. We have been fortunate to receive funding under Regional Tourism Program in 2001 to assist in the establishment of an Interpretive Museum and funding under the Cultural Heritage Projects Program in 2003 to assist in the preservation of the heritage kilns which were in urgent need of repair.

The availability of Government Grants for private owners of significant heritage places to undertake conservation works to preserve heritage assets for future generations is critical to encourage and enable the works to be carried out. Conservation works are often required and undertaken to ensure heritage structures will survive another 100 years into the future. Over the long term it is cost effective to undertake the preservation works at an early stage before deterioration results in a requirement for major works which will cost a lot more and compromise the integrity of the structure through the necessity of substantial rebuilding. When deterioration is allowed to continue the end result is often that the repairs are not worthwhile and the structure is then left to decay and be managed as a ruin.

However the problem for small business private owners is that there is no short or medium term economic return for making these repairs which are often very costly. I would strongly recommend the CHPP grant scheme be retained and continue to be made accessible to privately owned heritage properties.

The 'Hands on Heritage' program is a valuable program which successfully serves several purposes but is not available to privately owned businesses. Bendigo Pottery had several programs that the local Hands on Heritage team were very keen to be involved in as there was office type work sorting out and cataloguing old records that would then provide information that researchers could use. This provided a type of work that was not readily available in their program and a benefit for the community. There was no potential financial gain for the business and yet the project could not go ahead as it was in the rules that this program could not apply to private business. The result is the records still sit in boxes and there is no access to the information dating back over 100 years.

The rules for the Hands on Heritage program and programs like it should be revised to include private business as long as there is no commercial gain to the business. This would enable heritage projects to be completed at minimal cost while providing training and experience for unemployed people and generating an interest in heritage.

I am happy to elaborate on any of the above points if required.

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