

27th July 2005

Mr Neil Byron and Mr Tony Hinton

Commissioners

Australian Government Productivity Commission

Re: Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage Places

Dear Sirs

My name is Caroline Shepard and I am a member of Brighton Residents for Urban Protection (BRUP) and responsible for heritage matters within this association.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a presentation for this important hearing.

In my opinion it is imperative that the Commonwealth Government make available significantly greater Funding for the ongoing protection for identified historic heritage places and for further studies to identify and give protection to previously overlooked but nevertheless important historic stock.

Furthermore greater funding for education at all levels of society, that is: – primary, and secondary schools, adult education and focus groups etc. on the importance of preserving the built form in Australia.

There is also a need for further research into the positive benefits for preserving and protecting historically important places. This will result in a positive

outcome both economically and socially, as has been the case in overseas countries like England.

The Significance of Conservation of Australia's Historic Built Heritage Places

It cannot be overstated the importance of the Commonwealth Government having a policy framework in place for the ongoing protection of historic heritage places.

It is not a matter of just looking at the economic, social and environmental benefits and costs for the present time, but taking a much broader and long sighted view of the almost untapped tourism potential we have here in Australia, which needs to be harnessed and promoted.

Despite losses we still have a treasury of under promoted 19th century architecture extant and later periods which in the fullness of time will prove to be a wonderful promotional asset for tourism, if used correctly.

Melbourne in particular was the greatest example of 19th century architecture in the world, as well as Buenos Aires.

South Australia and Tasmania still have the most cohesive examples of early Victorian built fabric, which needs not only careful management and protection but excellent promotion for potential tourists, this is particularly important in their capital cities.

Overseas visitors have remarked to me, on many occasions that they are looking for our history here. Indeed when we were travelling through Europe last year we met a

German couple who remarked, that they would like to visit Australia in the

future and asked which cities they should see — their criteria being old buildings and not interested in high-rise.

As I am sure you are fully aware, the majority of tourists overseas are vitally interested in the history and in particular the built history of the countries they visit.

For example Britain, France, Italy and cities Prague, Brussels and Dresden etc. spring to mind as places promoted for their historic value, because they realized how important tourism is for their economy, as well as pride in their long history. In particular Dresden emphasises and amplifies this point as the city was completely destroyed during the Second World War, but was re-built. The Frauenkirche which was reduced to a pile of rubble has laboriously and painstakingly been re-built to the original plans at great cost and is now almost complete and a tourist icon.

I refer to page 3 of the Productivity Commission Issues Paper, May 2005.

Heading: Scope of the Inquiry

I will attempt to answer each point that has been raised.

*1. The main pressures on conservation of historic heritage places are -
development driven by greed and financial gain.*

2. The economic, social and environmental benefits and costs of the conservation of historic heritage places in Australia. In my view, you cannot measure cultural gain in financial terms. Talk of benefits and costs reduces

argument to the base line of an economic rationalist, has little place in the conservation of historic heritage places:

For example:

* Frauenkirche - Dresden - as discussed previously.

* Fire in the Great Hall at Windsor Castle -- did they stand outside and say

what is the economic benefit?

*Grand Central Station in New York. This building was in threat of demolition, but due to the championing of Jacqueline Onassis Kennedy, this extraordinary building was not only saved but was totally restored according to the original plans.

Jackie Onassis Kennedy said at the time and I quote: "Those who forget the past look forward to an uncertain future."

3. Commonwealth should set the example without fear from self interested development groups and begin with a blanket policy over all Australia, to conserve and protect places, areas and sites of natural, indigenous and historic importance.

Often these features overlap or are inter-dependent and should not necessarily be individually graded so some may be kept but some may be lost, but the whole historic picture of our combined past should be considered as a composite whole.

The loss of one feature affects the aspect of the whole surrounding landscape. The States should implement the policies set down by the Commonwealth on

these guidelines and should not be allowed to introduce their own agenda in conflict with the Commonwealth's heritage guidelines. For example, Victorian State Government's Melbourne 2030 Policy encourages medium to high density development which threatens heritage properties on larger allotments.

Local Councils trying to conserve and protect sites of historic heritage importance are continually frustrated by having their decisions overturned by the Victorian Civil and Appeals Tribunal (VCAT) an arm of government policy. Government should set an example in conservation of their own heritage properties and other heritage owners should be obliged to sympathetically maintain their properties. Change of use should be strenuously resisted and when change of ownership occurs the new owner must be made abundantly aware of their obligations.

4. There should be some tax relief where an owner outsources appropriate materials for an historic building instead of using a cheaper, inappropriate alternative. Sky-rocketing land tax in Victoria is threatening historic commercial places on larger blocks of land.

5. I am not qualified to assess all this. It is almost a study in itself. In my view however, the government should send an appropriate person to England where they seem to have their act together and despite an area much smaller than ours and 3-4 times the population, strike a great balance between all these trends, also resisting urban sprawl and providing a wonderful

delineation between towns and countryside. Though England is at the cutting edge of the technological age it is not at the detriment of their historical past of which they are very much aware. The economic value of their historic heritage places to the economy is huge, yet it is interwoven with their demographic needs, their environmental protection and social trends that we would do well to emulate.

6. The policy is simple:

To conserve and protect all places of historical significance whether natural, indigenous or built since European occupation.

Identification and listing of all these places should be encouraged throughout Australia.

Indigenous groups should be listened to for they are more in tune with their environment.

State heritage bodies and various State National Trusts should be given more teeth to conserve heritage places and resist inappropriate development, instead of being a lame voice crying into the wind.

When you talk of "competing objectives" and "interests", nearly always a competing objective is driven solely by greed and material gain, a quick short term profit then move on into obscurity having destroyed an heritage site which is now lost forever. Similarly, "interests" means "self interest" with little or no respect for heritage issues.

About this Inquiry - page 5 of Issues Paper

Question 1

What is the rationale for government involvement in historic heritage conservation and what principles should guide that involvement?

I am surprised that this inquiry has to address the rationale for government involvement etc.

I would have thought it mandatory on successive governments to protect our environment - natural, indigenous and built. After all, parliaments are transitory and charged with protection of the State while in office and to pass it on. The parliament is our custodian.

Are not records kept of Births, Marriages and Deaths, military history, titles, law proceedings etc. for future generations to know.

The environment, including historic heritage places are exactly the same and therefore incumbent of the government to act responsibly.

Question 2

Too much policy relies on local government. Its strengths are local knowledge but its weakness is local government has not enough clout and is easily overruled by State and Federal bodies.

Question 3

Current pressures come from greed and profit while emerging trends are urban consolidation and change of use.

As I have said before, despatch someone, or some people urgently to England and Europe. Not only have they struck a wonderful balance between the needs of a modern society and conservation of historic heritage places but they have turned it around to a huge economic benefit in the form of tourism which ultimately benefits the good of all.

In my view this would be what the Commonwealth of Australia needs – that is - for the good of the common wealth for all Australians to enjoy.

So send your envoy to Prague, Dresden and Brussels en route to England as *soon* as possible.

Page 6. Recognition

There are architectural historians out there waiting for a call to identify historic places and you can collate all the information from State Heritage Registers, National Trusts, local governments, environmental groups, indigenous communities and local government.

There is a need for a comprehensive survey of historic heritage places in Australia.

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information already gathered should be collated and gaps should be filled in by heritage architects.

In answer to the question on page 9:

"Is there a need for a comprehensive survey of historic places in Australia? If so, who should fund such a study and how would its findings be used? "

There is an acute and urgent need for a comprehensive survey of historic places within Australia. This is highlighted by the statistics already stated in this Issues Paper regarding how many buildings have been lost, due to destruction or loss of heritage values.

In regard to funding, it is an obligation of Federal, State and Local Governments to set aside sufficient funds to protect our natural and historic built environment for all Australia's inhabitants for now and the future, the benefits would be immeasurable.

This is absolutely fundamental and acutely important at the grassroots level of the whole heritage protection story.

The findings would be used to assess, protect, promote and indeed be the very springboard by which all policy, legislation etc. would be implemented for the very protection of Australia's historic built form.

Page 9 - Assessing the Policy Framework

Concerning market failures - in my view market failures occur when you allow conservation of historic fabric to be destroyed and lost forever, significantly impacting and affecting adversely the historic ambience of the area.

Market failures occur when you destroy or deface the heritage value of a precinct or building which then loses its consumer/tourist appeal, for example - the wonderful Melbourne G.P.O. is now a bland shopping complex and struggling commercially.

To what extent does historic heritage conservation generate benefits for the community?

There are a great number of benefits to the community through conservation of built heritage.

For instance:

- Sense of place.
- Tangible evidence of early built history.
- Connection with ancestors and their way of life.
- Appreciation of an earlier architecture and different building methods and designs.

How do these community-based benefits compare to the personal benefits which owners of heritage places would receive through conservation?

In my case - living in a building which is a 117 years old is a great joy and a privilege.

The personal benefits are a sense of direct connection with this area's early settlers. A further dimension is the enrichment of researching the two previous owners' history and their lives and their contribution to education in schools at the local level etc.

I feel personally that we — that is all of us are only custodians of these important buildings and how we treated them when they were in our care will be judged by future generations, this will be the legacy that we will leave behind. I would also be comforted to know that this house was protected from demolition when I am no longer its owner.

To create history for this great country of ours we need to preserve history.

The highly respected expert on Victorian buildings - Suzanne Forge, wrote in her book "Victorian Splendour" of 1981 and I quote: "Once one begins to depart from the known qualities of the original, then the work can only be described as recreation or renovation. Restoration should be done scrupulously well and with the greatest sensitivity and accuracy. This leads to the question of what should be restored, recreated, reconstructed or renovated in a house. Lack of understanding and sympathy for Victorian houses, particularly in the past twenty years, has resulted in some brutish treatments of houses, carried out in the name of improvements. Architecturally ruthless people and opportunists have massacred battalions of Victorian houses and left only a handful of innocent survivors intact. It is time we took stock of the rapidly diminishing resources of our Victorian

houses. It is also time we did something to respect the integrity and character of those that survive."

I would finally like to address changing attitudes towards historic buildings, which is pertinent to this inquiry.

About twenty years ago the Brighton bathing boxes at Dendy Street beach were in dire threat of demolition. Due to the effects of a few Brighton residents who fought hard for their retention, we have today an easily recognisable and rare remnant of bathing habits of the 19th century.

These brightly coloured buildings are known worldwide and as such a tourist attraction.

When they occasionally come on the market for sale they command very high prices.

Summary

- Commonwealth Government to implement an Australia wide survey for the identification, protection and promotion of historic heritage buildings and places.
- Tax relief and incentives for approved restoration work to owners of historic houses and places.
- Greater funding by the Commonwealth and State governments for heritage related issues.
- The National Trust to be given greater powers and funding.

- Send appropriate delegates to England to find out how they deal with conservation matters regarding heritage expeditiously.
- Education programmes for the promotion of the benefits of conservation of Australia's heritage places.
- Discourage facadism.
- Education of members of tribunals such as VCAT as to the importance of protection and intactness for heritage affected applications.

Thank you

Caroline Shepard

