

CASTLE HILL HISTORIC SITE

COMMUNITY COMMITTEE

INITIATED BY THE ROTARY CLUB OF CASTLE HILL INC. IN 1989

CHAIRMAN
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PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION HISTORIC HERITAGE PLACES INQUIRY

SUPPLEMENTARY SUBMISSION

by the

Castle Hill Historic Site Community Committee

February 23, 2006

As a result of our Committee's presentation and submission to the Inquiry's Sydney hearing on January 31, 2006, and the Commissioners' discussion with our Chairman and Presenter, Mr David Sommerlad, the Castle Hill Historic Site Community Committee (HSCC) submits the following comments for the consideration of the Inquiry:

Register of Sites

The Committee is strongly opposed to the proposed phasing out of the Register of the National Estate and the placing of most places on State registers (as well as local).

Assuming there was a Federal Register for iconic sites and everything else of significance was placed only on State registers, an understanding of degrees of significance would be lost. Many significant places would appear devalued and others of lesser significance would appear upgraded.

The main purpose of Registers of Sites should be to convey to the public some idea of the relative importance and significance of places in the context of their history, location, architecture, happening, rarity etc. Basic responsibility for places should remain with State Governments as they control land use and development but the Australian Government should retain its legislation on the "status list" – not the responsibility for, except maybe some icons – of historic heritage places to provide public guidance on an historical value scale for residents and visitors interested in gaining some understanding of the nation's origins, growth and diverse development.

Example: Castle Hill Historic Site – a large government penal farm (1801-10), first asylum (1812-29) and launching base for the Great North Road to the Hunter in the mid-1820s, thus convict occupied for 30 years – is most significant as the site of Australia's largest rebellion (1804) immediately followed by what has become known as the "Battle" of Vinegar Hill. This event and its ramifications rocked the colonial population of barely 6,000 and influenced its administration and activities for nearly 20 years.

The site of 20ha was dedicated by the Australian Government in 1975 for preservation in perpetuity as a public heritage park, was placed on the Register of the National Estate and subsequently on the State and National Trust registers. (It is currently being “developed” by its custodian, Baulkham Hills Shire Council, under a Master Plan of Management with significant convict interpretation).

This site today is not, as yet, well known to the wider public although its significance is monumental in a national historical context to the extent that the Australian Government bestowed on it special protection. This underlines the necessity for a National Estate list as well as state lists.

Suggestions of a National and a Commonwealth List introduce confusion to the system, particularly as the word “Commonwealth” is vaguely understood in Australia. Apart from the Commonwealth of Australia – rarely used – the public relates “Commonwealth” to the (British) Commonwealth of Nations, not to Australia alone. Our suggestion is to “leave Commonwealth alone”.

Funding Historic Heritage Places

Funding for heritage places should be the responsibility of the Australian, State, Territory and Local Governments, organisations, companies, foundations, the public and private citizens. Depending on the significance of the place, the urgency, location, historical value, context and public interest, NOT the government or party political importance, funding support should be made available by a government, a government partnership or a combination of all or some of the involved or interested parties to ensure preservation, continued use or appropriate development. **Any opting out by the Australian Government** – the nation’s primary tax-gatherer – could not be countenanced under any circumstances. Rather, it should become more involved as the nation grows, places become older and others join the ranks of those with historic heritage significance.

Public (or private) interest and support for historic heritage should be an influencing factor in fund attraction but some places of historic value should become a government responsibility irrespective. Viability of government-owned places is a factor for consideration but not a determining factor for many places. Efforts should be made, however, to enable government-owned places to be as viable as possible.

Historic heritage places can only exist if governments take heritage seriously, especially in Australia, and travel overseas provides obvious evidence of the economic as well as the cultural value of preserving and fostering historic heritage as a national asset worthy of investment.

D J Sommerlad

for and on behalf of the Castle Hill Historic Site Community Committee.

