

Dear Commissioners,

I am writing to you to express my concern primarily about the management of properties listed on the Commonwealth Heritage List and believe that the Heritage Inquiry would be an appropriate forum.

I would have liked to have made an oral submission to your recent hearing in Hobart but was in the northern part of Tasmania on the day the hearing was being held.

I have volunteered for a number of community organisations such the Tasmanian Conservation Trust and Lighthouses of Australia Inc (in relation cultural heritage projects) and I would like to acknowledge that the TCT has received funds (NEGP and CHPP) from the Australian Government. Support we were naturally very grateful to receive. I say this because I would not want to be perceived as writing this letter as someone embittered from not receiving requested funding.

In recent years federal politicians have been increasingly appealing for more nationalism, patriotism and pride in the Australian values but on the other hand, a decidedly stingy attitude still persists with regard to the funding of the physical symbols (the built heritage) of the nation is concerned.

The Australian Government should do much more than simply stick a few of the more portable elements of our culture into museums. Preserving our cultural heritage in situ receives very inadequate portion of the available funding.

The Federal Government is responsible for a large number of heritage structures in Australia but the lower levels of government as well as private sector are required to maintain and look after even bigger number of heritage buildings.

With a number of heritage assets like lighthouses being returned back to the state governments during the last twenty years, the federal government have substantially reduced its financial obligations to maintain them. With this trend continuing, it seems that now, with fewer properties to be responsible for, we should expect exemplary standard of performance from the Australian Government in looking after the heritage properties that are still left under its control. Unfortunately, that is not the case. From my own experience, the attitude prevails that if the responsibility for maintaining the buildings can be shifted to some other body, it would be done.

When the management of the historical object involves multiple issues or tenures (for example a lightstation containing the lighthouse tower and the associated keepers cottages, store rooms and other buildings) the government's policy seems to be to restrict its involvement only to the portion it owns or controls, even though the site calls for integrated management.

The classic examples are former lightstation properties that are presently on the Commonwealth Heritage List. Where the Australian Government used to own these stations, in the eighties or nineties they were returned to the state governments. In some cases where the light is still operating and needed for navigational purposes, Australian Maritime Safety Authority leases back the tower and only a small portion of the surrounding land, just enough to land a helicopter for maintenance.

One could be excused for thinking that a listing on the Commonwealth Heritage List would include all the relevant cultural features of the lightstation like residences, outbuildings, stables, tracks and grave sites as well as the tower and its related equipment. In fact, the listing on the Commonwealth heritage list means only the tower. In many cases this excludes most of the built fabric of the lightstation. I recently contacted the Australian Government about a number of lightstation properties on the Commonwealth Heritage List, offering my help with the production of management plan for those properties.

The response was very disappointing: The plans were to be only a desktop exercise and did not even involve anyone visiting the sites. Also, they were for the towers only and would not deal with any other issues. This response gave me the impression that the management plans were not going to be produced in a comprehensive fashion at all. Restricting these management plans to the towers only and leaving all the other elements of the management of lightstation aside is impractical; and fails to capture the heritage values of these places.

One example is Goose Island. Its graveyard contains the bodies of keepers who died in a boating accident while they were employees of the Commonwealth Lighthouse Service. These grave sites could do with some long overdue maintenance, except the Commonwealth management plan for Goose Island does not include their management. Surely, dealing respectfully with the graves of men who died while serving the Commonwealth should be a key part of the management plan and their maintenance funded by the Australian Government.

In a similar case, when I recently sent a copy of a letter of complaint to AMSA (the original went to Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service) where I expressed my disappointment with the state of the lighthouse reserve at Cape Wickham on King Island, AMSA were good enough to respond, but again, the letter stated that they were only responsible for the tower. There are a few vandalized buildings at Cape Wickham and the site of them only encourages further vandalism. The tower itself was even attacked by vandals, with its door being nearly smashed open. A further example of what a nonsense it would be to write a management plan for the tower without including the overall aspect of the site.

I ask the Australian government to undertake joint management plans for the lightstation properties in cooperation with the state governments. That way, a listing on the Commonwealth Heritage List would have a real impact on preserving our valuable historic sites.

Yours sincerely
Christian Bell
683 Nelson Rd Mt Nelson, 7007
Tasmania
Email marine@keypoint.com.au