

Christian Heritage Australia
25 Cobbadah Avenue,
Pennant Hills NSW 2120
15th February 2006

Australian Government Productivity Commission
Locked Bag 2, Collins Street,
EAST MELBOURNE VICTORIA 8003

Attention : Commissioners Messrs
Neil Byron & Tony Hinton

Dear Sirs,

Re: **CONSERVATION OF HISTORIC HERITAGE PLACES**

Please accept my apology for this late submission. I regret that I was not aware to the Productivity Commission investigation of this matter until early this year. My recent total hip replacement operation late in November last year and the Christmas season disrupted my life in recent months. Thankfully my health is recovering satisfactorily and I am to make a contribution on this matter for which I have a strong commitment.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Christian Heritage Australia is a registered business. The business has an extensive collection of church photographs, booklets and books on Australian church denominations, church buildings and their congregations from places all round Australia. This information has been collected over a 10 year period.

I hope to past on my research to a dedicated museum for the exhibition of Christian heritage and associated religious art works. At present the information is used to prepare heritage articles, slide presentations, booklets and postcards.

The business seeks to generate an interest in our Christian heritage and promote awareness of the contribution various church denominations have made to the local community and our National heritage generally.

Director - Darryl Allen (Submission author) is a retired Architect. He worked for 15 years in various private architectural practices and 24 years as a Design architect with the NSW Department of Housing. (formerly Housing Commission of NSW).

Qualifications: Bachelor of Architecture (Hons) and a Post Graduate Diploma in Public Sector Management.

A BRIEF NOTE ON SOME CRITICAL CHURCH HERITAGE ISSUES

MAIN CONCERN - RURAL CHURCHES

There are an increasing number of small rural areas which have only a small number of faithful members barely able to maintain their church buildings. Many rural churches have been sold and converted to houses or commercial use.

Many small towns and villages have at least three or four church buildings, usually an Anglican (formerly Church of England), Catholic, Uniting (formerly a Presbyterian or Methodist) and sometimes a continuing Presbyterian.

Such buildings are of significant historical value to their local area. Generally the buildings were financed and built by local people. They attended services in church on Sundays, their children attended school in the church or church hall during the week, were baptized, married and attended funeral services.

In the early years the church community was the centre of social life where various social functions were held including, concerts, music recitals, dances and plays. Sporting clubs and the community generally used the facilities to hold their meetings and organize social events

Too often when touring around the countryside you find a small village or locality where the old church building is the only building of architectural significance left standing. In such localities there are too few local people physically able, have access to or are willing maintain such a worthwhile structure. In years to come such buildings will be a pile of rubble. Left as the a "gravestone" the mark the spot where a pioneering community struggled to raise their families.

There is an urgent need to collect information on past and present churches, particularly in the rural area, before older members of the congregations and/or their descendents past on. Often local the records of rural churches are discarded with little thought of their historical significance. Church leaders of many denominations are usually transitory and have little time or interest in preserving historical information because of other demands.

CHURCHES IN LARGER TOWNS & CITIES

The larger towns and cities generally face different challenge, than their rural counterparts. The impact of the motor vehicle and the mobility such transport gives today's church members greater opportunity to be selective in choosing a place of worship. Some congregations have grown substantially to provide a

wide range of programs. Such churches attract more people, particularly the young people who seek new friendships and a broader range of activities. Some congregations are barely able to support a full-time pastor or priest.

In the early days of suburban living churches served localized areas because few people could afford the luxury of a motor car. In some older inner areas of Sydney a church denomination may have several church buildings. These buildings are usually built of brick or stone with finely detailed carpentry works. The craftsman's skills and cost of repairing and maintaining these buildings can be beyond the financial means of smaller congregations. Such a surplus of church buildings of fine architectural merit are a rich heritage legacy but present a substantial financial burden to their owners..

Recent building regulations have added to the financial burden, particularly in regard to Occupational Health and Safety, disabled access requirements, car parking and a host of others not to mention the increasing cost of public liability, building and contents insurance.

In a multicultural society it is increasingly important for generations of all Australians to be reminded of our past so they can appreciate why the present is what it is today and why certain older buildings are of particular significance.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROTECTING HERITAGE

The following recommendations focus on the continued process of gathering information with the aim of encouraging community participation and commitment. Also to identify urgent needs, assist future planning, improve management and help to develop implementation strategies for financing remedial work.

THE PROCESS

- 1. Encourage and financially assist Church denominations to establish a database of their properties to include the following, where possible:**
 - Church history (published or unpublished) Historic dates such as the foundation stone dedication date, completion date.
 - Date of alterations & additions including a brief description
 - Description of the building, including materials, structure & overall dimensions).

- Copies of architectural drawings, if available.
 - Selection of photographs including external, internal, artwork including stain glass windows, organs.
 - Copies of the lists of registered births and marriages
- 2. Review current guidelines used in each state for identifying items of particular heritage significance with the aim of establishing a national guideline for church authorities.**
- The establishment of a national guideline would have a short term benefit in identifying all the parties currently involved or who would be effected.
 - The long term benefit would be the establishment of a centralized data base for continued appraisal nationally for establishing the financial management of our national heritage at all levels of Government.
- 3. Encourage and financially reward local Historical Societies who submit information to a national data base on church buildings and other heritage matters.**
- Local historical societies could provide a brief outline of the information they have available including the location and description of property they use for storing such items and the extent of their voluntary support. This information would establish the extent of heritage information not already known to the general community and similar organisations.
 - Federal Government could consider offering a number of grants each year to assist local Historical Societies prepare exhibitions to promote their voluntary activities within their community. This would encourage community interest in their local heritage and hopefully reap more voluntary local support.
 - The longer term benefit would be the promotion of tourism through local heritage exhibitions and publication of articles on heritage in tourist brochures and national magazines.

- 4. Invite local government supported libraries and private collectors of heritage data to submit information on the extent of their heritage records similar to the recommendation for local historical societies mentioned above.**

- 5. Review the current extent of assistance provided at all levels of government to church authorities for heritage work, including the extent of past grants to churches for building work.**
 - The aim of this recommendation is to identify the extent of the church buildings worthy of heritage consideration, particularly in the country Local Government Areas. Although this work may have been carried out several years ago by Local Governments a further review would seem worthwhile to identify urgent needs, update and identify items not satisfactorily researched.
 - Continued public participation is recommended similar to that provided by the current Productivity Commission.

- 6. Identify and prepare guidelines on recommended procedures for recording historical information on buildings of medium to high heritage value which are, or likely to be, surplus to requirements.**
 - Where there is an unrealistic expectation of conservation and restoration there needs to be a process of culling and a formal acceptance of the deletion of some heritage items.

- 7. Federal Government to establish a funding process to assist each State Local Government peak body to:**
 - Establish guidelines for Local Council heritage evaluations.
 - Prepare draft guidelines for Local Council officers and heritage property owners. The guideline to provide information on the rights and responsibilities of all involved in the negotiation process.
 - Prepare guidelines for prospective owners of properties outlining preferred options for preserving the historical fabric of their heritage listed building and long term management of maintenance and use. The guideline would outline the historical significance of the existing building. Also outline the extent of acceptable reuse and the type of upgrading work that would not be acceptable.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE OPTIONS

The following is a list of suggested options for providing financial assistance to heritage property owners to offset the additional cost of maintenance, conversions, extensions, preparation of heritage reports and specialist consultant fees.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT OPTIONS

Rates concession
Waive DA fees
Concession on heritage requirements

STATE GOVERNMENT OPTIONS

Expansion of State Grants program
Reimburse specialist consultancy fees
Preparation of Heritage studies at no cost
Reduced water and Electricity rates
Continued support from State Heritage office
Waive Land Tax
Waive Stamp Duty

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Extension of Grant assistance through a defined percentage allowance of GST income
Waive GST on building materials, white goods and labour costs associated with repairs, extensions and conversions of heritage listed properties.
No Capital Gains Tax even when the property is not owner occupied.

Implementation of all the above would minimize the degree of financial, emotional and administrative burden associated with heritage properties. Such financial assistance would be an incentive for prospective owners to take on the extra cost, inconvenience and responsibilities of owning a heritage listed property.

The general community should not begrudge supporting our heritage. Preservation of our heritage is a contribution to the community and everyone in the community benefits. Historic buildings also attract tourist, provide a welcomed relief from the often bland functionality of modern buildings and have an emotional impact reminding us of the past and early events in our lifetime.

GENERAL COMMENT

I would like to see greater participation of heritage property owners in the heritage listing process. Preferably this process should begin at the earliest stages and continue through all stages of the heritage listing process. Greater consideration should be given to the personal impact on the owners in terms of their expectations of the future use of the property and the anticipated financial loss and ongoing constraints.

There should be greater concessionary considerations in terms of the extent that owners are allowed to carry out future work, particularly in regard to the internal fitting out of bathrooms and kitchens. In most cases these areas would not be accessible to the public.

It seems that the property owner affected by heritage listing seems are often a victim. I say "a victim" because they seem receive very little, if any, financial assistance and suffer extensive emotional stress and grief with little support from anyone outside their immediate family. I would like to see established a non-partisan government financed council of three to five part-time appointed persons. Initially this would be an advisory panel to guide heritage property owners and help them to work through the negotiation processes. Where a likely injustice has occurred the advisory panel could champion their cause. Government financial assistance to heritage property owners in relation to providing heritage professional services and other professional advice must be a consideration.

There should be a sympathetic resolution of conflict in the heritage negotiation process. Restoring a historic building to its original state completely could be the exception. Carefully considered compromised outcomes with due consideration for present day comforts in kitchens and bathroom areas would seem a reasonable outcome.

HERITAGE PROMOTION

I am pleased that the Government continue to be focused in raising awareness of our heritage, particularly in our schools, with an ongoing support through Tourist Centres, public exhibitions in museums and media generally.

Many organizations are making heritage information more assessable on a website.

I would like to see more incentives provided to community groups who desire to take on a heritage project such as the purchase and restoration of a disused church building for public use.

CONCLUDING COMMENT

I must say I find a walk around older buildings with their display of craftsmanship and artistic detail a delight. Such carefully considered design gives me a sense of comfort that at least some of the efforts of past generations have been recognized as a worthwhile contribution to the future.

The preservation of heritage buildings reminds us that at least some of the efforts and sacrifices made by past generations, and hopefully our generation, may survive to be appreciated by future generations.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute and providing access to information on your website.

I congratulate you and others involved in the process and thank you for conducting the review with professionalism, enthusiasm, patience and sensitivity.

I will be sending copies of some church photographs shortly, for general interest and to illustrate some of the aspects mentioned herein.

Yours sincerely,

Darryl Allen.