

# **INQUIRY INTO THE POLICY FRAMEWORK AND INCENTIVES FOR THE CONSERVATION OF AUSTRALIA'S HISTORIC BUILT HERITAGE PLACES**

## **Productivity Commission 2005**

*Submission by the City of Mitcham, 131 Belair Road Torrens Park, South Australia*

The City of Mitcham is committed to heritage conservation as one of the key themes which form the basis for Council decision making. The conservation of heritage places is reflected through Council policies, and through Council Strategic Plan: *Mitcham 2030 >> Building Tomorrow's Mitcham Today*

Within the City of Mitcham there are 26 places listed on the State Heritage Register, and 123 included in the Mitcham (City) Development Plan as Local Heritage Places. Further, there are over 1200 places within the Colonel Light Gardens State Heritage Area which are in themselves, by definition, State Heritage Places.

Some of Council's recent initiatives over the last 7 years relating to the conservation of our built Heritage include the following:

- the introduction of a State Heritage Area over the garden suburb of Colonel Light Gardens (in partnership with the South Australian State Government)
- the adoption of the Colonel Light Gardens Conservation Management Plan as a guide for Council projects and maintenance in the suburb
- the adoption of the Mitcham Village Management Plan as a guide for Council projects and maintenance in the historic township of Mitcham
- the introduction of a heritage advisory service which provides heritage advice to Council and the community concerning the maintenance and development of heritage places and areas
- the introduction of a heritage restorative fund which provides financial assistance to persons undertaking approved heritage conservation projects
- undertaking a Local Heritage Plan Amendment Report to introduce over 200 additional Local Heritage Places and an Historic (Conservation) Zone at Belair (to complement the existing zone at Mitcham) to our Development Plan

Council has recently flagged an intention to double the funds in the heritage restorative fund to \$50 000 per annum. This would be in addition to the carry over of unused funds from the previous financial year in order to maximise funds available for grants to the heritage community. This Council decision reflects our

view that a strong heritage grant scheme is an important part of the package of incentives and initiatives which can be undertaken at the Local Government level.

The City of Mitcham is also of the view that a number of other things should be provided for over the 3 levels of government in Australia. These would include but not be limited to:

- direct funding through grants (owners of heritage places and not for profit heritage organisations)
- waiving of relevant fees
- the guarantee of insurance for heritage places at no cost greater than for non-heritage places
- technical assistance
- government partnerships with private providers of labour/materials/expertise/finance etc
- incentives for developers which sensitively adapt buildings to new uses rather than demolish buildings for replacement (financial or transferable development rights)

It is our view that financial assistance for heritage projects should be increased at the State and Commonwealth level. When combined, there should be an adequate increasing of resources for all levels of heritage places in Australia (that is, national, state and local places - or equivalents). Ideally, such an increase in resources would comprise a range of initiatives.

When particularly viewed in the light of what the Commonwealth could achieve, this package should include the following:

- programs providing direct grants for approved heritage conservation projects to places or areas
- grants to State and Local Government for the same purpose
- an increase of the range of organisations which are able to receive tax deductible donations of cash
- the introduction of the ability for approved heritage organisations to receive property on a tax beneficial basis
- the re-introduction of a tax rebate scheme for persons or organisations undertaking heritage conservation projects

Again, it is stressed, that the above initiatives should not be restricted to any form of heritage place.

Amendments to taxation law which confer taxation benefits to organisations (whether permanent or temporary) would be consistent to the approach, as it is understood, taken to environmental organisations and cultural organisations. In

this regard, It is our view that the advancement of heritage conservation should be considered as important as the advancement of culture and the environment.

Our submission is made in the context of the firm view that the protection of our heritage is critical and should be considered as a 'non-negotiable' in the context of the advancement of our cities and regional areas. It is also made in the context of our view that heritage conservation is a shared community benefit and a shared responsibility between government and private individuals, and that government should be increasing its commitment to heritage conservation in order to fulfill its obligation to its shared responsibility.