

Scanned copy of original submission

13 February 2006

Heritage Inquiry
Productivity Commission
PO Box 80
Belconnen ACT 2616

Dear Sir/Madam

Productivity Commission Draft Report - Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage Places

Thank you for providing the City of West Torrens with the opportunity to consider and provide comments on the draft report - Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage.

The City of West Torrens considered this matter at its meeting held on 7 February 2006. At that time the Council determined that it would forward a submission to the Commission for consideration.

The report is very comprehensive and experience of Council staff would endorse the finding that Historic Heritage Places do provide important cultural benefits to the wider community.

For this reason, the Council contends that Australia's Historic Heritage requires protection in the interests of the public good.

Notwithstanding the Council also acknowledges that there is a question of equity in relation to the protection of heritage, that being the need to balance the issue of the public good with the rights and obligations placed on an owner of a building identified as of heritage significance.

Whilst in many cases listing is seen to bring with it additional obligations and cost for the owner, it is also worth noting, that listing an historic heritage place does not necessarily have negative impacts upon buildings owners and in some circumstances can actually improve the value of the private asset.

Most Councils in South Australia take the role of heritage conservation very seriously and understand the need to ensure a balance between public and private interests. Accordingly many are now seeking to support the listing of heritage items with the introduce of heritage incentive funds or similar to assist the owners of listed buildings with maintenance and upgrade works integral to the fabric and heritage of the building thereby offsetting what might be perceived to be the negative impact of such listings. Indeed the administration of the City of West Torrens has commenced the background work to enable the establishment of such a fund. This is occurring in tandem with the production of a policy amendment in relation to heritage.

The Commission's main finding as reported in the draft report, being that listing should only occur in instances where an agreement can be negotiated with an owner, is considered to be an alternative method of addressing the issue of equity. However, this Council would contend that it moves the pendulum in the opposite direction. That is, whilst it will certainly provide additional leverage to private owners it will ultimately jeopardise the long term conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage.

The basis for this position is local State experience which has seen both low levels of buildings identified for conservation and the loss of prominent buildings under voluntary schemes.

As with all matters of the public good regulation unfortunately is often needed. The Council would contend therefore that a regulatory system supported by some form of "compensation" would more ably and equitably provide for the conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage Places.

Should you wish to clarify this submission or obtain additional detail, please contact Group Manager City Development by telephone on (08) 8416 6249.

Yours sincerely

Chief Executive Officer