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The Commissioners
Heritage Inquiry
Productivity Commission
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Conservation of Historic Heritage Places

Background

Hay Shire Council is a small rural council in south-western NSW. There are many historic heritage buildings in the town constructed in the second half of the 1880s. Two of these buildings that this council has responsibility for are;

- The Hay Gaol
- The Bishop's Lodge

The Hay Gaol was established in 1878 and has been used as a gaol, maternity hospital, lock-down hospital for the insane, compound for prisoners of war (Japanese and Italian) during the Second World War and finally as a maximum security institute for girls under the Child Welfare Department. This last use ceased in 1974.

Bishop's Lodge is a magnificent iron building constructed as the residence of the Anglican Bishop of Riverina in 1889. Features of the building are the advanced technology used in the design and construction to offset the harsh climate of the area and the original 1889 paintwork on the exterior iron walls.

This background is provided to give some understanding of the basis for the following comments.

The main pressures on the conservation of historic heritage places.

The main obstacle in conserving these heritage buildings is the lack of adequate funding available for this purpose. The depressed farming sector as a consequence of the protracted drought that continues unabated means that Council is under extreme financial pressure simply to maintain its core services at the most basic of levels. Under such circumstances and taking account of the small population base, large number of historic sites and many competing demands on the Council's funding, it is not surprising that inadequate funding is available at the local level to maintain these historic heritage places.

A consequence of the lack of financial resources is the heavy reliance that must be placed on volunteers to make a significant contribution to the maintenance of the

buildings. Both the facilities mentioned earlier are managed and maintained by management committees comprising local volunteers.

It is impracticable situation, but one for which there seems to be little alternative under the current circumstances. By and large, these volunteers do not have the personal skills, time, experience and expertise to professionally conserve heritage buildings. The volunteers tend to be older citizens with limited ability to perform heavy physical tasks.

The economic, social and environmental benefits and costs of the conservation of historic heritage places in Australia.

These historic heritage buildings contribute to the cultural and social identity and development of the town and the region.

They have a vital role in educating school children in the history of this area and rural and remote Australia generally.

They make an important contribution to the local economy through their attraction and appeal to tourists.

The presence of historic heritage places in Hay is a contributing factor in efforts to build a stronger and more diversified local economy, reducing the reliance on the farming sector which is facing enormous challenges and uncertainty.

If these buildings were being conserved at the level that they deserve, the real cost would be the resources that would need to be diverted from the other essential services that Council provides. Adequate resources are not being, and cannot be, provided for conservation at the local level, so the real cost is the gradual demise of the historic heritage places.

In monetary terms, hundreds of thousands of dollars could be devoted to the conservation of these two buildings without being extravagant or inefficient.

The current relative roles and contributions to the conservation of historic heritage places of governments, heritage owners, community groups and other relevant stakeholders.

Council has actively empowered, educated and encouraged local residents to contribute to the conservation of the heritage places. The forced reliance on volunteers is so imposing as to produce a threat of burn out and/or revolution.

The significance of the examples of historic heritage places referred to earlier is such that the responsibility for their upkeep and maintenance should not be solely assigned to the local community. Unfortunately there is not ongoing support from the other levels of government to assist with this demanding task.

It appears that only those historic heritage places which are regarded as having state or national significance are provided financial assistance with the recurrent costs associated with their conservation.

The positive and/or negative impacts of regulatory, taxation and institutional arrangements on the conservation of historic heritage places and other impediments and incentives that affect outcomes.

These arrangements have a neutral impact on Council-owned historic heritage places.

Emerging technological, economic, demographic, environmental and social trends that offer potential new approaches to the conservation of historic heritage places.

I am unaware of any emerging trends that offer potential new approaches to the conservation of historic heritage places.

Possible policy and program approaches for managing the conservation of historic heritage places and competing objectives and interests.

Perhaps there needs to be a register of all historic heritage places with a rating that indicates the significance afforded them and the level of assistance that will be provided by governments (state and/or federal) with their conservation. This would allow the owners some certainty in determining the extent, if any, of resources to be provided to the conservation of the places.

The governments need to be willing to acknowledge the importance of historic heritage places in rural and remote Australia and to demonstrate that importance by the provision of commensurate support.

There should be a clear understanding of the criteria that historic heritage places need to satisfy in order to qualify for government assistance with their conservation.

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