



RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION REPORT

To: Whom it May Concern

I write as the co-ordinator of the Hunter Heritage Network and on behalf of our members, who are professionals in the heritage and planning arenas.

We would like to congratulate the Commission on their comprehensive survey of such a wide ranging scope of issues in the current system and its workings.

Whilst we recognize the value of the survey we reject the core finding that Australia should move to a voluntary system through which to manage its heritage items. We do not believe that the destruction of the existing system is the best resolution for any problems that may currently exist.

There are programs that could be introduced that would have enormous positive impact on how our early architectural history is managed.

We would highly recommend the establishment of a structured training program as well as a cohesive strategy with an enquiry specifically on the heritage trades and their future. This should include the mentoring of tradespeople. We have already initiated discussions with TAFE to this end. This follows confirmation from our members that there is a significant lack of qualified tradespeople to undertake specialized work.

We understand the future outlook for skilled trades-people is worrying in the sense that there may be in some areas a total absence of even conventional trades such as carpenters and joiners.

We also suggest that Commonwealth and State government should assist local government to set heritage listing and funding priorities. We reject the Commissions finding that Statements of significance should be put into the statutory instrument - this is not the place for such statements as they are constantly changing whereas an LEP can only be amended via an amending instrument.

We find that the criticisms of local government heritage management are in the main reasonable however the deregulation solutions proposed are not seen as acceptable. There is little if any acknowledgement shown of the enormity of the task before these authorities that bear responsibility for 80% of the heritage in Australia.

There is a lack of understanding of the heritage system by members of the public and this should be resolved by “education” and more effective incentives, not the removal of the legislative safeguards that are in place to correct market failure in the care of the built environment.

It is only an ill informed person who would not realize that heritage listing is an advantage rather than the opposite. There will naturally always be cases where an owner of a heritage item has self-interest at heart rather than the wellbeing of the item. Nobody is obliged to purchase a heritage item. Those that do must accept that ownership comes with a certain responsibility and appreciate that heritage, like other planning issues, must be managed in the context of planning assessment.

There is a need to raise the profile of heritage listing, demonstrating that this is the only way in which an owner may access government funding for essential works. Such assistance alleviates the burden of the cost of maintaining a heritage item. What other property owners are able to get finance (albeit in the form of a type of loan) to repair the roof for example?

We applaud the idea put forward by Henly Cox (a member of our Network) regarding a lottery system. The establishment of a National Lottery, as exists in the United Kingdom, is an excellent way for Government to finance the cost of running a heritage assistance program. Other options are to redistribute taxation revenue or earmark funds from the full sale of Telstra to a Cultural Heritage Trust, comparable to the Natural Heritage Trust.

SYNOPSIS OF OUR SUGGESTIONS AS TO THE WAY FORWARD

- 1) Establish a structured training program as well as a cohesive strategy with an enquiry specifically on the heritage trades and their future. This should include the mentoring of tradespeople. Our Network would be happy to work with TAFE in this regard with some appropriate funding. We have access to additional funding from elsewhere.
- 2) Design a marketing campaign to raise the profile of heritage listing, demonstrating that this is the only way in which an owner may access government funding for essential works.

- 3) Establish a National Lottery, using the module that has been so successful in the United Kingdom.
- 4) Redistribute taxation revenue or earmark funds from the full sale of Telstra to a Cultural Heritage Trust, comparable to the Natural Heritage Trust.

Australia is fortunate to have a formidable collection of heritage items. It must not be placed at risk by the destruction of a system that has taken decades to form. Rather, improve the present system.

Thank you for the opportunity of responding to the Inquiry. We hope that these comments are helpful in your final report to government.

Yours faithfully
YVONNE MAULE
COORDINATOR HUNTER HERITAGE NETWORK