

A Second Presentation by

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To

**The Inquiry into the Policy Framework
And Incentives for the Conservation
Of Australia's Historic Built
Heritage Places**

Conducted By

The Productivity Commission

**Australian Government
Belconnen ACT**

31st January 2006

Introduction

Good morning.

My name is John Boyd. My wife Jan and I are the joint owners of our home at 400 Mona Vale Road, St. Ives in Sydney.

Our home was one of the homes built in the first Pettit and Sevitt display village in Ku-ring-gai in the early 1960s.

I made a presentation to your earlier enquiry in August last year, detailing the four encounters we have had with heritage over the years.

At this time our home remains unlisted, but I believe that unless things change the threat of listing still hangs over our head like the proverbial sword of Damocles. And all the downsides that listing would bring, including a loss in value of some \$120,000, all sorts of restrictions on any future alterations, and increased difficulty in selling our home should we wish to.

I thank you for the opportunity to make another presentation today.

We have studied your draft report on the Conservation of Historic Heritage Places with great interest and are heartened by your findings and proposals for changes to existing rules and regulations. It is good to see that at last there is some official recognition of the almost indiscriminate way that many homes have been listed, and of the negative effects that listing can have on private owners.

Your step by step examination of the current methods of identifying heritage has revealed so many faults that we cannot help but wonder if many of the houses which have been listed at Local Government level should ever have appeared on a heritage list.

For example, in NSW, as you point out, a house would only need to achieve a moderate rating in **one** of seven criteria to achieve local listing, after which its legal status is identical to one which rated exceptional in six or seven criteria.

On this basis, it is a wonder that half of Sydney has not already been heritage listed!

Architects and Heritage

I would like to speak for a moment about architects and heritage.

On 17th June last year the Royal Australian Institute of Architects wrote to the NSW Heritage Office setting out details and rankings of significance of Post War Project Home Centres and Estates (copy attached).

The Pettit and Sevitt display village where we live was given first ranking; a later Pettit and Sevitt display village at Staddon Close St. Ives was given second.

In all, the Architects nominated a total of 14 Display Villages involving about 145 homes, and it appears that the NSW Heritage Office is currently assessing their significance (see "Daily Telegraph" news item and editorial of 7th November attached).

We understand that all of these homes were designed by architects.

We can only assume that these 145 homes comprise a wish list for future heritage listing. And under the present arrangements, why not? Every one of those houses could be heritage listed at no cost to the community or to their local councils.

And it is likely that every one of those homes would suffer a loss in market value which, under present arrangements, would be borne by the owners.

Let us assume, for the moment, that the average decrease in market value is \$100,000 per home. That would amount to a total loss of \$14,500,000 for the 145 homes, and for the 145 owners.

How different it would be if your proposals are adopted!

What a scurry there would be if the various local government councils had to find that \$14,500,000! And what an outcry from the rate-payers that their money was being spent in that way!

I put it to you that there would be a sudden change in priorities, and an urgent reappraisal of just what was worth listing and what was not.

But there is something else that needs to be said about the architects and their wish list, and the influence these architect-designed project homes are supposed to have had on the so-called Sydney School of Architecture.

The simple fact is that these homes **do not** represent the majority of the homes built in the 1960s. In “The Australian Home Beautiful” in October 1965 Mr. Robin Boyd, a highly respected architect, stated that these architect-designed project homes represented perhaps only one per cent of the total number of homes being built.

So is the move to heritage list our six sad, lonely houses on Richmond Avenue St. Ives, and all those other 139 houses nominated in the architects’ list, because of their overwhelming influence on the development of Sydney housing?

We think not.

More likely to honour the names of their architects and the project home firms that built them.

Virtual Recording

You mention this in your report, but are inclined to think that it is not likely to be an acceptable substitute for physical conservation of historic heritage places.

But nevertheless it has a number of advantages. It would cost a great deal less to record the details and history of a group of homes, or indeed of a single home, than it would to actually heritage list them if the owners are to be paid full compensation for the loss in value.

And virtual records would not be subject to damage or loss by bush-fire, white ants, rust, or general deterioration. Nor would they prevent the owners getting on with their lives and making whatever alterations or additions they wished to.

Your Key Recommendation

Your key recommendation was that “Privately-owned properties should be included on a National, State, Territory, or local government statutory heritage list only after a negotiated conservation agreement has been entered into and should remain listed only while an agreement is in force”

This recommendation is hardly likely to be welcomed by the National Trust, The Royal Australian Institute of Architects, Docomomo Australia, and any others pushing for heritage listing. Up till now they have had almost open slather; suddenly they, and the local government bodies they use as their instruments, would have to actually consider the real cost of their proposals – and meet them.

And I suspect that in my own case, if Ku-ring-gai Council itself had to meet the \$120,000 that heritage listing would take off the value of my home, there would be a sudden reappraisal of the need to list it at all.

And serious consideration as to whether Council would be getting value for its money, especially in the face of a possible outcry from ratepayers at the waste of their money.

Negotiated Conservation Agreements

Let me say that from a property owner's point of view, such a negotiated conservation agreement should not be lightly entered into. As well as a loss in property value, heritage listing does mean all sorts of restrictions on what changes may or may not be permitted in the future. And it's made worse by the fact that there doesn't seem to be any definitive set of rules that set out what would or would not be acceptable.

For example, one of my neighbours in an already heritage listed home sought Council approval to fit a tilt-a door to the double carport. Permission was refused. When asked why, Council's inspecting officer replied "Because I don't like it".

So any conservation agreement entered into by a property owner would need to spell out clearly what future alterations would or would not be acceptable.

Conclusion

We must congratulate you and your team for the comprehensive, detailed and exhaustive examination you have conducted on all aspects of heritage and its implementation at Federal, State and Local Government levels.

We agree completely with your proposed new methodology in determining what should and should not be heritage listed. The idea of a contract system negotiated prior to a property being placed on the register is excellent. And re-negotiation of the agreement from time to time will allow for changes in community values.

In addition, the need for councils to pay compensation in many instances will add an air of reality to the whole heritage process.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you.

We look forward to your final report, and even more to the implementation of your proposals!

Thank you.