

## Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage Places

I consider that heritage conservation in South Australia is in crisis and that the 'National Hobby of Demolition' identified by Jeans and Spearritt in 1980 in relation to New South Wales is likewise responsible for the irreparable loss of historic environments in South Australia.

*"The building boom....has robbed this state of much of its heritage. Crass developers pursued profit at the expense of all else. Much of the central areas...completely gutted for new office blocks, many built with total disregard for surrounding buildings and landscape."*

The Open-Air Museum: The cultural landscape of New South Wales, D.N. Jeans and Peter Spearritt [George ALLEN & UNWIN 1980]

I am appalled at the ongoing destruction of South Australia's historic environments. Much has been lost or is at risk of destruction. Our built heritage has been abused, compromised, damaged, destroyed, threatened or vandalised through ignorance, flawed policy, inadequate funding, under-resourcing, lack of enforcement, sub-optimal planning, commercial pressures, and privatisation.

The current system is widely recognised to be chronically under-resourced. Without proper resources for conservation it will continue to be difficult to protect our State's heritage and we will suffer irreparable loss of historic fabric and environments.

Another threat to the conservation of historic environments is the nonsensical iconification of our heritage, as demonstrated by the absurdity of the view that it is okay to demolish historic places like Fernilee Lodge because we can remember the Coopers family by going to any pub and having a Beer.

Lack of education on our history, our historical geography, and lack of respect for historical evidence engenders a quasi-new-history which further endangers our historic environments by preventing a real appreciation of their values and true importance.

This situation seems bizarrely counter-productive since it is widely recognised that cultural tourism is an industry which is rapidly growing world-wide and **our historic environments are the fundamental infrastructure of our Cultural Tourism Industry.**

We have known since at least 1974 that

*"The Australian Government has inherited a National Estate which has been downgraded, disregarded and neglected. All previous priorities accepted at various levels of government authority have been directed by a concept that uncontrolled development, economic growth and 'progress', and the encouragement of private as against public interest in land use, use of waters, and indeed in every part of the National Estate, was paramount."*

'Report of the National Estate' being the Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the National Estate, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra [1974]

Although the Australian Government may have 'declared its intention to identify, conserve and present the National Estate', it is not evident to me that there has been any success in ensuring that all levels of government and authority do likewise.

On the contrary, the absurdity of Registered items of the National Estate such as the Adelaide Park Lands remaining unprotected at the State and Local level is a bizarre and anomalous situation.

For an item on the National Estate to have been nominated repeatedly over a span of 17 years for State Heritage listing as

Adelaide's Park Lands have, to have been assessed as potentially having three (3) World Heritage values (Donovan & Associates, *Preliminary Assessment on the Cultural Significance of the Adelaide Park Lands*, Feb 1998) and yet remain unlisted and unprotected at the State level with the nomination unprocessed, seems to me to represent an unconscionable neglect of Australia's obligations under the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.

A key issue with conservation of historic heritage places is that it is fragmented and discontinuous with no enforceable requirement for automatic or mandatory protection **across all levels of government** at the point in time at which heritage values are identified to exist. That is, there is no automatic provisional protection, or moratorium on destruction. In the meantime the burden of protecting historic environments falls upon local communities and individuals.

I ask that the 'Report of the National Estate' being the Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the National Estate, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra 1974 be considered as part of my submission to this Inquiry.

I note that the public had given notice of many issues and problems **more than 30 years ago**. Despite the Australian Government establishing the Australian Heritage Commission, the Register of the National Estate, amending the EPBC Act, and establishing the Australian Heritage Council, locally we seem to be no further advanced with real on-ground protection of our portion of a "Distinctively Australian" National Estate.

One of the key objectives (Objective 1.8) of South Australia's *State Tourism Plan 2003-2008* is to "*Tell the story of the state's history and heritage*". To provide interesting and information-rich

experiences of South Australia, its geography, and the State's foundation, progress, and development it will be necessary to conserve our historic environments.

*"Progress, far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."*

*The Life of Reason*, George Santanya [1863-1952]

If we look beyond recent mistakes, in South Australia we are fortunate in having personal experience of past excellence in town planning, urban design, and environmental conservation due to the forethought of our Colonization Commissioners and the genius of Colonel William Light, our first Surveyor-General.

We are fortunate that our founders recognised the importance of public open space, reservation of coastlines and river banks, and environmental management in the economic development of the State **and that they planned in accord, and with regard to, recognised and collective knowledge, and with common sense, and regard for future generations.**

**We should do no less.**