

Re: Productivity Commission into Historic Heritage

Dear Mr Samuels.

I would like to offer the following submission for consideration by the Productivity Commission.

At present this is a summary of ideas that I may wish to work into a more substantial submission at a later date.

If historic heritage is to be considered a "market" then all aspects that contribute to that market should be considered and valued. Much wider definitions of productivity and value need to be included in assessing the "economic, social and environmental benefits and costs of conserving Australia's historic built heritage".

I believe that the value of heritage should not be determined by monetary measures, but if financial costs and benefits are considered, then they should be expanded to include the ultimate economic and financial values of aspects such as the social, community and aesthetic values to such historic heritage contributes.

Despite my comments about the dangers of ascribing a purely monetary value, historic heritage is now an established "product" with a measurable dollar value in many circumstances. It is used as a marketing tool for real estate, tourism, hospitality, recreation and a wide range of consumer products.

Heritage-based tourism and people seeking the authenticity of a country lifestyle have seen the revival of many country towns such as Maldon, Beechworth, Clunes, Daylesford, Chiltern, Koroit, Port Fairy, etc. etc., which 10-20 years ago had shrinking populations and economies, and were visibly decaying.

Critical to realising the benefits of a vibrant heritage segment, is a sound basis in the accurate assessment and meaningful understanding of what our heritage is, and the best way to manage it. This requires:

- consistent legislation and legal protection for historic heritage across all governments,
- a methodical identification and conservation program,
- a single comprehensive listing process for all levels of historic heritage places, with appropriate mechanisms for delegating management and administration
- a culture within private and public property owners and management authorities which respects the value of heritage, and
- adequately funded public heritage programs in research, identification, conservation, interpretation, public education and developing viable uses for historic heritage places.

Some examples of the determining factors in assessing value of heritage are:

- Social value of heritage places in establishing Australian and community identity and defining our sense of place. Australians of all social and cultural backgrounds gain a substantial meaning out of all Australian heritage places, not only those reflecting or representing their own circumstances. For example monuments to our past become educational foci for instilling certain values in recent migrants, and ultimately become part of their adopted heritage. They therefore have an integrating effect on the multicultural community, with considerable benefit in forming social cohesion.
- Community values in the investment made by people in their life choices, for example, the community building, conservation campaigns, civic improvement, local historical societies and genealogy. The historic heritage places are an important component in the network of events and activities which help to create and maintain a sense of community. This is as true for urban and new suburban areas, as well established rural communities. It can be seen in the involvement of recent and second generation migrants, and new residents of suburban estates in the historical societies, national trust branches and local cultural organisations.
- Tourism value – historic heritage is a major drawcard across Australia for international, interstate, intrastate and local tourism and heritage-based recreation. Whether it is the Rocks in Sydney, Port Arthur, Melbourne’s gardens and terrace houses or the gold fields, a vast number of tourist destinations depend on the visual clues of historic heritage fabric and landscape to provide the setting for viable commercial tourism industries.
- Commercial and consumer value in the conservation and restoration industry. The economic value of the restoration industry depends on the existence of an historic heritage both to focus the interest in restorers and renovators, and provide the physical material with which they work. It also drives an expanded market in heritage related consumer goods such as reproduction furniture, house fittings, decorations and the like, not in themselves of heritage value, but part of a discretionary spending which depends on the fashion for heritage to drive it.
- Real Estate values are intrinsically tied to the perception of heritage. Old residential areas whether inner city terraces, Federation suburbs or recycled historic warehouse developments, create a premium on the property value well over the land value. Valuing heritage qualities in the property market ensures the viability of areas susceptible to urban decay, such as the fringes of expanding commercial zones, or shrinking rural communities. Australian cities have mostly escaped the phenomena of the “Doughnut City” where the inner ring of old higher density residential is abandoned by residents and business

Gaps in our knowledge

- Many areas are still poorly understood or researched, especially in areas of industrial heritage, cultural landscape and social heritage. A thematic review of the Victorian Heritage Register two years ago identified substantial gaps in knowledge on a state basis. This is still true, and even more so on a National Level where there has been little thematic research since the demise of the National Estate Grants Scheme.

- There is a poor understanding of National Heritage values due to a lack of systematic typological and thematic studies being carried out. Those that have been undertaken in the last decade or so, have generally been done only at a State or regional level.

Historic Archaeology Not addressed at Federal Level

- Missing important opportunities to identify and understand our historic archaeological sites due to a lack of systematic identification and management programs. There is no Federal legislation, policy or programs directly addressing historical archaeological sites, and the approach at the state and local government level is highly variable and in some cases very inadequate.

Lack of comprehensive listing, identification and assessment programs

- At present there are a variety of heritage lists maintained at three levels of government as well as many non-government organisations such as the National Trusts in each state. There is no comprehensive or consistent approach to finding, assessing and listing heritage places of the type used in the graded register of English Heritage for example. This results in the unnecessary duplication of effort, conflicting and contradictory approaches, and unnecessary bureaucracy surrounding heritage management. It also leads to many gaps in the system that allow important heritage places to be overlooked or neglected.

Inconsistent legislation

- There is great inconsistency between various state heritage practices with a range from very good to almost non-existent. The recent changes at the Federal level have not been accompanied by complementary state legislative reforms.
- Heritage legislation is currently spread among several different jurisdictions. Aboriginal and historic heritage is usually provided with different sets of legislation and consequently different levels of identification, protection and management.
- A number of aspects of historic heritage are not afforded protection. While Victoria's heritage act has been amended recently to cover significant collections of portable heritage items, it has generally been left to state and federal museums and galleries to protect the moveable cultural heritage.
- Historic documents, archives and heritage related information again comes under different legislation. Historically important archives, which often contribute to understanding heritage places, are usually preserved, only because of other non-heritage related legislation, such as the various public records acts.

Lack of appreciation of community sector in historic heritage

- Before governments took on a role in managing historic heritage, individuals, private organisations and community groups have long taken up the challenge to preserve and understand our history. Historical societies, local history groups, small specialist and local museums, amateur and family history researchers, genealogists, conservation groups, machinery preservation groups, antique collectors, and a range

of others, have all played a very important role in both formulating the ideas around heritage, and carrying out practical heritage work. Their role has rarely been appreciated in full, and in general they are left on the periphery of the now entrenched heritage bureaucracies.

I hope the productivity commission will use this opportunity to strengthen the role of heritage in Australia, and develop recommendations that will see more efficient, successful and equitable heritage programs and legislation.

Thankyou for the opportunity to make this submission.

Regards

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