

Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage Places.

Submission from The Evans Head *Living* Museum and Community Technology Centre

The following document is presented in lieu of an appearance at the Initial Public Hearing in Brisbane 25 July 2005.

PREAMBLE:

The Evans Head *Living* Museum and Community Technology Centre (from here on called the Museum) is a community based organisation at a small fishing village and tourist centre in northern New South Wales. We have been in existence for just over four years and have evolved from two organisations, the Original Evans Head *Living* Museum and the Community Technology Centre initiative of the State and federal governments. There is a management committee of six and an active volunteer base of about eight, who are unpaid and all non-working. There is a subscribing membership of about 70. We are registered with the Department of Fair Trading (N.S.W.) as a non profit organisation and have charitable status with the ATO. Although the Richmond Valley Council provides us with a premises at a peppercorn rent, we are not affiliated with any organisation, political party or interest group. Our financial existence is entirely through our own fund raising activities and what can be raised through fees for services. These issues are significant in the light of the following submission.

The following submission has been prepared by myself, John Davies, president of the Museum in consultation with members of the management committee. Because of time constraints, it has not been presented to a meeting of the committee. It could be regarded as a

personal submission with input from various members but I would hope that it reflects the overall feelings of the members of the Museum.

1. The main pressures on the conservation of historic heritage places.

I would like to address the issue from the perspective of the involvement of volunteers. As an example, I will be using the pressures placed on the Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome, the site of the Bombers and Gunners training facility during World War II. Maintaining this as a significant historical site for Australia has been the concern of two very separate bodies, the Museum which has been attempting to generate factual information and the Aerodrome Committee which has been involved with applying political pressure. Richmond Valley Council has the intent to release the aerodrome site for residential development. Although the aerodrome is currently a working landing strip being regularly visited by vintage war birds, the Council's proposed development will effectively close this activity through the establishment of a retirement village adjoining the strip.

I am not asking the hearing to participate in this debate. What I am attempting to establish is the current pressure on a historical site where the outcome will be to preserve a neutered version of the site that will eventually be unsatisfactory to all parties.

The question of whether such a site should be preserved could be clouded by emotion as those involved have a long association with either the RAAF or the history of Evans Head. My personal feeling is that Australia has so few sites on Australian soil showing the extent of our involvement with World War II that it is imperative that the aerodrome be preserved in its entirety. In my travels through Britain and Europe, I have come across many WWII sites that are maintained as deserted monuments - airfields, concentration camps, watch towers and so on. The site at Evans Head is an excellent example of a nation doing its best to repel a threatened invasion. The presence of this culture would be lost if the site is turned over to residences.

This is not to deny the urgent need for development. The local council has a very difficult job in providing facilities for a population spread over a wide area and for a

rapidly growing centre that has outstripped the available utilities. Therefore, it has to be acknowledged that the preservation of the aerodrome would be at great cost to the ratepayers. They will end up paying much more for the upgrading of utilities as the income base would not have expanded as well as bearing the cost of the on going maintenance of the aerodrome.

Besides the pressure by changing land use, the other factor that works against the conservation of such a site as above comes from the nature of volunteers themselves. None of us, nor our organisations are in the same financial strengths as the local council to prepare submissions for consideration by the decision making bodies of government. Although we have many experienced, professional and highly educated members in both organisations mentioned above, none of us have the financial ability to engage professional lobbyists or consultants who can prepare authoritative and lucid submissions to counter those prepared by councils.

Conclusion.

There are two factors I am trying to highlight here that would release some of the pressures on the conservation of historic heritage places. They are:

The development of a national policy on what aspects of Australian history should be preserved as represented by historical sites. Was WWII a significant aspect of our history and did the RAAF play an important part in this to the extent that a relevant site should be set aside to commemorate this? If so, what basic recompense should be available to those who would benefit from an alternate land use?

At a Federal level, there should be a source of funds, outside the current grant programme, that would be available to volunteers to pay for their out of pocket expenses so they can thoroughly investigate the possible significance of heritage sites.

John Davies.

20 July 2005.