



OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE

King George Terrace
Parkes ACT 2600

Telephone 02 6270 8222
Facsimile 02 6270 8111
Email oph.info@dcita.gov.au
Website: www.oph.gov.au

*Department of Communications,
Information Technology and the Arts*

Neil Byron
Presiding Commissioner
Inquiry into the Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage Places
Productivity Commission
PO Box 80
BELCONNEN ACT 2616

Dear Commissioner,

I refer to the current Productivity Commission Inquiry into the Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage Places.

Attached is the submission to this Inquiry from the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA). An electronic version of this document will also be lodged. While the Submission does not directly address the policy issues raised by the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry, it provides information in relation Old Parliament House (OPH) which may assist the Commission's considerations.

OPH, which is managed by DCITA, is a nationally significant heritage place and is listed on the Commonwealth Heritage List. It is also a successful tourist attraction and national cultural institution focussed on revealing the significance of Australia's political and parliamentary history. Should the Commission wish to visit OPH as part of its work, I would be most happy to welcome you and show you through our building and discuss the challenges associated with managing OPH's heritage values.

Should the Commission require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me on 02 6270 8144.

Yours sincerely,

Kate Cowie
General Manager
Old Parliament House
4 August 2005

Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into the Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage Places

Old Parliament House, Canberra

1. BACKGROUND

Old Parliament House (OPH) is Australia's first purpose built Federal Parliament and is of national heritage significance. OPH was the home of the Federal Parliament from 1927 to 1988 and witnessed many extraordinary moments in Australia's parliamentary and political history. It is listed on the Commonwealth Heritage List (14 July 2004), the Register of the National Estate, the ACT Government's Heritage Places Register, the National Trust of Australia (ACT) Register and the Royal Australian Institute of Architect's Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture, and is nominated for inclusion on the National Heritage List.

The national heritage values of OPH are imbued in its historical and social significance as the focus of Federal Government politics from 1927 to 1988. This powerful cultural icon is a symbol of the nation's struggles and triumphs, its federation and its long standing democratic traditions. The building and setting are also significant in terms of its architectural values. OPH represents the major work of the Commonwealth's first architect, John Smith Murdoch (1862-1945), and it is a major physical feature of Canberra and its original planning. OPH contains a significant moveable heritage collection related to its use, function and development.

After closing in 1988, OPH was re-opened to the public in December 1992 and is currently open 364 days of the year. In 2004-05 OPH welcomed over 350,000 visitors. More than 174,000 visited OPH for functions, conferences and dining experiences, whilst 178,000 visitors came to experience the building and its exhibitions, events and public programs. This latter segment of OPH's visitors can be divided demographically as follows: ACT 23%; NSW 37%; VIC 15%; QLD 9%; SA 4%; WA 4%; NT 1%; TAS 1%; and International 7%.

The National Portrait Gallery (NPG) is located within OPH, and brings visitors face to face with Australians who have made a major impact upon our history and culture. The NPG is expected to move out of OPH and into its new purpose built building in 2008.

OPH is managed by the Australian Government through the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA). DCITA has been responsible for the management of OPH since June 1995. In December 1997 the Old Parliament House Governing Council was established to provide advice on strategic directions for OPH and furnish advice to the Minister for Communications, IT and the Arts on matters relating to OPH including: general policy; capital works and refurbishment; guidelines governing exhibitions, interpretation, sponsorship and

commercial use; and the management of Old Parliament House. The current Chairman of the Governing Council is the Rt. Hon Doug Anthony AC CH.

OPH's National Heritage List Nomination has been attached for the information of the Productivity Commission (**Attachment A**). This document provides detailed information regarding OPH's claims as a nationally significant heritage place and includes: statement of values; statements addressing national heritage criteria and a detailed history of the place. OPH lodged this nomination with the Minister for Environment and Heritage on 14 October 2004 and expects to be advised of the outcome of this nomination within the statutory 12 month timeframe as outlined in the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999* and subsequent amendments.

2. MANAGEMENT OF HERITAGE VALUES

As a nationally significant heritage place, the conservation of OPH's heritage values is central to the success and on-going viability of the organisation. This is reflected in OPH's vision:

To conserve Old Parliament House as a symbol of Australia's political history and parliamentary democracy and ensure that the people of Australia and international visitors are able to enjoy, appreciate and understand the building, its significance and contribution to the nation.

Specific issues pertaining to managing heritage values are outlined below for the information of the Inquiry. These issues are not unique to OPH but are faced by many heritage places and organisations.

2.1 Conservation and Interpretation of Heritage Values

The central heritage management document for OPH is the Conservation Management Plan (CMP). There have been three CMPs developed in 1986, 1996 and 2000. The current CMP (2000) is currently under review and will be replaced by a new Heritage Management Plan to assist OPH in its compliance with the statutory obligations of the EPBC Act.

The Heritage Management Plan (HMP) will:

- develop an appropriate conservation management structure and practices, including implementation procedures to meet OPH's statutory obligations;
- provide the basis for a streamlined approach to conservation, management and interpretation of the building, including the retention of its full significance from 1927 to 1988 and develop more sensitive guidelines for the assessment of relevant significance;
- provide a holistic understanding and analysis of the cultural significance of OPH through describing and assessing its Commonwealth and national heritage values;
- guide changes to the place;
- specify appropriate treatments for specific elements of the building;
- provide policy guidance for the care of the building fabric and furniture;

- include policies for the provision of modern services; and
- consider adaptive reuse of OPH in line with current and proposed uses.

A key challenge for a nationally significant public heritage site such as OPH is achieving a sustainable balance between access, use and conservation. The HMP will guide this balance and provide a framework for decision making processes that maintain or enhance the heritage values of OPH. Further, the Plan will provide a framework for resolving conflicting uses to ensure that the heritage values are not compromised.

Conservation however, is only the first physical step in successful and sustainable heritage management. Interpretation and promotion of those conserved values is the next essential step. Effective interpretation reveals the significance of the values to the community. Interpretation may take the form of face to face and self guided tours, exhibitions, theatrical productions, multimedia installations, education programs for all ages and even websites. The OPH website (www.oph.gov.au) is used to interpret the site and promote its heritage values to Australians and the international community. Without successful interpretation, public heritage places such as OPH run the risk of being misunderstood, devalued and ultimately at risk of compromise.

2.2 A Best Practice Approach to Managing Heritage Values

A best practice approach may be defined as outstanding performance in the practice and processes of heritage management, demonstrated by the best possible use of resources coupled with high levels of stakeholder satisfaction, and authenticated by comparative assessment.

OPH is committed to pursuing best practice in the management of our heritage values. The success of this commitment is highlighted in four case studies for the recently revised Australia ICOMOS *Illustrated Burra Charter: Good Practice for Heritage Places* (2004). These case studies are identified within the following Articles of the Charter: Article 25 – Interpretation; Article 29 – Responsibility for Decisions; Article 30 – Direction, Supervision and Implementation; and Article 32 – Records.

Specific examples and measures of our best practice approach include:

- Where appropriate OPH seeks to employ staff and contractors with qualifications and demonstrated expertise in the fields of heritage and collection management;
- Six monthly in-house training sessions in interpretative practice and historical content are conducted for volunteers and staff;
- Conservation Awareness Training is delivered bi-annually for staff and contractors working in the building;
- OPH participates in cross organisational forums, workshops and conferences to share information and experiences with current heritage management projects;
- OPH continues to attract increasing levels of visitors experiencing the heritage values of the place, with 98% of visitors rating their experience as good or very good;

- OPH has been awarded four ACT (2000-01 to 2003-04) and two national tourism awards (2002-03 and 2003-04) in the category of Heritage and Cultural Tourism; and
- Recognition of two successful and appropriate adaptive re-use projects featured in *Adaptive Re-use: preserving our past, building our future*, Department of Environment and Heritage (2004).

2.3 Resources

As a nationally significant heritage place, OPH places a high level of organisational commitment to dedicating resources to manage the heritage values of the place.

The Conservation and Collections operational unit exists within OPH with the specific mission of “achieving long term sustainability of Old Parliament House through the management, conservation and documentation of the national heritage values of the building and collections to meet statutory obligations and corporate goals”. The Unit is staffed is as follows:

Conservation & Collections Manager (APS Executive Level 1)
 Heritage Officer (APS Level 5)
 Collections Officer (APS Level 5)
 Collections Assistant (APS Level 3)

A panel of heritage conservation consultant companies supports the work of the Conservation & Collections unit and is called upon for additional advice, expertise and services as required.

The current resource arrangements allow for the appropriate management and conservation of the heritage values of OPH.

3. GENERAL COMMENTARY ON THE ISSUES OF THE INQUIRY

3.1 Operating under the new Commonwealth Heritage Regime

OPH has been working within the new Commonwealth Heritage regime as outlined in the EPBC Act and its amendments and regulations since January 2004. Prior to this change, OPH held discussions with staff from the Department of Environment and Heritage (DEH) regarding necessary preparations for the transition from the *Australian Heritage Commission Act 1975* to the amended EPBC Act. These preparations included revising Conservation Management policies and raising staff awareness of the proposed legislative changes and changes to operational procedures. OPH Management and staff continue to have discussions with DEH officials regarding changes and developments in the Commonwealth Heritage policy framework.

As indicated in section 2.1 of this submission, OPH is currently updating its Conservation Management Plan (2000) to a new Heritage Management Plan (2005).

Until OPH has completed its Heritage Management Plan, our policy is to refer proposed actions to the Department of Environment & Heritage for advice.

At the date of this submission OPH had made four referrals under the EPBC Act since January 2004. All four referrals were determined to be “not controlled actions”, that there was no significant impact on OPH’s heritage values and Ministerial approval was not required for the referred proposals. All referrals were dealt with within the statutory timeframes outlined in the EPBC Act. The details of these referrals and decisions are publicly available on the Department of Environment & Heritage website (www.deh.gov.au/epbc).

3.2 Scope of the Inquiry

OPH notes that the terms of reference of the Inquiry does not include moveable cultural heritage. OPH holds a significant collection of heritage furniture and fittings directly associated with the place. Much of this collection was purpose designed and built for the Parliament. Due to this strong association, the conservation and management of OPH’s heritage values is considered to embrace these moveable heritage collections.

This approach is consistent with the EPBC Act which under Section 528 (Definitions) defines a ‘place’ as including a “building or other structure... which may include... furniture, fittings and articles associated or connected with the building or structure”.