

PLan: the Planning Action Network

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

Introduction

1. PPlan: the Planning Action Network, of which I am Convener, is a community organisation with apolitical voluntary membership working for good community living environments throughout the Northern Territory.
2. My qualifications include a Graduate Diploma of History focussing on Heritage, added to a BA with History major. I have National Trust and the Historical Society of the Northern Territory membership.
3. As a tourist in England May-July, 2005, I am able to contribute from overseas knowledge.
4. As there had been no submissions from the Northern Territory, I have responded to a recent request from a heritage community member to make one. I have thoroughly read the Issues paper. I hope to attend a hearing. I hope to attend a hearing.

Importance of Historic Heritage Places

5. Significant historic heritage places are an important part of a good community living environment. This enquiry focuses on the 'historic heritage' part of heritage. 'Natural heritage' seems to have a useful framework of policies that has stimulated action through partnership, such as with Landcare and Green Corps, although more needs to be done.
6. Historic heritage places give a place and site identity, providing points of reference underpinning community pride and stability. They provide authentic visitor attractions, with stories to carry home to others, and are thus key tourism assets.
7. It is very relevant to stress the importance of 'places' of historic heritage significance (including intact 'built heritage'), rather than only buildings. My own view is that saving and interpreting significant historic heritage places, needs as much emphasis as the expensive fabric restoration of particular buildings. An example of this is the First Settlement site (Goyder's Camp) in Darwin, now still unlisted, and overshadowed by the current Waterfront Project .

8. Even buildings need their context of 'place'. They should not be moved, as happened with the Uniting Church (Knuckey Street. Darwin. The site is part of the story. Gardens are also important. The Darwin public are now seeing a 'blow by blow' 'death of a thousand cuts' of the heritage listed house and garden of Old Admiralty House on the Darwin Esplanade, by a 16 storey apartment building on its tennis court, and a planned multi-storey building behind.

Juggling Values

9. A major difficulty for all of us is the intrinsic difference between conservation values and economic values. Conservation of historic heritage is about social and community values, and not easily measurable. Economic values are usually measured in money terms. Another difficulty is the gap between the disciplines. There are few with an equal understanding or empathy with both fields. Many of us experienced this in the task of persuading the Department of Finance not to sell houses in the Myilly Point Precinct.

Government Funding for Historic Heritage

10. Historic heritage is an enduring asset in the social and

community sense. However, it takes time for its value to be realised by non-historians. Heritage is as necessary to a nation, whether it be of local, regional, state, or national significance. It is as essential as education and health to a strong democracy, secure in its own image. It must basically be publicly funded, ie. from taxes that people pay. Perhaps we can look at better managing this public money, or supplementing this by private enterprise, but we must not even dream of abandoning our historical heritage to private enterprise.

Recent English Experiences

11. Historic heritage places visited recently in England, are:

Battle Abbey (Hastings) - English Heritage

Stonehenge - English Heritage

Chysauster - English Heritage

Prehistoric Flint Mine -English Heritage

Greenwich College and Royal Observatory - English Heritage

Roman Baths, Bath -English Heritage

Tintagel Castle -English Heritage

Coleton Fishacre -National Trust

Sutton Hoo - National Trust

Avebury Rings - National Trust

Cotehele -National Trust

Alfriston House -National Trust

Ely Cathedral – Anglican Church
Winchester Cathedral –Anglican Church
Bury St Edmunds Abbey –Anglican Church
Wesley Cottage –Uniting Church
Abbey Gardens (BSE) – local government
Oldway Mansion – local government
Oliver Cromwell’s House – local government
Chatsworth House – Hereditary family owners
Arundel Castle – Hereditary family owners
Sussex Weald Rural Museum –Trust

Most of these were crowded with people, whether individuals, or tour groups. Tourism is well catered for in England, with heritage places well marketed. Larger places had good interpretation, often with guides who appeared to be volunteers, and/or well informed. Gardens and physical context are important in authenticity and visitor enjoyment.

Guide books were for sale, most had extensive high class souvenir shops, and some had thriving restaurants, whether separately commercial, or internally fundraising, I do not know. Local government Tourist Information Centres throughout Britain promote places to visit through brochures and maps.

Many villages in Britain have conserved the streetscape of their main street, realising the importance of this integrity for tourism. These villages frequently draw a restaurant trade.

There is a different class of places to visit, run commercially, such as the Poldark Mine which may hang off an 'historical' allusion, but which are not concerned with heritage conservation, but with entertainment.

This list shows how much historic heritage in England is so successfully managed by the national government. Other heritage is with the National Trust, which is of course a trust specialising in heritage conservation, with the original owners, with local government, or with dedicated trusts.

Experience in Darwin

10. During the last ten years important historic heritage was lost due to the development imperative of governments. These include:

Travellers Walk (Register of the National Estate)

Hotel Darwin

Commonwealth flats, Foelsche Street

Uniting Church, Knuckey Street

In addition, the Uniting Church World War II Memorial Church in Smith Street has been compromised by a Woolworths Supermarket being built within ten metres, and

Old Admiralty House and Garden has been compromised by loss of garden and overlooking buildings.

The seriously flawed and outdated Heritage Conservation Act has been under review for at least four years. During huge CBD development, the government heritage unit seemed focussed on remote areas. The unit is too small. There has been a concentration on fabric. The public expecting that the unit as working systematically, is amazed to find that much of our city heritage remains unlisted. There are years of backlogged heritage applications. The heritage list database has been out of date for years. The Planning Act ignores places of heritage significance not yet listed, so there is no protection for even much loved places.

It is often stated that war and cyclones destroyed a lot of Darwin's heritage, and the government is destroying the rest.

Years ago many members of the NT Parliament espoused a passion for heritage, but the new act languishes.

A very small population needs stronger legislation and a change in political attitude to save its historic heritage, some of which is of national significance. Local government has a very limited role in the NT compared with our states.

Your own issues paper (p8) shows only 160 listings for the whole Northern territory and that local government has no role in heritage.

The Northern Territory, where European settlement began only in the mid-nineteenth century, and where the population is very small, has small resources for the conservation of historic heritage, and is disadvantaged when compared states with well established heritage infrastructures. It also has a huge area to manage.

The Northern Territory situation is quite different from Sydney or Melbourne.

Issues Paper Points and Comments

11. Heritage is better conserved if used.
Many local community organisations could occupy heritage buildings.

Local government can perform a leading role, eg. Parramatta, Lane Cove.

Heritage in private hands can be very difficult to manage.

Regulated and conditional tenancies for leased heritage can be successful for owner and tenant.

Selling publicly owned heritage can go wrong for conservation.

Commercial tourism can cheapen heritage by popular exploitation.

Heritage streetscapes of more than one building are often tourist attractions, with restaurants and tearooms popular.

Galleries, museums, gift, craft and souvenir shops can be successful in heritage buildings

Heritage has a very important educational use.

Volunteers can enjoy being heavily involved in heritage conservation.

Tax incentives for corporations and individuals are a very useful conservation incentive.

Annual grants can be useful for larger organisations with grants, promotional and marketing expertise. Smaller organisations often lack the necessary range of skills. The precious time composing grant applications could have been better used.

Heritage items are of various types with varying values and significance. Existing heritage criteria, perhaps with some adjustments and/or the use of other interlocking criteria,

might be come to sort heritage places for appropriate levels of prioritization and management. This must be done by heritage experts, but not be confined to architects.

There are useful lessons for incentives and grants in managing historic heritage in the framework now used for the conservation of the natural environment.

Historic heritage conservation in situ is not totally dissimilar to museums and libraries which conserve moveable objects of present and future value

Some Positives and Ideas

12. The Register of the National Estate, is a list of the nation's inheritance. These are capital assets to be maintained for future generations. Other countries do this (Section 10). The Australian Government would be 'shooting itself in the foot' and out of step with other nations if it abandons all but a very narrow list of 'national heritage'.
13. Selling off our heritage to private commercial organisations is not the answer. In a country reputed to have a strong economy, it would be a nonsense to do so.
14. The Australian Heritage Commission, its files and its staff represent a mine of resources and skills that should not be lost to the nation.
15. My own recent experience in England has proved how important historic heritage can be to the tourism industry alone.

It economic terms, it provides a wide range of employment, including non-urban employment, spreads skills training, supports transport systems, provides retail opportunities, stimulates the hospitality industry, including bed and breakfasts, encourages renovations, subsidises marginal farms, and provides outlets for local produce and crafts.

In social terms, it revitalises communities in human terms, renews the spirit, stimulates community pride and identity, and creates new confidence.

Recommendations

16. The terms of reference of this enquiry begin with the statement:

With the commencement of amendments to the Commonwealth's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 on January 1 2004, which provide greater protection of our national heritage values, it is timely to review the current pressures and issues associated historic heritage conservation.

It is this broad objective which we must address legally and in other ways.

17. Legal prescriptions are required which cover history heritage as well as natural heritage. In the Northern Territory, history heritage

conservation in urban areas, particularly in Darwin, has failed. NT governments' construction development imperative, and the propensity for local developers and government agencies depending on the letter of the law, regardless of community distress over heritage loss, have led to this. Trends with the Darwin Waterfront Project indicate a repeat scenario in an area of national significance.

We need strong legal prescriptions which absolutely protect heritage, and which will be activated by a government which detached from immediate political pressures.

18. In a place like the Northern Territory, it is a mistake to restrict the law to historic heritage places which are already listed. Many significant places are not listed, partly because it is assumed the government would have done it, there is a backlog of many years for already nominated places, and huge projects come up without notice. Even this year, tropical Commonwealth flats in the final formal stages of listing were blatantly destroyed by a developer without penalty in the final stages of listing.

We need legal provisions which protect potential historic heritage places at the stage that new development and mining projects so that they can be assessed, rather than demolished out of hand.

19. Our organisation has contributed earnestly and often to environmental impact processes on natural and heritage matters. These huge voluntary efforts seem pointless. The present Darwin Waterfront Project contains Darwin's First Settlement Site - Goyders Camp, and places central to the Bombing of Darwin in World War II. In spite of massive, environmental impact documentation, the community has no guarantee that any of these sites will not be destroyed.

People cannot continue assembling and sharing their information without achieving results.

The Northern Territory has no Environmental Protection Authority. The Development Consent Authority recognises only listed heritage places, and rarely save them.

We need independent authorities to make open decisions, follow through processes systematically, and publicly report on the outcomes of these EIS's.

20. Local and interstate architectural practitioners presenting proposals sometimes show little concern for environmental and/or heritage issues. Binding national legislation would simplify keeping them aware of legal obligations, even in

a commercial context.

National legislation specifically covering historical heritage (within the EPBC Act) would raise its status, strengthen powers, provide consistency, and leave no excuse for ignorance of the law in relation to the conservation of historical heritage.

21. Few people realise that an EIS covers historic heritage, so this aspect can be forgotten and ignored.

The title of the EPBC should be amended to include 'historic heritage', or 'heritage', increasing status, and aiding relevant keyword retrieval.

22. Two recent successes on the Myilly Point Heritage Precinct show that well conserved heritage buildings can be used to generate income, by leasing, or by serving Sunday High Tea in a garden. Heritage work is heavily dependent on volunteers. Efforts like these can supplement government funding, but overall success depends on more government funding, particularly for paid staff.

People are very weary from carrying the conservation load for years. Volunteers need to achieve results.

Funding through grants has proved inadequate. National trends may not match urgent local priorities. With meagre staff the percentage of time spent writing applications is crucial.

Personal and corporate tax incentives for heritage conservation should be re-established.

We need a basic level of recurrent government funding, for expert paid staff, and to provide basic conservation before more business approaches can be developed efficiently.

25. Good outcomes have been achieved in the area of natural heritage with multiple approaches, eg. incentives, research, grants, environmental specialists working with volunteers, work opportunities for the unemployed, relations with farmers and business, partnerships with Aboriginal communities, and co-operation with specialist agencies such as Greening Australia, for staff and native plants.

Such an approach would aid conservation, but also help us to manage more historic heritage to feed money back into the area in the long term.

We need a replication of the type of policy framework used for natural heritage. As well as an emphasis on conservation expertise, such a framework should provide access to (perhaps shared) the marketing, promoting and accounting expertise sometimes lacking amongst conservationists, particularly in smaller areas.

26. Historic heritage needs a boost of image which should show that the Commonwealth Government recognises the value of historic heritage to the community, and its potential to support the tourism industry.

It is recommended that the Commonwealth Government use its public relations resources to inform the Australian public and business of the value of historic heritage to the nation.

We trust these comments will be useful to the Commissions deliberations.

Yours sincerely,

M A CLINCH

Convener

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