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Heritage Inquiry
Productivity Commission
PO Box 80
Belconnen ACT 2616

12 February 2006

Re: Submission to draft report on Productivity Commission Inquiry into Conservation of Australia's Heritage Places.

The Professional Historians Association (SA) Inc, has two major overarching concerns with the draft recommendations of this Inquiry.

First, the draft recommendations (particularly concerning voluntary heritage listing) will, if implemented have diametrically the opposite effect to that intended by this Inquiry. That is, they will hasten the dereliction and destruction of Australia's cultural heritage. More than 40 years of voluntary heritage listing (by the National Trust) indicates the serious limitations of that approach to safeguarding Australia's irreplaceable privately-owned heritage properties. This outcome will be counter to the recent public pronouncements of Prime Minister John Howard about the importance of imparting history to young Australians. The nation's built heritage is one of the most fundamentally important means of helping to teach historical appreciation and understanding to future generations.

Second, the inquiry appears to have acted on a misplaced assumption that the existing, well-developed regime of heritage listing and protection is to the detriment of Australia's economic development, and the economic interests of all private property owners. The real estate sections of newspapers make constant reference to the heritage character of houses for sale, particularly at the high end of the market, as a selling point, and to the advantages of places located in local heritage conservation zones. Heritage values and heritage listing are clearly considered to be economic assets. It should also be pointed out that the Real Estate industry is one of several which benefits economically from heritage listing, as do building tradesmen and building suppliers, architects, planners, and professional historians. The tourism industry - particularly in SA - also draws substantially on the state's heritage assets to attract visitors to SA. Regional tourism, an economic lifeline for regional Australia, is highly dependent on using heritage listed places as drawcards.

In conclusion, the tone of the draft report is detrimental to the profession as well as the practice and understanding of history and heritage in Australia.

(Dr) Susan Marsden
President