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PUBLIC HEARINGS CONSERVATION OF HISTORIC HERITAGE PLACES

Personal background and involvement in heritage trade training

I am a Senior Head Teacher of Painting and Decorating with the TAFE Commission of NSW and have had an interest in historic buildings and their conservation for over 40 years.

In 1984 I was the recipient of a TAFE New South Wales Project Fellowship to study building conservation in Venice, Italy. This 3 month course was conducted by the Venice European Centre for the trades and professions of the conservation of architectural heritage (Centro Europeo) and was invaluable in that I have been able to apply the conservation skills that I learnt to my teaching and ongoing heritage trade training curriculum development

I have been involved in the development of heritage trade training since 1990 when TAFE Commission of NSW started developing specific heritage trade training for a number the building trades. This development was in response to the noticeable paucity in heritage trade skills required for the rebuilding of Newcastle NSW after the earthquake there in the early 1990's

This experience enabled me to provide constructive input to the development of the New South Wales Heritage Trade Training Strategy 2000-2005. and I later delivered the Cert III Painting and Decorating heritage trade course which was funded as part of this strategy initiative.

I also have a private practice in heritage painting and decorating consulting and this allows me to maintain a current awareness of conservation issues particularly in regard to the perceived shortage of appropriately skilled workers, scarcity and/or unavailability of traditional tools and materials, lack of ongoing or long term work opportunities.

Recently I have been the recipient of a DEST/ISSI Fellowship to study conservation of wall paintings at the Centro Europeo and I hope to take up this Fellowship towards the end of this year.

Main Issues:

- **Conservation trade training integrated into policy framework**

I believe that any policy framework for the conservation of Australia's historic heritage places must be clearly underpinned by appropriate training programs for the building trade skills required to conserve, restore and maintain these historic heritage places. These training programs must be adequately and reliably funded if they are to be successful.

If viable, integrated and sustainable programs of heritage conservation building trade skills training are not intrinsic to, or are excluded from conservation policy frameworks, then the ongoing sustainability of these historic heritage places will be in jeopardy from inappropriate work practices being applied resulting in long term deterioration, neglect and possible destruction of not only original finishes and building fabric but entire structures.

Australia must, as a multicultural society, and in order to enhance our national identity, preserve and interpret our stock of built heritage items, be they Georgian mansions, Chinese joss houses, German farm buildings or migrant hostels. These are links to our history and are tangible records of the development of our society.

- **Lack of ongoing or long term work opportunities.**

Conservation and /or restoration work is, in general, of an intermittent nature. This makes it difficult for contractors to commit solely to conservation/restoration work and any increase in trained workers entering the field further exacerbates the situation. Linking the requirement of appropriately trained and experienced contractors and workers to the awarding of government conservation projects (this could be in the form of a pre qualified tenderers list) or a condition of grants awarded to owners of historic structures would greatly add to the confidence of contractors to enter this field.

- **No centralised training facility.**

Australia doesn't have the scale of projects or workforce to support training facilities in all states. A specialist facility is the best option and has the potential of attracting offshore participants which further assists the viability of such a facility.

A centralised facility provides a focus for issues, initiatives, debate and also has the potential of providing links between clients and contractors.

Main Issues continued

- **Inappropriate training.**

There is little or no realisation of what skills are actually required by building trade workers to effectively contribute to the successful conservation of historic structures. The notion of master artisans further complicates this issue because most of our historic built heritage was constructed and finished not by master artisans but ordinary tradesmen with a very practised and good understanding of their trade.

Current national competencies bare little resemblance with the curriculum studied by those whose work we are trying to conserve

- **A funded mentor system.**

This will allow smaller contractors who have the required conservation skills but do not necessarily have the infrastructure or the financial resources to employ a trainee, an apprentice or up skill an existing worker to provide practical conservation skills training. Incentives to participate in a mentoring system could be by means of grants/fellowships to either the contractor or person in training. Further, this could be linked to taxation relief or made a condition of any Government grants or assistance to owners of historic places

Richard White