



29 July 2005

Heritage Inquiry
Productivity Commission
PO Box 80
BELCONNEN ACT 2616

Re: Submission on the Heritage Inquiry by the Australian Government Productivity Commission.

Strathfield Municipal Council is a small Council located in the Inner West of metropolitan Sydney.

Like other inner-west Councils of Sydney, established in the mid-to-late 1800's, Strathfield has a significant amount of heritage property. Strathfield has a few items on the State Heritage Register, which are mainly State Government utilities eg railway stations and infrastructure. The majority of heritage items and conservation areas are listed on the Strathfield Council Local Environment Plan [LEP].

As Strathfield is predominantly residential, most heritage listed property is residential and privately owned. The other main category of heritage listed property is Churches and Schools.

The first heritage survey of Strathfield Municipality was done between 1986-88 resulting in the gazettal of a Local Environment Plan in 1992. The next significant survey was done between 2000-2004, with items and areas identified by this review are currently on public exhibition for inclusion in a new Local Environment Plan.

To assist owners of heritage properties in Strathfield, Council has developed a range of policies providing financial support and assistance. Our policies include:

- Access to a Local Heritage Fund. Grants are provided on an annual basis to owners of non-commercial heritage property for conservation and maintenance work. In the last three years, Strathfield Council has allocated \$60,000 in grants.
- Reimbursement of development application fees. Strathfield Council reimburses 100% of development application lodgement fees for works considered 'exempt and complying'. 50% of development application fees are reimbursed for heritage conservation work.
- Free heritage advisory service. Strathfield Council provides a free heritage advisory service from Council's heritage consultant for owners of heritage

property. Generally, owners use this service when wanting advice for proposed development.

- Annual heritage awards. Strathfield Council conducts annual Heritage Awards to acknowledge and promote residents and ratepayers who participate in heritage activities eg restoration, conservation work etc.

Strathfield Council provides development incentives on items and areas in the Strathfield Planning Ordinance Scheme.

Further, Council dedicates significant resources, particularly in assessment of planning and development, to heritage administration and management eg strategic planning and administration of heritage activities, engagement of heritage consultants for advisory work, provision of heritage materials in Council Library, publications etc.

All the above activities and initiatives are funded by Strathfield Council. Neither the State nor Federal Government contributes financially to our heritage programs. Further, genuine incentives for owners of heritage properties are funded almost entirely by Strathfield Council.

If Australia's heritage is considered important to all levels of Australian government, it can not primarily fall on local government, which receives no direct share of taxation revenue, to fund and resource most heritage activity. Support for heritage is required from all levels of government.

In NSW, the overwhelming majority of heritage listed properties are on local government lists and therefore, it is local government which provides most support and funding for heritage in real terms. However, it seems that only those historic heritage places, which are regarded as having state or national significance, are provided financial assistance with the recurrent costs associated with their conservation. There should be a 'whole of government' approach to heritage, where owners of heritage property have greater certainty and assistance in the management of Australia's heritage assets.

The Commission's 'issues paper' correctly observes that heritage is threatened by lack of maintenance of heritage items. One of the largest contributing factors in deterioration of heritage assets is cost of maintenance. Minimal direct funding for heritage activity, both for Council and for private owners, is available from State or Federal Government. Local Government support for heritage varies from Council to Council. It appears that there is no comprehensive or cohesive national, state and local framework for management of this issue.

From our experience at Strathfield, since the Local Heritage Fund was established, there has been a noticeable improvement in the conservation of heritage items and precincts in Strathfield. This fund does not cover total costs of conservation works, but provides partial reimbursement to the owner, which is a genuine incentive to undertake conservation work.

Completed works, such as restored and repaired fencing, landscaping, roof repairs etc, have resulted in greatly improved streetscapes of many heritage conservation areas. It is likely that many of these works would not have been undertaken, if grant funding had not been available from Council. With access to funding, necessary repairs have been

undertaken such as roof repairs, which left unchecked would threaten the useful life of the property.

The Productivity Commission should consider a range of financial incentives and supports, particularly for owners of heritage properties, which could include:

- Tax concessions and grant funding programs.
- Rebate system – similar to the Pensioner Rate Rebates scheme, where Federal or State Government could provide a rate rebate incentive for owners of heritage properties.

Please note that as many heritage properties are privately owned, many by retirees on fixed and limited incomes, assistance needs to be in the form of direct financial assistance. Tax concessions may not be useful for owners or community based organisations.

Yours faithfully

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