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The Chairperson  
Australian Built Heritage Inquiry  
Productivity Commission PO Box 80  
BELCONNEN ACT 2616

Dear Sir/Madam

The essence of my submission urges that the non-market benefits of heritage conservation need to be acknowledged and supported by government.

**Why is historic heritage important?**

The value to Australian society of a well-conserved and managed cultural heritage manifests in some quantifiable ways, such as the income generated by cultural tourism and the added value of heritage characteristics in real estate. But this is a very limited view of the benefits of heritage conservation, which is essentially an intangible good. Specialist cultural economists have found no consensus to express the value of heritage. Yet they generally conclude that the social benefits of (some degree of) conservation justifies public subsidy.

The social benefit amounts to a communal sense of cohesion and purpose, based on physical evidence and associated stories. One way of articulating this quality is the question: 'How can you know where you're going if you don't know where you come from?' The physical presence of heritage objects, buildings and landscapes connects human pasts (which can be ancient or relatively recent) to today's lifestyles, producing a sense of continuity. Even if not explicitly understood by every individual, it informs the atmosphere of civil society in positive ways.

This is not to say that all old heritage items are meaningful to every single person. On the contrary, it indicates why it's so important that the repertoire of heritage items represents the diverse histories of Australians today. But just as tales of historic events such as Gallipoli become shared history, so does the heritage of a main street, a school, a planting of trees. A share in the past is a stake in today.

**How effectively do public and private sources support heritage conservation?**

Much of the fairly inarticulate but broadly acknowledged social good of heritage conservation is the result of public investment. Thanks to the development of state and

federal government support since the 1970s, a substantial quantum of historic stock has been conserved, inspiring other agencies and individuals to follow suit. It's important that the APC reasserts that it is worthwhile for government to maintain heritage as an investment in social health and happiness.

Admittedly, social health and happiness are not high on voters' or governments' agendas for expenditure. Acknowledging that we must make rational use of limited public resources, the Australian heritage management profession operates within a frame of systems and criteria constructed since the 1970s. The Burra Charter framework developed by Australia ICOMOS has proved its usefulness to professionals and amateurs for shaping decisions on what and how to conserve. Its systematic process can usually convince onlookers that heritage conservation is a justifiable business.

Yet as in all fields, more could be achieved with bigger resources. There has never been a time of 'enough' money for heritage conservation, and so both private and public apparatus of heritage management have been vigorous in searching for non-subsidy sources of income. There is a limited commercial market for the values associated with a sense of the past, ranging through expressions such as home restoration, urban/suburban amenity, and tourism. These make good arenas for realising many goals of heritage conservation, but they create two big risks.

The first risk is that heritage becomes the privilege of those who can afford to pay for it. One solution here is to offer more incentives for individual projects to enlarge the capacity of all to conserve their own heritage. At the same time, social value projects will always need community, ie public, assistance.

The second risk is that the tail wags the dog. Heritage tourism, in particular, has had enough success as a money-maker to induce a government vision that all heritage conservation can cover its own costs. This has led to compromised standards where it almost-but-not-quite works, and frustrated impotence where it doesn't work at all. It is important for government to acknowledge that tourism is a particular, not universal, solution for funding heritage conservation.

### **Summary**

- Australia needs heritage conservation: How can you know where you're going if you don't know where you come from?
- Heritage has intangible benefits that merit continuing public support.
- Professional heritage practice uses effective systems to manage resources.
- Markets for heritage products are not sufficient to fund conservation in all cases.

Yours sincerely

Dr Linda Young