

Submission for Inquiry into Policy Framework and
Incentive for Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage
Places

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We wish to submit the following opinions about one aspect the inquiry, namely: the *economic, social and environmental benefits upon the costs of the conservation of historic heritage places in Australia.*

Specifically, we wish to comment on how historic heritage conservation (namely that of cemeteries) generate enormous benefits to the community and are deserving of conservation.

1. The importance of cemeteries in the context of Australia's history justifies Federal government funding support for their conservation.
2. Old cemeteries like the **Boroondara Cemetery in Kew, Victoria**, provide a wealth of artistic, cultural, religious and historic information about how death was commemorated in Australia in the 19th Century. This has also impacted on the way death is memorialised today. In addition, the cemetery holds a large reserve of information for those wishing to trace their family history and, equally importantly, those with an interest in the history of Victoria's earliest days of settlement.
3. Many of the older graves in Boroondara Cemetery are in a state of poor to extremely poor condition (current estimates number approximately 50%)* and the narrow pathways leading to the gravesites are in disrepair, making even walking around the cemetery potentially hazardous.
4. Owing to current funding constraints on cemeteries, there appears to be few funds available to maintain or restore tombstones. In particular, gravesites that are of local, state and national significance are left in a poor state. For instance, lettering is poor on the memorial to Dr Constance Stone, the first woman medical practitioner in Australia; and the tombstone of Fred Walker (whose factory originally produced Vegemite) is in a state of disrepair. Frequently, families do not have the funds available to maintain the gravesites of their ancestors.

5. Some cemeteries in Victoria and other parts of Australia have established “friends groups” who are able to give some small support to restoration projects. Boroondara does not have such a group.
6. Making government funds available for this and other key restoration work would increase the social value of tombstones, and ensure that such gravesites are available for future generations of visitors/historians to the cemetery. Funding could also be used to assist families in meeting the costs of conservation/preservation work. Access to funds would also encourage families to attempt to meet such costs.
7. If cemeteries are left to deteriorate, we lose valuable historical and familial records of how ‘life’ was in early Victorian times in Melbourne.
8. We submit that the Federal government should consider support to the States in the form of funding for the conservation of cemeteries, in particular, those of significant historical, artistic or religious significance to the community at large.

* ‘Hazardous’ includes tombstones falling over, iron railings rusted, cracks in stonework and unreadable lettering.