

**Our submission contains no confidential material.**

**Productivity Commission Draft Report  
Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage Places**

**Comment by The Glebe Society Inc**

**Overview**

These comments follow our initial submission made in July 2005.

We support the generality of comments contained in the supplementary submissions of the following organisations and/or persons :

- The National Trust (NSW)
- The Glebe Point Road Residents Group
- Cr Phillip Black

We find in respect to Heritage Items, that the reliance solely on voluntary Conservation Agreements is limiting in that it fails to recognise the narrowness of its application and fails to examine additional ways to broaden successful conservation.

As to the report's focus on Heritage Areas, it has little to say other than that heritage should remain as one of numerous considerations in assessing development proposals under the Local Government Environmental Planning process. This is no more than the status quo, the results of which have not been conducive to successful heritage outcomes.

**HERITAGE ITEMS**

**Generally**

The Glebe Society can endorse joint agreements to conserve these items as *one* strategy when the items are in private ownership. However we stress that there are other means of ensuring conservation.

The notion of conservation or recognition of an item is dependent on the agreement of the owner is ideological, but simply doesn't make sense. There are many examples where the rights of the individual and private property are curtailed in the public interest, and without doubt Conservation is a very prominent example, because it is clearly in the interest of the wider community, and in many cases the entire nation and future generations.

This is certainly the case in Europe, where items are recognised as part of the cultural heritage of nations, and in the United Nations, where UNESCO lists World Heritage sites, and where there are many different types of incentives, sources of funding, criteria and promotion.

### **Some details**

- We accept the report's finding of there being too much reliance on legislative controls often as not resulting in unsatisfactory outcomes. This of course may be due to the absence of an accompanying assistance package (ie, rate relief, grants, etc) rather than inadequacies in the legislation.
- Also the need for assistance : the "carrot" as well as the "stick"
- Conservation Agreements have their shortcomings in that :
  - Owners and developers take more notice of the do's and don'ts of legislation, at least in the first instance, than of the uncertain and cumbersome process of obtaining assistance.
  - When agreement fails, the only alternative given is that of voluntary or compulsory purchase, involving considerable funds and then finding suitable tenants or obliging new owners. We note that local government has not the powers for such purchasing. Overall this only available alternative may seem draconian to many.

## **HERITAGE AREAS**

### **Generally**

Our comments (above) regarding the approach taken in Europe and by UNESCO, also apply in the context of Heritage Areas. In many ways, Heritage Areas could be regarded as more important than Items, as they typically include a greater range of heritage issues, often including activities, and a far greater range of intactness, often far beyond the physical (the Old Town of Hanoi immediately springs to mind).

Hence the approach taken by the report is really the opposite of what it should be. The involvement of local government is essential precisely because Heritage Areas are active and interactive places. Heritage Areas should be recognised and supported by State and Federal governments rather than left solely to local government responsibility, with their limited powers and resources.

### **Some details**

- We accept the three tiers of responsibility :
  - Commonwealth Government for items of World and National significance
  - State Governments for items of State and local significance
  - Local Governments (as assigned from the States) for items of local significance
- We observe that Heritage Areas can and do vary in their significance across all three of the above tiers. Responsibility for such would consequently bear on any tier of

government. This is contrary to the Report's recommendation that only local government would have the responsibility.

- We further observe that Conservation Agreements cannot hope to be the tool used to conserve Heritage Areas. For example, it would be impossible to conclude such agreements on 75% of Glebe's building stock.

### **ASSISTANCE MEASURES**

The report is to be criticised for its failure to say that the Commonwealth Government, as the prime taxation and revenue resource, cannot escape the role of being the principal provider of the assistance argued as necessary, if heritage conservation is to be successful in this nation.

David Mander Jones  
Convenor  
Heritage Subcommittee

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