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The Western Australian Museum appreciates the opportunity to comment on the issues raised by this very important inquiry relating to the policy framework and incentives for the conservation of Australia's historic heritage places. The Museum has staff expertise covering the range of disciplines relating to natural and historic heritage and serves an important role in research and in developing exhibitions and education programs. The natural and cultural history collections the Museum holds are vital for the research on which biodiversity and historic heritage knowledge can be based and decisions made. The economic value of these collections to heritage cannot be easily estimated, the scientific, cultural and historic values are often as yet unknown. The Western Australian Museum is also responsible for the management and interpretation of a range of heritage buildings including Samson House, the Fremantle history Museum, heritage buildings at the Francis Street Perth site, the Fremantle Commissariat building (Shipwreck Galleries) and heritage buildings at the Albany and Kalgoorlie Museums.

In the WA Museum submission we propose to address the central issues of the inquiry by responding to the three key questions:

- What is the rationale for government involvement in historic heritage conservation and what principles should guide that involvement?
- How does the policy framework for historic heritage conservation currently operate and what are its strengths and weaknesses?
- What are the current pressures and emerging trends influencing the conservation of historic heritage places and, in light of these, how can the policy framework be improved?

### ***Background***

This Inquiry is timely as there is a great range of new work emerging on the subject of the importance and meaning of heritage. There is too, a growing realisation that the narrowly targeted cultural policies developed through the 1980s and 1990s have not been successful in developing support for the range of non materialistic, non measurable social values of heritage. To date there has been a lack of elaboration of the benefits of an understanding of heritage to other areas such as education, community well-being, sense of place, ageing and crime.

The recognition that our present way of life is not sustainable - environmentally, socially or economically - has seen an articulation of the value of heritage to sustainability. The WA Sustainability Strategy: Hope for the Future for instance, recognizes that heritage is an important part of sustainability and states that reinforcing local distinctiveness, heritage and sense of place, are keys to building a sustainable community. Heritage serves to define who we are and where we are. It gives people a sense of identity, a feeling of belonging and contributes to the development of social capital.

However, the values of heritage have not been well communicated or incorporated into the planning process. Heritage must be recognized as an area that involves the community, rather than something determined by heritage experts on behalf of the community. Heritage policy must recognize the diversity of voices in society and it is in this work of capturing diversity that Museums can play an important role.

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### ***Role of Museums***

Museums are intrinsic to our society and to understanding our natural and cultural heritage, but often, as with the wider heritage area, their economic contribution is often called into question or undervalued. Museums face increasing pressure to compete for market share with other segments off the cultural sector in terms off both audience and funding. As financial pressure increases in critical areas such as education, health care and transportation, and as governments at all levels strain to provide services, there will be proportionally less money available to invest in heritage related activity unless the very real social and cultural value of heritage is recognised.

Without this recognition, museums and similar institutions (e.g., libraries and archives) are ill placed to benefit. Their scope for generating revenue through commercial means is limited to admission fees, retail operations and the like. Such gains may offset to a degree the cost of the "public" component of the operation (e.g., visitor programming). However, the bulk of operational costs for many institutions are associated with the less visible yet equally critical preservation function. For this reason, institutions such as museums will continue to rely upon public funding for most aspects of their activities, especially in relation to the development, protection and management of collections and associated research.

### ***What is the rationale for government involvement in historic heritage conservation and what principles should guide that involvement?***

Efficiency based arguments for public support for heritage conservation are based, as the Issues Paper states, on the premise that such support is needed as heritage, culture and the arts are areas of market failure. However, what is evident is that the market cannot be relied on as it cannot assign adequate value to such areas. The benefits of heritage are broadly as follows:

- A contribution to health and well-being made by creating places for recreation, enjoyment and learning.
- A contribution to building strong, socially cohesive and. resilient communities.
- A contribution to making communities aware of what makes them different and special and encouraging local and regional pride in the face of increasing globalization. .
- A contribution to a flourishing local community by providing jobs and assisting in the creation of a buoyant tourism industry.
- A contribution to minimizing resource use and reducing energy consumption.
- The creation of a sense of distinctiveness and a sense of place.
- The provision of broad educational opportunities.
- A contribution to intergenerational equity - allowing an asset to be passed on to future generations.

In seeking to leave a legacy for *future* generations, governments at all levels are required to make bold, far reaching decisions, that require more than consideration of short term economic gains, but rather take a long term view.

Tessa Jowell, UK Culture Secretary, Media and Sport wrote recently:

*The historic environment and wider heritage contributes to a wide range of Government ambitions to cut crime, promote inclusion, improve educational achievement, but it is worth*

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*supporting in itself, for the way it can encourage people better to understand and engage with their history and their community, and help slay that poverty of aspiration which holds so many people back from fulfilling their potential.*<sup>1</sup>

In her writings and speeches as Secretary, Ms Jowell has attempted to lead in changing the terms of the heritage and culture debate in the UK.

***How does the policy framework or historic heritage conservation currently operate and what are its strengths and weaknesses?***

The pursuit of heritage protection and the development of a 'sense of place' is an important part of sustainability and as such is relevant to all areas of government policy. Conservation of natural and cultural heritage therefore cannot be the responsibility of one department alone. It crosses almost every area of activity in the public and private sectors. Effective management requires more integrated thinking. In Western Australia for instance the Heritage Council is responsible for heritage, Department of Culture and the Arts for culture, Department of Environment for the protection of the natural environment, while planning and transport issues, which can have a huge impact on heritage, are taken care of in the Department of Planning and Infrastructure. Local governments are also central to heritage protection. They take many of the decisions which most affect the historic environment as part of the operation of the planning system. Even in a small authority, integrated policy making can be difficult when heritage cuts across planning, leisure, museums, education, transport, waste and environmental policy and operations.

It can be argued that all of these organisations should be prepared to demonstrate their commitment to the stewardship of the historic environment as part of a broader commitment to sustainability. This might mean assessing all of their policies for their impact on cultural heritage objectives, in the same way that they undertake environmental assessment. Perhaps we should also look to the public sector to demonstrate leadership in the management of heritage assets. Ultimately, heritage will only be sustained if people value it.

What are the current pressures and emerging trends influencing the conservation of historic heritage places and, in light of these, how can the policy framework be improved?

The range of pressures impacting on our ability to conserve historic heritage places, both natural and man made include increasing urbanization, land clearing, globalization, and more importantly, the fact that the market does not assign adequate value to their preservation and to the contribution they make to society. However, there have been attempts to quantify market value to heritage, particularly in the US and the UK and these attempts indicate that the difficulty in doing so should not justify inaction. A document prepared by the Colorado Historical Foundation on the economic benefits of heritage preservation concludes that historic preservation, often triggered by modest public investment incentives, represents a 'powerful economic engine', an 'engine for economic development' creating tens of thousands of jobs, particularly in the area of heritage tourism<sup>2</sup>. We would urge that similar studies be undertaken in Australia.

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<sup>1</sup> Department for Culture, Media and Sport, *Better Places to Live. Government. Identity and the Value of the Historic and Built Environment*, March 2005.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Economic Benefits of Historic Preservation in Colorado, prepared for the Colorado Historical Foundation, January 2002.

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Caring for the historic environment brings economic benefits through creating jobs, generating income, encouraging investment, regenerating areas and contributing to competitiveness. Heritage is an industry in its own right, creating employment in the construction and landscape sectors, in the public sector and in the private professional sector. It can make an indirect contribution to job creation through attracting visitors, who in turn generate jobs and expenditure. Tourism is a direct employer and, like conservation, generates employment. Conservation-related building maintenance work generates work in the construction industry.

Heritage contributes to economic prosperity through the regeneration of run-down areas, which in turn generate investment. It can contribute to the quality of life, to social inclusion and to the economy.

In order for the conservation of natural and historic heritage to fulfill its potential to contribute to economic and social life, and to contribute to sustainability we need to ensure that we have an effective system for conserving it. This may mean recognising that responsibility for heritage protection goes beyond the dedicated heritage sector to encompass other government departments and agencies as well as the private and voluntary sectors.

Heritage conservation requires a whole new way of working - across disciplines and across agencies. Training for professionals working in fields related to heritage conservation needs to incorporate the importance of heritage. Changes such as these, as well as a range of incentives, are needed if conservation of the historic environment is to play a more constructive role in economic and social life.

Heritage must be valued as an integral part of the natural environment, and of economic and social life. Museums play an integral *role in* helping to understand the *significance of* our natural and cultural heritage. If we are to pass on to future generations what we value, we will need to recognise that heritage is relevant to us all.

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