AUSTRALIA

Introduction

For this issue of the ICOMOS International Heritage at Risk report, Australia ICOMOS has chosen to report on two major processes of review and inquiry, which have provided an important snapshot of the areas of risk to Australia's cultural heritage and the adequacy of the legal and policy frameworks in operation to conserve Australia's heritage.

These processes are:

1. The five-yearly *Australian State of the Environment Report,* completed at the end of 2006, which considered the state, pressures and adequacy of conservation responses for Australia's natural and cultural heritage (as well as the links between human settlements and heritage places, and biodiversity in relation to natural heritage and landscapes).
2. The completion in 2006 of a substantial Inquiry into the 'Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage' by the Australian Productivity Commission.

Trends affecting Australia's Heritage at Risk

In Australia, there is a statutory requirement for a State of the Environment Report to be prepared by an Independent Committee every five years. There have been three reports, the most recent of these was tabled in the Parliament in December 2006.

The 2006 State of the Environment Report provides an ongoing commentary about a range of risks to natural and cultural heritage places and objects, including environmental decline due to over-clearing in some ecosystems, large-scale bushfires and the long drought, shifts in land use, social change, and lack of understanding, skills and resources. To these can be added the increasing pressures from tourism, urbanisation, industrial/commercial development, and the legislative framework which often inhibits effective management of places at an appropriate whole-of-landscape scale.

Some of the important trends identified for Australia's cultural heritage places and objects include:

- The Condition of Historic Heritage Places remains generally static since the previous report, without improvement [see Box 1].
- Pressures impacting on the integrity and condition of heritage places and surrounding landscapes are experienced in regional growth centres and coastal areas through urban expansion, consolidation and redevelopment; rural population decline can be expected to continue to result in abandoned and deteriorated heritage places.
- The Condition of Indigenous Heritage Places has begun to improve as a result of increased involvement of Indigenous people in site management but there are huge variations in resources, intergenerational involvement and skills available. There is increased recognition by developers and governments that Indigenous people must be consulted about issues affecting their lands, heritage and connection to country.
- The Condition of Heritage Objects and Collections generally relates to storage arrangements, which are inadequate in many small museums and not environmentally controlled in places with climate extremes; conservation treatment of collections remains a high priority.
- Stronger recognition of Intangible Cultural Heritage in heritage activity has continued, including language, oral tradition, crafts, skills and performing arts. There is continuing interest by Australians in Indigenous art forms, music and oral narratives as intangible heritage and as part of national identity.
- However, the 2006 State of the Environment Report noted the continuing loss of Indigenous languages in Australia, with 110 of the 135 languages considered to be critically endangered and only 18 are considered by linguists to be 'strong'.
- Understanding of Indigenous cultural heritage, especially intangible heritage associated with stories and practices, is increasingly at risk through the lack of transmission of traditional knowledge by Elders to younger generations, and also lack of knowledge about Indigenous heritage in the wider community.
- Political support for heritage is widely perceived to have declined. Despite the enactment of the long awaited reformed national heritage system, stakeholders believe that heritage is 'off the political agenda' and replaced by broader environmental issues like water supply, salinity and re-vegetation in these times of continuing variable climate. In turn, these are highlighted in the national research priorities.
- Changing concepts of heritage were noted.
  - The Natural Heritage Trust dominates the government funding agenda and this has created a discourse in which the word 'heritage' is increasingly linked to nature.
  - There has been an increase in recognition and research about non-Anglo histories and places as our multicultural post-war generation retires and records their memoirs of arrival and living in Australia and as we recognise the wartime issues of alien internment and 60th anniversaries associated with the end of World War II.
- Cultural landscapes are well recognised at the conceptual level, as a tool for integrating and managing all heritage interests in a place, but operational definitions and practical conservation approaches have been slow to develop and there has been very little actual on-ground management. The integrity of heritage landscapes is threatened in the face of transforming developments such as wind farms. [see Illustration 1]
- Professional training programs continue to occur in academic 'silos', based on separate heritage disciplines. Lack of history teaching in school environmental studies/social studies curricula remains an issue discussed nationally, including through the National History Summit convened by the Australian Government during 2006.
- Private residential heritage buildings, listed on heritage registers, have generally been maintained because of private owner preference, their niche real estate value and the period restoration businesses that serve their renovation and maintenance.
- Former government-owned heritage properties have lost heritage values and integrity where they have been redeveloped for new uses, particularly in urban redevelopments such as inner-city post offices.
- Public funding for historic built heritage conservation has declined.

The need for sustainable energy sources in Australia has resulted in the rapid installation of wind farms in parts of the continent. Community debate about these developments has included support for renewable energy sources as well as the need to assess the cultural and natural landscape values of areas suitable for wind-power generation. New assessment and siting guidelines are being developed to respond to community concern to improve the consideration of cultural landscape impacts, although many wind farm developments have already been approved or established.

The risks to Australia's natural and cultural heritage arising from natural hazards have been well recognised. For example, large areas of the continent have been affected by severe wild fire events over the past five years, including two very severe fires in the alpine region of the south-eastern States during 2003 (when over 1 million hectares were burned) and over the summer of 2005-6 [see Illustration 2]. In most cases these bushfires are naturally occurring. There is evidence that prolonged burning will change the distribution of certain forest types such as alpine ash and may lead to loss of that natural heritage type (Gill et al., 2004) while re-invigoration of Indigenous mosaic burning regimes in arid lands has been seen as positive by Indigenous communities and ecologists.

Because cultural heritage impacts are generally poorly recognised in the bushfire response of land management agencies, Australia ICOMOS developed a guideline document to assist the decision making, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the crisis, when many heritage features are further damaged or destroyed through

'clean up' activities [see www.icomos.org/australia]. The recent experiences with these large fires have also provided opportunities for new surveys of Indigenous and historic heritage assets in the affected regions, and to develop new risk-preparedness measures.

The current drought and pressure on water resources has substantially raised community awareness and concern about climate change, although it is well established that Australia has an extremely variable climate. Nevertheless, the enhanced political presence of climate change issues is to be welcomed. Climate change is now gradually becoming a part of the processes of risk assessment and response, with projected changes in land use, and increased occurrence of extreme events (for example, greater occurrence of drought and bushfires in the south, and more frequent cyclones in the north), as well as sea level rises. However, because of the variety of environmental systems across the continent, detailed modelling and identification of risks are occurring. So far, this work has not picked up the cultural heritage impacts and issues in a comprehensive and detailed way.

The Mount Stromlo Observatory, near Canberra in the Australian Capital Territory was severely damaged by the 2003 south-eastern Australian fires, resulting in the loss of important historic buildings, scientific equipment and documents. The Observatory was built in 1911 to fill a solar recording gap in the western Pacific, and is historically significant for its role in scientific research in astronomy and astrophysics in Australia since Federation.

BOX 1: The Condition of Australia's Historic Heritage
This table reports the trends emerging from two sample surveys of historic sites on the national Register of the National Estate undertaken in 2000 and again in 2004. The results of this condition survey suggests only small changes in condition overall, and that certain kinds of historic buildings continue to be particularly vulnerable.

	2000	2004
Commercial premises in urban centres and regional towns	Good condition; but exteriors have high integrity; Interiors: low	Same trend: historical associations and functional significance much diminished
Prominent buildings in rural towns		Adapted by retail chains, especially clothing
Prominent buildings in cities and regional towns	converting to 'modern' retail standards	Increasing number subject to facadism:
Vacant places	42% of those surveyed	Same %
Places subject to conservation works		Increasing deterioration due to no maintenance
Affluent regional centres, including coastal towns		Increasing land values threatening heritage integrity
Former government buildings	Many empty destroyed individual heritage integrity	Streetscape value maintained but modifications
Heritage listed places as a class fare better	Need for more systematic survey consider heritage	Obligations placed on planning approvals to
Heritage listing of places has not been systematic	Minimal protection at the local government level	Listings but many councils are overtly pro-development
Redundant rural buildings of heritage value	Noted as problem known	True scale and extent of this problem still not
Government buildings remain at risk station and Rockhampton Post Office	Echuca railway engine shed, Burra railway Hospital, Townsville Customs House, State Government Printing Office in Perth	Customs House Williamstown, Ararat Mental
Churches: highest integrity and best class of heritage place	Conservation problems developing, such as water penetration redundancy	Trend of ageing church fabric and inadequate maintenance funds continued; increasing
Subdivision of church land		Continuing trend impairing curtilage values
Masonry of heritage buildings degrades integrity	Painting: to detriment of heritage values and	Trend continues
Provision of interpretative information		Ranges from zero to good: Qld Heritage Trails
Interpretative material installed as part of conservation works	Deterioration observed in signage	Continuing trend: town streetscape panels and historic route panels are 'tatty and tired'

Source: Australian State of the Environment Report 2006 (Beeton et al, 2006). Data Reporting System Table NCH-06, based on Pearson and Marshall (2004, pp.17–19)

Areas of Inadequate Policy Responses

Risks to Australia's cultural heritage are in part an outcome of ineffective response measures, in particular the inadequate provision of resources available to the owners and managers of important cultural heritage places.

It is therefore important to evaluate the policy settings established by the three levels of Government – the national/Commonwealth Government, the eight States and Territories, and the 694 local governments across the continent. The policy environment also includes the considerable contribution of the community and professional organisations, and the role of academic institutions.

It was hoped by all these stakeholders that the Australian Treasurer's instruction to the Productivity Commission in April 2005 to enquire into the policy framework and incentives for the conservation of Australia's historic heritage places[i] would lead to new policy and programme approaches.

Australia ICOMOS and most key government and non-government heritage organisations supported a number of the key findings of the Inquiry, such as:
- the importance to the nation of our historic heritage places,
- the role of historic places in contributing to cultural capital,
- the enhancement of social capital through heritage providing a tangible link to the past and reinforcing the sense of community identity,
- the emerging trends of adaptive reuse and heritage tourism,
- the need for enhanced decision-making tools, including data collection and systematic monitoring, and
- the need for improvements to the system in terms of coordination between levels of government, consistency and transparency in the identification of heritage values and the application of thresholds, and the efficiency and effectiveness and efficiency of conservation programs.

However, the submissions also expressed strong disagreement and dismay about the main thrust of the draft Recommendations (December 2005), and disappointment in the lost opportunities represented by the final report (April 2006). This reaction is based mostly on the finding by the Inquiry that heritage protection represents a substantial economic 'burden' for private owners, and questioning whether the social benefits sufficiently warranted these 'onerous restrictions'.

The Productivity Commission had *challenged (and seemingly disregarded) central principles and tenets underlying the practice of heritage conservation, and seemed to have provided little of practical or tangible benefit in return* (Heritage Chairs of the States and Territories of Australia, 2006:2).

This was the first national inquiry into heritage in over 30 years, and there were high expectations of its potential significance for the future of the national heritage system. As a result, the 418 written submissions offer an unparalleled snapshot of the 'state of heritage' as it is regulated, administered, and experienced at community level in 2005/6 and an unprecedented opportunity to not only assess the 'state of heritage', but also to construct ways to improve the system nationwide.

The three most consistent and compelling messages from the submissions to the inquiry are (Heritage Chairs of the States and Territories of Australia, 2006):
- Insufficient capacity exists at all levels of government to meet community expectations regarding the conservation of Australia's historic cultural heritage.
- This is especially critical at the local level, and a growing share of heritage conservation responsibilities has been shifted to local municipalities, without the accompanying financial and other resources (including technical advice and expertise).
- The lack of a *national strategic framework* which incorporates the roles and activities of all levels of government is a substantial issue.

The Heritage Chairs & Officials of Australia and New Zealand also conducted a national choice modelling survey as part of its contribution to the Inquiry process. The results were overwhelming, showing that 93% of the community see heritage as forming part of Australia's national identity. A similarly overwhelming percentage of respondents considered that it is important to protect Australia's heritage, even though the individual respondent may never visit these places, and that it is important to educate Australian children about heritage (The Allen Consulting Group, 2006).

Registers of listed places have been complied since the 1970s and as shown in Box 2 below the vast majority of statutory-listed historic heritage places are of local significance. More listed heritage places are in private hands than are in public ownership, especially those of local significance. The emphasis on the 'problems' and the resourcing challenges therefore focuses primarily on the vast heritage resource of local significance.

Box 2: Australian historic heritage places on statutory lists/registers, at 30 June 2005

Jurisdiction	World and national heritage lists	Government-owned heritage lists	State and Territory heritage registers	Local government lists
Commonwealth	16	292[a]	..	..
New South Wales	..	6 522[b]	1 500	26 000
Victoria	..	nsl	1 992	100 000[c]
Queensland	..	nsl	1 440	na
Western Australia	..	nsl	1 113	16 807[f]
South Australia	..	nsl[d]	2 195[e]	4 500
Tasmania	..	nsl	5 326	..[g]
Northern Territory	..	nsl	175	..
ACT	..	nsl	247	..
Totals	**16***	**6 814**	**13 988**	**>147 000**

[a] Commonwealth Heritage List.

[b] Government-owned and managed places on the NSW s. 170 Register

[c] Estimated number of properties covered by individual and area Heritage Overlay controls.

[d] Included in State figure.

[e] About 27 per cent are residential homes.

[f] Includes non-government lists. About 36 per cent are residential homes, 77 per cent are 20th Century places and 7 per cent are also listed on the State Register.

[g] Included in State figure.

na Not available. **..** Nil. **nsl** Not separately listed.

(Source: Table 3.3, Productivity Commission, 2006:36)

The Productivity Commission undertook a survey of all local government areas in Australia. 75% of Australia's 694 local councils responded. Around 50% of responding councils provided some forms of assistance to property owners and community organisations to identify and conserve historic cultural heritage places (ranging from 15% of councils in Queensland to over 80% in New South Wales). The main forms of assistance provided were free heritage advice and grants (Productivity Commission, 2006:38-9).

Submissions were generally in accord that the efficiency and effectiveness of the system is hampered by a failure to fully implement nationally agreed approaches and by the lack of capacity of local government, in terms of skills and financial resources, to properly manage and support heritage conservation at local level. There are also issues arising from the insufficient and/or unnecessarily complicated interactions between systems for heritage protection and urban planning.

The roles and responsibilities of governments, and the administrative and regulatory arrangements between them, were key issues for many respondents, including for those most involved, the responsible agencies themselves. This relates to the complexities arising from Australia's 'three-tier' structure of government, and the confusion in the community about the different responsibilities and significance thresholds. There were concerns about cost shifting between the different levels of government, and duplication in the processes of listing and statutory approvals, leading to community confusion about how things are expected to work.

A notable example of the lack of protection provided in the three-tier government structure is the extensive and extremely significant rock art of the Burrup Peninsula in Western Australia (see Box 3). A large portion of this landscape has now been included in Australia's National Heritage List. However, issues still remain regarding the long-term conservation of its heritage values in the face of competing development pressures from natural resource exploration and processing, and less urgently, tourism.

Box 3: Burrup Peninsula
Development pressures can inhibit the operation of national and State cultural heritage legislation, including places with potential World Heritage values. One example from Australia is the Burrup Peninsula rock art sites in the Dampier Archipelago in the north-west of Western Australia, which is also the site of Australia's largest liquid natural gas facility on the North-West Shelf.

The Australian Heritage Council assessed the site as having National Heritage values, and after a protracted process it was entered on Australia's National Heritage List by the Commonwealth Minister on 3 July 2007. There was a, consistent view of experts that the protection provided by the Western Australian State Government was insufficient. The area is noted by ICOMOS in its thematic study of global rock art sites, and is well known internationally as a very significant rock art cultural landscape. The inclusion of this area in the National Heritage List was welcomed by many organisations and experts throughout the Australian community, including Australia ICOMOS.

Rock art specialists from around the world have expressed concern about the impacts of new development proposals for the Burrup. The World Monuments Fund's 100 Most Endangered Sites list included in June 2007 the Burrup Peninsula, 'one of the world's richest collections of rock art…with up to one million carvings as old as 20,000 years… as among the planet's most endangered sites' (http://www.worldmonumentswatch.org/).

Delegates to the Australia ICOMOS national conference, meeting in Fremantle, Western Australia in November 2006 noted the unquestionable significance of the Burrup Peninsula Rock Art sites, and the lack of adequate legislative protection afforded to them, particularly in the face of the substantial and economically important industrial development proposal. Australia ICOMOS requested that national and State governments act with urgency to redress this situation, ensuring the adequate protection for the significant cultural landscape, development and implementation of a strong and culturally appropriate heritage management regime, and all necessary actions to avoid adverse impacts.

While to some extent this call has been answered with the listing of a large part of the area on the National Heritage List, there remain strong concerns about the long term conservation of the area in the face of competing pressures from development. The boundary of the listed area was a controversial element of the compromise between the State and National Governments. This allows for the development to proceed in part of the area, involving the continued relocation of rock art. There is currently no endorsed Conservation Management Plan in place for this significant site, and strong concerns remain about the nature and extent of future development, both within and adjacent to the listed area.

Similarly, there are many examples of inadequate government stewardship of publicly owned heritage assets, including insufficient resourcing, privatisation of management, and poor government adherence to heritage legislation.

Overseas studies and local research were used to demonstrate that there are both market and non-market values of historic heritage places to Australian society and that there is a 'public good' argument for historic conservation that justifies government intervention.

The funding that governments in Australia devote to taking care of our cultural heritage is far less than the amount they allocate to safeguarding the public interest in conservation of natural resources. There is a stark contrast between the funding provided by governments in Australia for the conservation of natural and historic heritage. For example, the $2.7 billion Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) represents the biggest financial commitment to environmental action by any Australian government. Yet the Act which established the Trust in 1997 specifically excludes historic heritage from funded projects, despite the often indivisible nature of the heritage values expressed in the one place or landscape – natural, Indigenous and historic. There is a case to be made for widening the use of the NHT mechanisms to include cultural heritage. Similarly, the lack of financial incentives for privately owned properties was frequently mentioned. There has been a great deal of debate about the operation of the taxation system, and the need to find new income sources.

Finally, there is a lack of national data collection standards and coordinated programs of data collection and reporting. This makes it impossible to monitor the condition of the heritage estate over time with any accuracy, and also means that the evaluation of the effectiveness of response measures, is anecdotal, impressionistic and ineffective as a basis for development of new policy or funding proposals.

Conclusion

The peer-reviewed and independently prepared State of the Environment Report's theme commentary for Australia's Natural and Cultural Heritage had the following conclusion. It is a call to action for all heritage practitioners working in Australia – and Australia ICOMOS - and a challenge to all levels of Government to find new and more effective arrangements for managing Australia's cultural heritage (Lennon 2006).

Heritage conservation in Australia is at a turning point. Heritage values have changed over the last 30 years since the Australian Heritage Commission Act was passed and reflect changed attitudes, educational standards, technology, economy and demography… The relationship between the Australian Government's heritage administration and State/Territory jurisdictions has been formally established through the National Heritage Protocol (September 2003). However, better integration of the new arrangements with State processes across all areas of heritage conservation still remains the most active requirement. A national policy framework is needed to attain the economic and social benefits of our heritage assets. Heritage is still regarded as special places rather than as a range of values found throughout the environment and encompassing stories, traditions and community associations.

The very high risks being experienced by non-renewable heritage resources must be given adequate voice through specialist advisory bodies to the various Ministers overseeing heritage legislation and programs. There has been a demonstrable decline in the independence, leverage and professional composition of these committees over the last ten years, part of a more widespread trend recognised by some commentators of declining public debate and in the dissenting activities of NGOs. This has been coupled with the de-regulatory thrust of many State governments, a narrowing of the leadership exercised by the Commonwealth government and devolution of responsibilities to the over-burdened and under-resourced local levels of government.

A shared heritage requires public/private partnerships at all levels, public engagement, accountability and continuing education. In a decade of economic prosperity, cultural heritage remains a minnow in the vast sea of boiling issues relating to climate change, water supply and agricultural sustainability.

These factors compound the pressures on Australia's cultural heritage and diminish the effectiveness of the responses. As we look ahead, they therefore pose substantial risks to the conservation and sustainability of Australia's cultural heritage.

This contribution to the ICOMOS International Heritage at Risk 2007 report was prepared for Australia ICOMOS by Jane Lennon, Kristal Buckley, Susan McIntyre-Tamwoy and Peter Phillips. Photographs were provided by Kristal Buckley, Juliet Ramsay and Jo McDonald.

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[i] Indigenous cultural heritage was excluded from the terms of reference for the Inquiry.