

Cultural heritage and local government

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Introduction

In 2005 the Productivity Commission undertook an inquiry into the conservation of historic heritage places in Australia. The Commission conducted a survey of local government to gain information on its role in the identification and conservation of heritage places (Productivity Commission 2006, appendix B,323).

A large number of submissions from: local government organisations, local and city councils, State governments and national NGOs, also commented on the role of local government. This material has given us a snapshot of this role and of current issues and trends (see <http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiry/heritage/subs/sublist.html>).

Many submissions acknowledged that the vast majority of heritage places and landscapes are the responsibility of local government, and that effective local government action is essential to the conservation of the heritage of the community.

The local government program is considered the mainstay of the Heritage Incentives Program for three reasons. Firstly, local government actions have a major influence on the historic environment as a whole, through management of the strategic planning at local level and their day-to-day management of the historic environment. Secondly, they exert a major influence on the management of heritage items through the development assessment process. Thirdly, as major owners of heritage places, they can demonstrate leadership in best practice management of our rural and urban historic environment. (Submission 157 New South Wales Heritage Office, 34).

The majority of councils surveyed have some form of heritage list and statutory protection, with a growing tendency for state governments to delegate more powers and responsibilities to local government. Many local councils consider that increasing delegation is not matched by appropriate resources. There is considerable discrepancy between states and regions in the degree

of effectiveness of this role, with some councils having no heritage list to date, and many lacking heritage advisers, assistance and policy support. However it can be said that overall local government involvement in heritage is growing more important and its effectiveness is gradually strengthening.

Local government responses

A large number of councils -- almost 73 per cent-- responded to the Commission's survey, and the general attitude of councils in the survey and submissions was positive about the value of heritage.

There is clear evidence of Councils' and community support for the conservation of cultural heritage. Heritage places are recognised as being important in the history, unique character and shared values of communities, and there is a high (and offer activist) community interest in heritage. Especially in depressed and threatened rural communities, the economic value and tourism potential of authentically conserved places which add to the unique character of the town or region is well recognised. Heritage surveys -- the usual way of identifying local heritage -- are seen as raising the level of awareness in communities. A growing trend is for councils to actively use their heritage portfolio for community, economic and tourism benefit. .

ALGA [Australian Local Government Association] and local government generally appreciate the growing importance heritage conservation has generated for local and regional communities over the past couple of decades in general. The revitalisation of main streets, the cultural tourism strength of attractive community towns and villages, and the increasing international interest in Australia's buildings, structures and physically created places and landscapes provide tangible examples of such benefits. (Australian Local Governments Association Submission DR 254, 3)

Good examples of this are seen in the submission by the Broken Hill City Council (submission12) and the Ballarat City Council (submission 100).

Heritage and cultural tourism have become an integral part of Broken Hill's future. The fixed life of the mining industry has led the city to focus on sustainable cultural tourism as an important area of growth with heritage as its major selling point. Most importantly there is now a new attitude and pride within the population of Broken Hill and as the city embarks upon the new millennium this sense of confidence is critical for its community spirit..... .

Broken Hill provides a unique model for managing heritage at the local level and has established an integrated approach to conserving heritage buildings and revitalising public streetscapes. Innovative plans have been implemented by the City with

cooperative efforts between local government and the community, resulting in a renewed sense of pride in the community.

Heritage and the heritage programs have played a significant role in the economy of Broken Hill. The tourism experience and the sense of place have been enhanced. Tourism numbers have increased over recent years. There has been a trend for retirees to move to Broken Hill given its affordability, and there is considerable anecdotal evidence that the appearance of the city has been a determining factor in the choice of location of the retirees in question. (Broken Hill City Council p2)

On average half the councils responding to the survey provide assistance to the community and individuals with the conservation of heritage places. This assistance is either free advice (40 per cent) or the provision of grants or concessions (25 per cent). Cooperation between state and local government is good on the whole, but there are some consistently mentioned issues considered to be serious problems.

It iswidely agreed amongst many local government politicians and practitioners that the financing of local heritage conservation is problematic given the constraints placed on local governments and the historical implications arising from 'cost - shifting' as documented by the Hawker Report - Rates and Taxes: A Fair Share for Responsible Local Government (2003) (Australian Local Governments Association Submission DR 254, 3).

Other issues commonly mentioned were:

- lack of consistency of approach between different councils, and lack of clarity, inconsistency and confusion especially for owners, between Commonwealth, State and local roles.
- numerous problems with the application of planning provisions at the local level
- a strongly identified need for more heritage advisers and heritage professionals especially in regional Australia.
- public perceptions that heritage listing is a threatening process, and the need to alleviate this by publicity, and the provision of realistic and well targeted incentives
- pressure for ' development at any cost' especially in depressed areas, and the effect of the population increase in ' seachange' areas
- the effect of urban consolidation on the character and heritage of old and valued suburbs in the major cities
- lack of powers at local council level particularly to stop demolition by neglect
- the issue of redundant rural building types -- woolsheds, early pastoral huts etc.

- the cost to councils of maintenance and restoration of their own building stock

Summary

In summary, local government plays a key role in the conservation of cultural heritage. The sector's appreciation of the importance of cultural heritage and involvement in its identification and conservation can be seen to have increased over the reporting period, though it is clear that there are still some significant problems to be addressed.

Reference

Productivity Commission 2006, *Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage Places*, Report No 37, Canberra.

Table 1: Local Government listed places, by State –survey responses

State	Councils with a heritage list	Individual places	Heritage areas ^a	Council owned places ^b	
				Average	Maximum
	% Respondents	No.	No.	% Listed Places	% Listed Places
NSW	93	25 847	512	8.8	71
Vic	97	19 183	497	9.3	83
Qld	42	9 852	191	19.9	100
WA ^c	84	8 178	391	12.7	100
SA	52	7 489	92	7.9	33
Tas	86	5 804	87	5.6	29
Total	75	76 353	1 770	10.4	100
a Includes historic conservation zones, heritage precincts, streetscapes and special areas.					
b Includes parks and monuments.					
c May include places in Municipal Heritage Inventories.					
Source: Productivity Commission 2006, <i>Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage Places</i> , Table B.2:324					

Table 2: Employment of heritage advisors – Proportion of responding councils

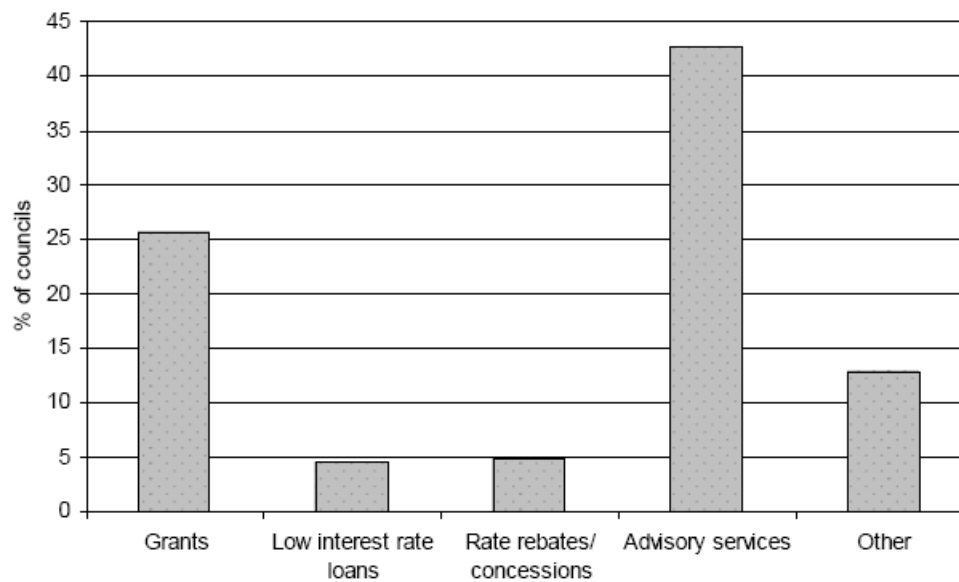
State	Councils who employ a heritage advisor	Proportion of heritage advisors employed on a part-time basis	Average days per month ^a	Access to a heritage advisor employed by another council
	%	%	No.	%
NSW	81.5	85.0	2.1	1.5
Vic	83.9	96.2	2.7	1.6
Qld	9.3	77.8	2.9	4.1
WA	31.4	92.6	3.2	11.6
SA	43.8	92.9	1.9	6.3
Tas	31.8	85.7	5.0	0.0
a For part-time heritage advisors.				
Source: Productivity Commission 2005, Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage Places, Table B.10:335.				

Table 3: Obtaining development approval – proportion of responding councils

State	Development approval ^a required for ALL works on listed places	Development approval required for only those works affecting identified heritage values	Other ^b
New South Wales	57.7	18.5	24.6
Victoria	53.2	24.2	22.6
Queensland	38.1	17.5	12.4
Western Australia	60.5	8.1	14.0
South Australia	48.4	17.2	21.9

Tasmania	81.8	9.1	9.1
<p>a Applies to state and/or locally listed places. Some councils indicated that modification to items on the Register of the National Estate also required approval.</p> <p>b Typically, councils that nominated this category indicated that maintenance, painting and minor renovations did not require approval or that only demolition or changes to the façade required approval.</p>			
<p>Source: Productivity Commission 2006, Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage Places, Table B.12:337</p>			

Figure 1: Type of assistance provided - proportion of responding councils



Source: Productivity Commission 2006, Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage Places, Figure B.3:331.