To the Minister

This is a very brief response to your proposed strategy for acknowledging, managing and promoting Australia's heritage. I have worked for over 20 years in both  paid and voluntary capacities to retain and promote Australia's heritage on the Far North Coast of New South Wales, and consider I am representative of the many volunteers who work in this sector. I believe that without community engagement in this region we would have very little in the way of indigenous, cultural or environmental heritage remaining. I believe community engagement and support, particularly at the local level, is the most important part of this strategy.

Community Engagement and Support at the Local Government Level

Our community works mainly with local government, in particular Ballina Shire. This council will only acknowledge items of heritage significance if the owners of those items ask Council to do so. This creates a catch 22 situation where only items listed on the Local Environmental Planning instrument are considered in development applications (DA). So if a significant item is not on THE list then there is no legal reason why it should be considered in a DA, even if the community knows it is significant.The problem associated with this is that the DA does not even need to be advertised so an item may be demolished before the community can alert Council.

**I would like the strategy to address the issue of having consistant local regulations which acknowledge and conserve heritage items at the local level. If items are conserved at a local level then they are automatically conserved at a National level.**

In addition this Council does not have any grants program to support the management of heritage places and hence there is no incentive for owners of heritage items to maintain items of significance. This particulary applies to items of rural heritage which are often no longer used or archaeological sites which are just seen as an impediment to future development. The implication from the above is that if we want to save and promote our heritage we must do so at the local level.

**I would like the strategy to focus on delivery at the local level. The strategy should encourage all Councils to provide a heritage grants scheme. It should also encourage NSW, and other, State governments, to develop new income streams to support the heritage sector. The Western Australian lottery scheme (as in UK) seems like a good model to follow.**

In-kind Support

Historical Societies in the region mostly manage their own budgets but many are housed in Council/Government owned buildings. These buildings themselves are often significant places and require on-going maintenance. Costs associated with maintaining interiors, grounds and general maintenance ie cleaning gutters, mending fences, pest inspections, security, telephone and electricity are usually born by the societies but major works ie re roofing, painting, repairing rot are beyond their budgets. It is difficult for Societies to influence Council to undertake these major works and a lack of funds is often cited as the reason why maintenance is not done.

**I would like to see the strategy suggest that an organisation/program like the Green Army (skilled and organised at a National Level) be used by Councils to undertake works on local government assets. Works would include heritage painting, re-roofing, repair work on historic windows etc.**

Using my own Alstonville Historical Society as an example, we manage a house museum and historical resource centre. The house is owned by Council and volunteers open the doors to the public 2 days per week or by appointment on other days. Local schools are encouraged to visit but in recent years we have seen visits from schools decline. Teachers cite paper work, safetly audits, costs (although we only change $1 entry fee) and busy timetables as reasons why they don't visit. Working with large institutions like the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney we have been able to bring a nationally significant item to our Museum. This exhibition increased visitation rates and allowed the community to see an item not normally shown to the public. I would like to see us continue to work with these large institutions but it seems funding to these places is reducing and it is probable that we will not be able to mount a similar exhibition in the future.

**I would like the strategy to include a program which funds large heritage institutions eg the Powerhouse Museum, Australian War Memorial, National Library of Australia etc, so that they can continue with regional programs which in turn support smaller local museums.**

Please, not another website!

The strategy suggests the development of an Australian Heritage Commission website as a key element for promotion. Our society is overloaded with websites to update and maintain. We have for example our own simple website, we also put material on the Northern Rivers Arts Website, NSW Museums and Galleries website and the local tourist office site. In the past we have put material on the Collections Australia website, Heritage Australia website and those of various volunteer organisations. All this takes much time and I don't believe our presence on these sites has increased our exposure or visitor numbers.

**I think the strategy should look at promoting our heritage through one national tourism website.**

Thank you for considering this response to your Strategy.

Sincerely

Jane Gardiner

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