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National Trusts of Australia Cultural Heritage Survey



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Cover image

Goldfields Golden Pipeline, Western Australia

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National Trusts of Australia Cultural Heritage Survey

The National Trusts of Australia were invited to contribute to the ‘heritage’ theme of the State of the Environment 2016 report (SoE 2016).

The aggregated responses to the survey are presented here. The text below is the introductory text provided to the respondents. Three responses were completed, two from members whose work involves both cultural and natural heritage, and one whose work involves only cultural heritage. The most frequent response to each question is shaded for visual interpretation.

Overview

Under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, the Minister for Environment is required to table a report in Parliament every five years on the state of the Australian environment. The SoE 2016 will build on data and information published in [SoE 2011](#).

The EPBC Act specifically includes the ‘heritage values of places’ as part of the ‘environment’. Heritage values are defined as including: the place’s natural and cultural environment having aesthetic, historic, scientific or social significance, or other significance, for current and future generations of Australians.

The SoE report assesses the current state of the Australian environment across a range of disciplinary ‘themes’ (including heritage), explores how the environment changes over time and reports on emerging and future environmental matters. It is a source of independent and credible information and data at national and regional scales, and is compiled by independent experts.

The Australian National Trusts are invited to contribute to SoE 2016. This contribution will include an invitation to the National, State and Territory National Trust organisations to complete this survey about cultural heritage issues, plus a presentation and discussion with the National Trust Board in April 2016.

The approach to preparing SoE 2016 will be similar to SoE 2011, but available resources are greatly reduced. The main SoE 2016 report will be a succinct volume, drawn from a series of nine supporting reports – including heritage. These reports will contain assessment summaries which parallel those in SoE 2011.

A major challenge in completing assessment summaries for the heritage theme report is the lack of empirical data. Reliance is therefore placed on expert opinions expressed by well informed bodies, such as the National Trusts.

The questions below are generally framed and focused at a ‘national’ level. It is recognised that this does not facilitate consideration of the fine grain and major differences between jurisdictions or local communities and places. Nevertheless, if you are able to accept the highly general nature of the approach and provide a response, the 5 to 10 minutes of your time will contribute directly to some of the heritage theme findings of the 2016 State of the Environment Report.

The data that you provide in this survey will be provided to the Department of the Environment and Energy on behalf of the Commonwealth of Australia. This data may be used under the terms of a 'Creative Commons Attribution' licence to support the work being done for the State of the Environment Report 2016.

State and Trends of Australia's Cultural Heritage					
How strongly do you agree with the following statements about the state and trend of cultural heritage in the last five years?					
Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Significant progress has been made in the collection of data relating to statutory listing processes for cultural heritage.		1		1	1
The number of listed cultural heritage places has increased and there have been more systematic, thematic cultural heritage assessment projects.		1			2
The majority of Australia's cultural heritage places are in good condition and retain integrity of their identified values.		1		1	1
Comments:					
<p>"In Western Australia the statutory listing of Aboriginal sites is a shocking mess. I question whether it is appropriate still to have racially segregated heritage acts in Western Australia, with weaker regulations for Aboriginal heritage than for settler heritage. It is time for bold leadership to create a single heritage act for WA.</p> <p>The existence of parallel Acts today serves further to segregate an unacceptably divided society, rather than forge social cohesion. It allows for alarming comparisons between the two draft Acts, whereby proposed penalties for damaging non-Aboriginal heritage sites are greater than for damaging Aboriginal heritage sites, proposed mechanisms for protecting non-Aboriginal heritage sites are explicitly stronger and better defined than those for protecting Aboriginal heritage sites, proposed jurisdiction over listing and destruction of sites lies with the Minister for non-Aboriginal heritage, but with a staff member of a public services department for Aboriginal heritage. These and the many other inequities between the two Acts are all indefensible. It is contended that the segregation of heritage protection in 21st Century Western Australia is no longer conscionable. Heritage is heritage; it should all be subject to the same legislation and regulation. Combining the two Acts would offer significant benefits for non-Aboriginal heritage.</p> <p>The proposed WA Heritage Bill is out of step with international heritage legislation in that it makes no provision for the protection of intangible heritage, even though this State has rich non-Aboriginal intangible heritage. There are also significant administrative and political benefits from merging the Acts; cutting down duplication of processes, removing the multiplication of heritage lists, removing the multiplication of advisory boards, etc. In terms of implementation it is contended that, if the rigour and transparency with which non-Aboriginal heritage management decisions are currently applied by the Heritage Council was extended to Aboriginal heritage then the bulk of the serious and socially divisive heritage conflicts witnessed in recent years would never have occurred. Merging the two Heritage Acts has the potential to bring administrative and social cohesion to an area that is currently of grave intellectual, political and social concern."</p> <p>""*Management of historic sites in public land</p>					

Through our management of Crown land sites and our linkages to other public land managers, NTAV routinely engages on conservation management issues with Parks Victoria and Committees of Management, local government, government agencies such as VicRoads and VicTrack, and consequently have a broad and in-depth experience of heritage issues on public land.

In many ways the management of historic places on public land for the last 40 years has been a sorry tale. The agency expertise for heritage on public land in Victoria, the Historic Places Section, was progressively dismantled in the 2000s. The absence of a plan, a strategy and engagement by all governments has led to some seemingly intractable problems with historic sites on public land, including “demolition by neglect”.

*Relationship between different levels of government

The consideration of the views of local government by state government authorities has also been a vexed matter, resulting in frustration at the local level for decisions made at the state level failing to take account of local heritage issues.

The inability for Heritage Council decisions that finds places of local significance to be translated to interim heritage controls. If, following an assessment by Heritage Victoria (and a possible hearing) the Heritage Council determines that a place is not of state level significance, but should be referred to local government for consideration for an overlay, in many instances the referral is not taken up by local government. The politics of local government frequently cloud a detached assessment process.

*Identification and management of cultural landscapes

The identification and protection of significant cultural landscapes at National, State and local level is increasing, however there are significant challenges in the registration of broad-acre landscapes and urban precincts, including multiple landowners and stakeholders, and complex values, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, tangible and intangible. The management of cultural landscapes should be investigated and championed by all levels of government, with the Historic Urban Landscape approach, currently being implemented in Ballarat, offering one approach to the management of a complex cultural landscape.

*Demolition by neglect

While we agree that the majority of Australia’s cultural heritage places are in fair to good condition, “demolition by neglect” remains an issue for places in both public and private ownership. There is a lack of any workable mechanism for enforcement against demolition by neglect at state or local government levels. In 2013 we commissioned a report on the issue of demolition by neglect in Victoria, and in 2014, with the support of the Heritage Council of Victoria, we facilitated a forum of planners and experts to formulate policy initiatives to deal with the issue at local government level. A model law has been drafted for use by local government. The report can be found here - <https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/initiatives/demolition-by-neglect/>. Recommendations identified include potential models for incentives as well as penalties and other enforcement mechanisms.”

“The ‘State’ of Australia’s heritage places

The 2011 SoE report stated:

Assessing the condition of Australia’s heritage places is hampered by an incomplete and unrepresentative set of formally identified heritage places, and by the absence of a comprehensive

body of reliable national data (P.703).

The information we do have available on heritage places is mainly about descriptions of places, their heritage significance and in some cases current funding initiatives. There is no comprehensive data, or even full understanding of the condition and integrity of these places. This was the situation reported in 2011 and remains so to this day. We just do not know what the condition of Australia's heritage places are as we have no empirical data, nor any common means of collecting it. Developing a national database on the condition and conservation works on our heritage places would be of great value to governments and NGOs concerned with heritage conservation."

Pressures on Australia's Cultural Heritage

How do you perceive the level of impact of the following pressures on Australia's cultural heritage?

Pressure	Very High Impact	High Impact	Low Impact	Very Low Impact	No Impact
Climate Change					
Rising temperatures		2	1		
Changing rainfall	1	2			
Rising sea level		2	1		
Altered fire regimes	1	2			
Extreme weather events		3			
Population					
Population growth	1	2			
Population shift	1	1		1	
Community perceptions of value		3			
Economic Growth					
Resource extraction	1	1	1		
Development	1	2			
Tourism	1	1	1		

Are there other major pressures affecting cultural heritage in Australia or other comments:

"The lack of community perception of value is a core problem as well as a general lack of public engagement with heritage when compared with other top 50 world economies.

Another major pressure in rural areas is land management systems. These are skewed towards protecting natural heritage, often to the detriment of cultural heritage. E.g. fire and animal management regimes that are neither traditional nor compatible with protecting cultural heritage."

"* Foreign Investment

The National Trust in Victoria receives a handful of enquiries each week regarding to the increasing densification and redevelopment of property reportedly owned by foreign nationals. Residents making enquiries are not only concerned about the loss of heritage homes, but also the heritage trees and gardens that are demolished when older homes are replaced by a larger, sometimes significantly larger, dwelling.

The government's current policy is to channel foreign investment into new dwellings, as this increases the total housing stock of Australia, and foreign investors may seek approval to purchase an established dwelling for redevelopment into multiple dwellings. As a result, in already densely populated areas, existing dwellings are targeted for redevelopment.

While planning approval is required under the provisions of the planning scheme for the demolition of places protected under the Heritage Overlay, a planning permit is not required for the demolition of places which are not recognised under the heritage overlay. As a result, places which may have heritage significance, but which have not been picked up in a heritage study or planning amendment, are vulnerable. We note that the demolition of serviceable dwellings to encourage the construction of new housing stock also has serious sustainability implications.

Recent high-profile demolitions associated with foreign investment:

- The Whitlam House, 'Ngara', was reportedly bought by (*a foreign national*) for \$3.3M with intent to demolish the building and rebuild a family home. It is not known whether this purchase required approval from the FIRB, or if required, whether it was sought or granted. After a protracted heritage-listing process, a Heritage Overlay has been applied to the partially-demolished building by the City of Boroondara.

- A 1913 Queen Anne mansion on St Georges Rd Toorak, owned by (*an individual*), who has held an Australian visa since 2001.

We note that Labor's proposed negative gearing policy, announced in February 2016, would similarly limit the availability of negative gearing to newly constructed homes. This may also have the effect of putting increased pressure on existing housing stock, particularly in already densely populated areas."

"Climate Change.

While there have been many worthy studies done on the science of climate change, as far as our heritage places are concerned, we really have little understanding of the scale of impact over time it will have. We can speculate on the impacts of local weather patterns and the impacts on each heritage place, and then put in place conservation and protection management measures, but the longer-term impacts such as biological changes, population changes, and social changes can only really be guessed at.

Government leadership - an understanding and acceptance by political parties and government ministers of the reality of climate change is an imperative if we are to address the threats and put in place effective mitigation and conservation measures. Governments must come to terms with the realisation that our climate (the climate regimes of planet Earth) is, and always has been dynamic both over long-periods of time and within the life spans of humans. The changes we are seeing now have been greatly further influenced by anthropogenic activities. If this realisation is firmly fixed in the minds of our policy makers and forms the base of climate change mitigation then we will see positive results for our heritage places.

The impacts of cyclones on Queensland are largely contained to north and far north Queensland, however, wild storms, devastating flooding, and hail affect the rest of the state on an all too frequent basis. Where climate change can be attributed to such events, then the consequences of damage are more real and of significant concern.

Overall, we consider the impacts of climate change to be high to very high in longer timeframes as well as much shorter timeframes than we are experiencing at the present. The 2011 SoE assessment of climate change impacts, which ranged from a very high impact for rising sea levels and high for temperature, rainfall, & fire regimes (p. 718) reflects a similar assessment."

Management Effectiveness for Australia's Cultural Heritage

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Identification					
Australia's cultural heritage is well understood and appropriately recognised.		1		1	1
Adequate resources are available for the survey, identification and assessment of Australia's cultural heritage places.				1	1
Management					
Management needs and processes are well understood by those responsible for managing Australia's cultural heritage places.				1	1
Appropriate management plans or other mechanisms are in place for the management of Australia's heritage places.		1	1	1	
Protection					
Australia's cultural heritage receives adequate protection through existing statutory controls.		1			2
Decisions regarding cultural heritage places are well-informed by an understanding of heritage values and the principles of the Burra Charter.			1	2	
Leadership					
There are appropriate governance structures in place to co-ordinate and manage cultural heritage in Australia.			1		2
Celebration					
Cultural heritage places in Australia are accessible, well-presented and contribute to the community's sense of place.		1		2	

Is there other information you would like to provide?

Significant issues that should be considered:

"Heritage tourism should be a significant driver of the Australian economy. For this reason Heritage Masters programmes should be Commonwealth supported."

"Population growth

We have assessed the growth of population as reaching a very high impact on our heritage properties. We consider that there are likely to be two trends, coming from population growth, which would affect cultural heritage. The first is an increase in movement from rural and regional to city areas. This would put pressures on governments to increase urban infill development at the detriment of urban open space and heritage properties. The second trend is the obverse. Population change from rural to urban would result in decreasing or changing levels in many of the

more out-of-the-way areas subsequently incurring a loss of appreciation of the values of heritage places and making it more challenging to achieve effective conservation outcomes.

The adaptive re-use of heritage places is of vital importance. Abandoned places are at great risk whilst at the same time inappropriate use can do much damage. Population growth where it happens should be anchored by protecting and promoting heritage places to empower a sense of place, conversely where populations reduce then those heritage places left behind need support from 'broader church' organisations such as the National Trust that exist to look after important places which by their very nature cannot self sustain. The funding is needed to fulfil this purpose – to create and maintain jobs where otherwise no such jobs may exist to drive visitation to such places.”

Other pressures or comments:

“Other Information

Conservation & Management of Heritage Places.

While there have been a host of heritage surveys resulting in conservation plans for properties, not all (probably few) are followed up with effective long-term management. This is caused by a number of issues; the primary ones are a lack of standards resulting in inconsistent assessments; a lack of active conservation measures and management being developed; and an increasing lack of conservation and trade skills. There is also a lack of business planning and marketing and sales plans for properties with the aim of attracting visitors to experience our heritage.

As our built heritage ages there is an increasing demand for conservation and a rapidly decreasing skilled force to carry out the required work. This results in many heritage property managers having to delay vital conservation works or employ labour that has little heritage skills training and experience.

There is a decline in heritage investment in state and federal budgets. The constant imposition of government imposed efficiency dividends on agencies has put pressure on these agencies in terms of their budget, staffing and resources to be effective in heritage management. This has resulted in ad hoc protection and management of places of national and state significance.

There also needs to be a stronger link to tourism planning and promotion of our heritage places.

Statutory Controls.

We consider that state and federal statutory controls governing heritage places is being eroded to the point of not providing adequate long-term protection. A case in point is the recent policy agreement, which has been developed between state and federal governments giving the states more discretionary powers allowing them to make decisions on referrals under the EPBC act. This has two major inherent problems: it has seriously weakened the act itself, which was designed to oversee the protection and conservation of heritage places; and it allows the states more powers over self-driven developmental decisions affecting heritage properties which will have detrimental effects on the places themselves and their intrinsic values.

Other Comments

A final comment.

Conservation measures of our heritage properties should be aimed primarily at the identified heritage values of each rather than the place. In other words, our cultural places (and in many cases our natural heritage places) have layers and complexities of historic and social values intrinsic to the overall heritage significance. While the architectural, structural and aesthetic values are often understood and conserved, it is the social values that are often not fully researched or understood. Many heritage assessments, because of an absence of determining standards, lack a comprehensive

coverage of all the facets of heritage significance. The ongoing development of Millers Point, Sydney, and the destruction of 1960s accommodation blocks in Canberra, are examples of concentrating on the bricks and mortar facades of places, either conserving them or destroying them, and not considering their interiors, their historical contexts, their intangible values or their tangible values as part of a cultural landscape.

There needs to be greater appreciation of the value of heritage places to drive visitation across Australia. Jobs and volunteer opportunities that are then created in management, visitor services, investment in facilities and conservation will result from the visitor economy.

Cultural heritage needs to be across both built heritage and the arts that occupy these places and the jobs created need support and recognition.”