

Submission to the Australian Heritage Strategy Consultation

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SIGNIFICANCE
International

1. The 2012 Australian Heritage Strategy consultation presents a timely opportunity to recognise our lack of comfort regarding Australian heritage.
2. In large part this discomfort appears to derive from limitations in inherited management systems, which in turn regard heritage as material not process.
3. The Commissioned Essays answer all 22 questions posed in the Public Consultation Paper, supported by much verified historic, recent and contemporary evidence. This provides an ample basis for immediate action.¹
4. Significance International's interpretation of heritage management devolution in Australia concurs with that of Assoc. Prof. Don Garden, and in so far as existing management frameworks can at least be restored to their previous coherence and vision, Prof. Garden's advice should be followed.
5. Kate Clark provides wider ranging evidence and sensible suggestions to address the same identified dysfunctions.
6. However, to make heritage, and indeed ourselves, fit for the challenges of the future, it seems clear that the idea of heritage as process² must be seriously embraced, and together with a measure of imagination, create a model that articulates better with other more rapidly evolving systems and sensibilities e.g. in Information and Communications Technology; as 21st century (post-colonial, post-modern, post-normal science, globalised, 'wicked' problem³ challenged) Australians.⁴
7. The people most obviously disadvantaged by our multi-layered, siloed, state-border-disrupted, and shrinking heritage system are Indigenous Australians.
8. The calls by Clark, Johnston, Bell & Elley and Schmider & James to recognise the connectedness of Indigenous people with the land could work well as a

¹ The 'Precautionary Principle' as defined in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development

² Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, Routledge, London, 2010.

³ Valerie A Brown, John A Harris and Jacqueline Y Russell, *Tackling Wicked Problems through the Transdisciplinary Imagination*, Earthscan, London, 2010; and Australia Public Service, *Tackling Wicked Problems: a Public Policy Perspective*, 2007, Available here:

<http://www.apsc.gov.au/publications-and-media/archive/tackling-wicked-problems>

⁴ The 2011 *Strategic Roadmap for Australian Research Infrastructure* is more advanced in this regard, identifying a role for an 'Understanding Cultures and Communities' research priority as well as related Urban Settlements, Cultures and Communities, Digitisation Infrastructure and eResearch Infrastructure Capabilities: p 15 -16.

framework for all Australians, as they seek to more effectively express their heritages, values and identities.

9. The concept of 'cultural landscape' is an evocative one (Schmider and James: 1), with tremendous organising potential. We can all comprehend that humans footprint the environment, but we must learn to de-emphasise and manage differently the concept of land ownership. 'Joint Management' and 'Shared Responsibility' approaches are necessary (Schmider and James: 12).
10. Cultural landscapes⁵ may comprise place-based, movable, and intangible elements – the full gamut of heritage in the way it was formerly defined e.g. *Australia State of the Environment 2006* definition quoted in Garden page 1.
11. By 2011 the term 'heritage' appears to have been commandeered by place-based heritage interests (particularly evident in *Australia State of the Environment (SoE) 2011* from which movable cultural heritage has been excised – despite its persistence in the EPBC Act 1999⁶ which the SoE Reports address⁷), just as the term 'culture' has recently been officially interpreted to mean 'arts' (Australia Council Review Report 2012,⁸ National Cultural Policy Consultation Paper 2011⁹).
12. The comparative invisibility of the movable cultural heritage component of heritage is regrettably evident in a number of the Commissioned Essays. This leads one to wonder how it will be possible in the future to determine the significance of sites when the substance and meanings of these sources, which include oral history recordings, archival records, plans, objects, artist's renderings, and scientific specimens, have been neglected.
13. The Public Consultation Paper reports (page 3) that the Heritage Report Card in *Australia State of the Environment 2011* states: 'Climate change, development and population pressures are the biggest threats to heritage...'. The Australian Heritage Strategy Commissioned Essays clearly show that an antiquated heritage management system, which sought to capture 'otherness' rather than 'connectedness' (Johnston: 12), is not working well for Australia's people or heritage.
14. As all Commissioned Essays suggest, a return to enlightened Commonwealth leadership which better enables community to express and manage heritage is now required, in order to effectively meet such challenges as climate change, development and population pressures.

⁵ Ken Taylor and Jane Lennon, *Managing Cultural Landscapes*, Routledge, London, 2012.

⁶ Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. Available here: <http://www.comlaw.gov.au/Series/C2004A00485>

⁷ Access all *Australia State of the Environment Reports* here: <http://www.environment.gov.au/soe/index.html>

⁸ <http://culture.arts.gov.au/sites/default/files/australia-council-review/australia-council-review-report.pdf>

⁹ <http://culture.arts.gov.au/discussion-paper>