

STATE SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY – HERITAGE COUNCIL SUBMISSION

April 2002

1. Sustainability and cultural heritage

While the Consultation makes a passing reference to cultural heritage in the Fremantle example shown inside the front cover, the document overall has a very strong focus on natural heritage, biological diversity and ecology.

For instance in the Sustainability Principles (p. 4), the key principle refers to “conservation of the biological diversity and ecological integrity”, while conservation of cultural heritage isn’t mentioned.

A broader concept of sustainability has been accepted elsewhere. At the international level, the World Bank’s culture and sustainable development program states that “culture is an essential dimension of development...we start from the proposition that you simply cannot have development without a recognition of culture and of history” ⁽¹⁾. The World’s Bank’s program aims to:

- Provide new economic opportunities for communities to grow out of poverty;
- Catalyse local development by building on diverse social, cultural, economic and physical resources;
- Generate revenues from existing cultural assets;
- Strengthen social capital and social cohesion; and
- Complement strategies for human development and build dynamic, knowledge-based societies.

The UK Government’s sustainability strategy, outlined in *A Better Quality of Life* ⁽²⁾, recognises that heritage has an important role in urban regeneration; in sustaining the viability of local communities and commercial districts; supporting the tourism industry; and maintaining social cohesion. The national sustainable development indicators include the UK Historic Buildings-at-Risk list, and will include (once developed), other data on the state of the built heritage.

Your own document *Sustainability and Planning: A whole of Government Approach* (Newman, 2001), states that the new concept of sustainability “puts the process of town planning and urban design clearly on the sustainability agenda”. The list of Livability indicators against which sustainability is to be measured includes “urban design quality”, but the next step isn’t taken of identifying cultural heritage conservation as indicator in its own right.

In conclusion, we believe that the final Sustainability Strategy should include an explicit statement that ‘sustainability’ encompasses conservation of cultural heritage for the benefit of present and future generations.

⁽¹⁾ *Culture and Sustainable Development: A Framework for Action*, World Bank, New York, 1999

⁽²⁾ *A Better Quality of Life*, The Stationery Office Limited London, 1999.

2. Is sustainability a worthwhile pursuit?

Yes, subject to our comments above regarding the way sustainability is defined.

3. What benefits could flow if sustainability was taken more seriously?

A summary of the benefits accruing from a more serious commitment to heritage conservation, within the sustainability agenda, is set out in Appendix 1.

Heritage conservation does not stand in isolation, but is inseparably linked with economic development, tourism, urban 'livability', reduction of waste, and the social cohesion of communities. It is a major asset in promoting goals in these related areas, and it helps provides the 'glue' that holds them together.

4. What opportunities exist to pursue sustainability?

There is great potential for expanding cultural heritage-based economic and social development in WA.

Many rural and remote parts of the state are facing economic decline, and are looking to make much better use of their local heritage assets in building local economies and local communities.

The perceived 'conflict' between private property rights and heritage conservation remains a contentious issue in many parts of the State. Nevertheless, heritage is accepted as an important community goal to a much greater extent than in previous decades.

Given strong leadership from Government, considerable potential exists for more sustainable outcomes in WA's rural and urban areas.

5. What is the role of Government, the community and business in facilitating change to be more sustainable?

The State Government has the capacity to facilitate positive change by:

- i. Preparing a Heritage-based tourism, economic and social development strategy for WA;
- ii. Improving the identification of the State's heritage by completing the State Register;
- iii. Improving knowledge of the condition of the State's heritage (for instance, WA's 1998 State of the Environment report did not cover cultural heritage, unlike the SOE reports of the Commonwealth and some other States);
- iv. Improving legislative protection of the State's built heritage by making the Heritage Act up-to-date and effective;
- v. Requiring that Regional Development Commissions commit to sustainability objectives (including cultural heritage conservation) in their grant aid and other programs;
- vi. Increasing the amount of grant aid available to heritage conservation projects on the grounds of the sustainability benefits (given that the funds available in the Council and Lotteries Commission grant programs are very small);
- vii. Leading by example in the conservation of Government-owned heritage assets;
- viii. Making heritage conservation an important issue in major planning policies or reviews, such as the *Future Perth* project.
- ix. Promoting a wider appreciation of the value of cultural heritage, including knowledge of the economic benefits of heritage conservation.

Local Government has an important role to play in promoting sustainable outcomes through the town planning system. At present, too many local governments regard heritage either as an impediment to development or simply a 'non-issue'.

Community, businesses and other private interests own and manage the majority of the State's heritage places. The option of conserving and maintaining heritage places will be taken more seriously if the benefits can be demonstrated more clearly.

6. *What best-practice examples exist?*

Success stories and 'best practice' in sustainable development, founded largely or partly on heritage conservation, are documented in a number of publications. Examples include:

Australia

Heritage-based Tourism, Social & Economic Development: How your heritage advisor can help

Heritage Council of Western Australia, Perth 2001

Small Town Renewal

Peter Kenyon and Alan Black (eds) for the Rural Industries Research & Development Council

United Kingdom

The Heritage Dividend: Measuring the Effects of English Heritage Regeneration

English Heritage, London, 1999

The Power of Place

Historic Environment Review Steering Group, London, 2001

United States

Cities Back from the Edge: New Life for Downtown

Roberta Brandes Grantz, John Wiley & Sons/The Preservation Press, Washington, 1998

Smart States, Better Communities: How State Governments can help citizens preserve their communities

Constance Beaumont, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Washington, 1998

Dollars and Sense of Historic Preservation (series)

National Trust for Historic Preservation, Washington, 1999.

7. *What research and development is needed?*

The main areas in which better information is required in Western Australia are:

Identification of the state's heritage	This responsibility rests with the Heritage Council in compiling the State Register; and with Local Governments in compiling and maintaining Municipal Inventories.
The condition of heritage places	This is essentially a State of the Environment issue. The Heritage Council has proposed an Australia-wide solution led by the Heritage Councils in each state.
The impact of heritage protection on property values and economic prosperity	This requires leadership and funding from Government, in partnership with tertiary institutions. Models for compiling information of this kind exist overseas.

BENEFITS OF HERITAGE CONSERVATION AS A CONTRIBUTOR TO SUSTAINABILITY

Heritage conservation enhances urban amenity or livability, and thereby attracts people and investment

“Places” matter to people, and local distinctiveness is an important factor in the quality of places people live. Heritage conservation makes an important contribution to the appearance, charm, variety, and ‘sense of place’ of a town or city.

Successful innovation-based and skill-based companies will in general prefer to settle in an environment that staff will find attractive. That represents a key to attracting new business investment.

Heritage conservation provides incremental development that lasts, not ‘quick fixes’

Heritage conservation addresses the underlying fabric that makes a place genuinely attractive to visit, live in, work and do business in.

The benefits of heritage conservation often lie in the compounding impact of many smaller scale projects. In contrast, large project-based developments such as casinos, convention centres, or stadiums, may benefit a limited constituency, yield short-term benefits, or require major public subsidies.

Heritage conservation attracts proportionately more jobs than new construction, and provides better local expenditure-retention

Analysis of the comparative economic impact of conservation work vs new construction, shows that for every \$1million of conservation work:

- 4 to 5 additional jobs will be created when compared with \$1 million of new construction (15 jobs vs 10 jobs);
- \$100,000 extra dollars will be retained locally in aggregate household income (\$780,000 vs \$670,000);
- 4 additional (non-building labour) jobs will be created in the local community (14 jobs vs 10 jobs).

Heritage conservation aids economic diversification

Heritage conservation aids economic diversification at three levels: spread of industries, geographic diversity, and diversity of scale (large vs small businesses).

For example, the former York Flour Mill has been converted as the manufacture and display base of the Jah-Roc Furniture. Pastoral diversification into heritage-related tourism is an emerging trend.

Heritage conservation promotes more cost and energy efficient building practices

Conservation costs typically represent only 40-50% of the cost of equivalent new construction, except for major commercial restoration projects which still provide cost savings of 3-15% when compared with complete demolition and replacement.

Heritage conservation is more energy efficient than new construction: the non-renewable resources involved in demolition and reconstruction are energy-consuming.

Demolition of existing buildings adds to landfill created by demolition waste, which is estimated to contribute nearly 30% of Perth's landfill volume.

Heritage conservation stimulates and supports tourism

Cultural heritage assets are one of the most important drawcards possessed by rural towns and the metropolitan region. The economic impact of tourism is illustrated in these figures from the WA Tourism Commission:

- 20 carloads of overnight visitors to a town, each night for a year, has the same impact as a factory with an annual payroll of \$1.5 million; and
- The same 20 carloads of visitors arriving each night creates 21 jobs in the local economy.

Heritage conservation supports urban regeneration, townscape improvement and local 'capacity building'.

Putting resources into a neighbourhood because of the value of what is already there, rather than labelling it as deprived, builds community and business confidence.