

Heritage Symposium

'Tasmania: an Historic Environment'

Thursday 27 November 2008

MINISTER'S OPENING ADDRESS

INTRODUCTION

Good morning ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land we are meeting on today – the Leterremairrener (Leter rem air rener) people and their associated and living traditions and customs. I would also like to thank Dewayne for his introduction; and welcome you all to the historic Inveresk Railway Workshops.

Our historic environment is valuable and unique. It's social, economic and environmental importance is something that Tasmanians must never lose sight of. It is something to treasure as a reflection of our historic past, but it is also a key part of our communities today

Our heritage reflects local histories and the places that are important in the lives of our towns, suburbs and individual communities. Our heritage buildings are also microcosms that reflect broader trends and currents of the past. We collectively ascribe meaning to these places, meaning that is loaded with our interpretations and understanding of our collective past. Our heritage, then, is both an important element of our identity and an extant reminder of our past.

Our heritage has both individual and community significance to us. Individual significance might include the way a heritage owner takes meticulous care in restoring their home, business or garden.

Community significance can be seen in the excellent example of Oatlands' recent Tidy Towns win. Such achievements highlight how communities working together can achieve great results.

The debate about what heritage is and how much should be saved is an ongoing one. Questions within this debate may include: is the greatest pressure on our heritage the grand colonial, Edwardian, Georgian or Federation places? Or is there greater pressure on more recent contemporary heritage, redundant farm buildings or historic churches?

These debates are worth having. However, we must never lose sight of protecting those places that are most important to us and that represent the various layers of our history. We should try to avoid the tendency of favouring one era over another in doing so.

From an economic perspective, our historic environment is part of our brand. It is a core appeal and a strong economic driver, as part of our multi-million dollar tourism industry. Development is needed but in a way that enhances and augments the brand, and our lifestyle.

Tourism Tasmania data shows that in 2007, 439,000 (or 52 percent) of interstate or international visitors participated in at least one heritage attraction or activity.

There are 340 accommodation properties which offer a heritage experience; and over 20 percent of tours and attractions focus on heritage or cultural activities.

This reflects the strong visitor interest in attractions like Port Arthur, Clarendon House, Sullivans Cove and the Cataract Gorge. Visiting precincts like Stanley, Evandale or Franklin and seeing something unexpected or delightful on the side of the road is part of Tasmania's special appeal.

We cannot be complacent about sustaining this appeal. Tasmania has a unique point of difference in the tourism market. We need to continue to ensure we offer sound and authentic products. Telling our unique stories and fostering experiences that engage visitors is part of this opportunity.

There are many examples of the ways in which Tasmania is capitalising on these opportunities. The major development of the internationally acclaimed Henry Jones Art Hotel is one. The theatrical experience offered by the Round Earth Company in Strahan is another. The new interpretation resources that have been installed at Highfield House in Stanley is yet another.

International trends such as the emergence of educational, experiential and volunteer tourism suggest that we are well placed to make more of these trends and take advantage of changing visitor expectations.

With this in mind, it is my intention to ask Tourism Tasmania to assist me to organise a forum in mid-2009 for tourism operators and those with an interest in cultural heritage.

The need to pursue sustainable practices and address the challenge of climate change is becoming increasingly important.

The continued use and adaptive reuse of heritage can contribute greatly to this agenda. The reuse of buildings, rather than their demolition and replacement can lead to considerable savings in the embodied energy forgone.

Adaptive reuse is important. We must further explore ways to ensure that our buildings are able to be better equipped to face the challenges of sustainability in their operation and functioning, such as by becoming more energy efficient.

In recent years the State Government has been working more closely with heritage owners and key groups like planning authorities, the National Trust and the Heritage Council through Heritage Tasmania to make a number of key changes to how we manage the historic environment.

I would like to take the opportunity now to reflect on some of these changes; mark some achievements; and make some observations about potential future directions.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

There are high levels of community interest and engagement with heritage. The number of people involved in history rooms, historical societies, house museums or friends groups is quite significant.

Events like the Tasmanian Heritage Festival, Australian Wooden Boat Festival, Evandale Village Fair, Oatlands Spring Festival and the various bi-centenaries we have marked reflect this interest.

We must ensure that community interest in heritage continues to grow if we are to achieve our objectives in protecting and managing heritage. We must publicly recognise the hard work of volunteers and praise the efforts of custodians. More broadly, we must encourage Tasmanians to learn about our heritage so that community interest remains high.

A FOCUS ON OWNERS

A significant shift in our approach to implementing the *Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995* has occurred. This reflects a desire to adopt a system that is more transparent, proactive and supportive. The objective is to place greater emphasis on consultation and collaboration.

In 2004, Heritage Tasmania opened a field office in Launceston and in 2007 a shop-front in Hobart was opened. Both are in heritage listed buildings. This is symbolic of our desire to enhance customer service, improve access to the services and resources available and ensure we are leading by example as good custodians of our heritage.

New practices such as ensuring that community consultation occurs before and during heritage surveys have been well received. Owner feedback has also been very positive when listings occur, as owners are now proactively informed of a proposal to list a place. It is important that owners are informed and involved before the statutory process begins.

The provision of free advice to owners, developers and planning authorities on works is a vital service. Whilst this has been a long standing arrangement, increased staffing has improved our ability to provide the service statewide.

New public programs, engagement in local events and facilitating forums help raise understanding of heritage. Working with the National Trust on the Tasmanian Heritage Festival, the Southern Midlands Council's '*Restoration Central*' and the '*Open Doors*' initiative are examples of collaborations that increase skills and engage owners and the general public with heritage.

These gains are significant. They give some insight into the ongoing process of reform and illustrate how the Heritage Council and Heritage Tasmania are increasingly engaging more proactively with individuals and groups.

There is more that can be done, and I hope that today's forum gives you the opportunity to pass on your views.

THE NATIONAL TRUST

One key body that the State Government has close ties with is the National Trust. It has been a major focus of reform since 2004. This has involved considerable effort by a number of people. The results are very tangible and I am pleased to say, the envy of interstate counterparts.

As we know, the National Trust has faced some serious and pressing challenges. It was with regret that Cabinet made a decision to place the Trust into administration in 2005. Much has improved since then, however, and the Trust has reinvented itself as a much stronger, more credible and focused community organisation.

In the past two years Trust membership has grown by 18 percent and there has been a 12 percent increase in the number of events held during the Heritage Festival. The Trust's debt has been reduced by more than 46 percent since 2005. Each of these indicators is a healthy sign for a community organisation that had almost disintegrated.

These gains reflect the hard work of the Trust's many volunteers, staff and Board members, and the efforts of the team at Heritage Tasmania who managed this reform process on behalf of the State Government.

The Trust has an important role. As the state's leading community organisation it represents the general community's interest in presenting and protecting heritage.

Further, as we engage with the National Trust about their future role we should explore ways to work with key organisations to draw volunteers from across the sector to share insights, ideas and consider training or development opportunities.

It is now well placed to work with and support local community initiatives through the provision of practical advice, its tax deductible gifts program, and its ability to sponsor the projects of local non-incorporated bodies.

Its coordination of the annual Tasmanian Heritage Festival cannot be overlooked. It is the state's premier heritage event that has broad appeal to both locals and visitors and continues to grow and improve.

STATUTORY PROTECTION

The Heritage Council and Heritage Tasmania have both undergone a number of important changes in recent years.

A number of recommendations from the Heritage Review and the Mackay Report that do not require legislative reform have already been implemented. Additional changes have been made based on owner feedback.

The Mackay Report highlights the central role that local government plays in protecting Tasmania's heritage. Local Government has, and will no doubt continue to play, an important role in protecting and managing our heritage.

Proposed reforms aim to achieve a better balance between a sound statutory and a more community-minded approach that reinforces the value of collaborating, sharing information and pursuing sound outcomes. Both Richard Mackay and Scott Gadd will speak more about this later this afternoon.

Another major priority for the State Government is the development of more contemporary Aboriginal heritage legislation that will reform the *Aboriginal Relics Act 1975*. Tasmania's Aboriginal heritage is unique, rich and diverse. It is amongst the oldest surviving cultural heritage in the world. The need to implement new and improved legislation to better manage, protect and promote it is as great as it is pressing. Continuing to work with the Aboriginal community and to consult with and engage the broader community will assist in bringing about its completion.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

The provision of funding for heritage will, I expect, always be topical. We have a huge number of important places and many competing demands. Coupled with a low population and income base from which to generate income, the challenges to effectively protect our heritage will at times be great.

Yet I am encouraged to see that some new opportunities have emerged in recent years and I am hopeful that we will be able to do more to build on them in the future.

The Heritage Council offers grants for urgent and essential conservation works on heritage-listed places. These grants are offered through an open Expression of Interest process that is publicly advertised. It provides grants of up to \$25,000.

The Tasmanian Community Fund is another important source of funding for conservation works and local community initiatives across Tasmania.

The *Small Museums and Collections Program* operated by Arts Tasmania also makes a significant contribution to the work of the sector. Its *Roving Curator Program* has provided an invaluable service to local museums.

Tourism Tasmania continues to make a big contribution. Resources and programs focussed on enhancing visitor experiences, such as the *Signature Experience Program* and the *Building Visitor Experiences* website, help to develop experiences that connect our visitors to the wealth of stories that abound in the sector.

The *Tourism Promotion Plan Program* has also funded a number of heritage tourism initiatives. These include the restoration and interpretation of the heritage apple picker's huts at Hartzview Winery in the Huon Valley. The development of an interpreted walking trail in association with the Tin Dragon Trail Cottages in the North East is another such initiative funded by the program.

The funding of major icons is also a priority. In the past two years the State Government has committed funding to a number of major projects. These include:

- \$1.2 million to restore the Callington Mill;
- \$1.5 million to help conserve St David's Cathedral; and
- \$1.5 million to assist with the development of the Trail of the Tin Dragon.

Finally, the 2008-2009 State Budget included the creation of the *Urban Renewal and Heritage Fund*. We will be in a position to announce more detail on this Fund soon.

AUSTRALIAN CONVICT SITES

Before I conclude, it is important to mention that in January this year the Australian Government submitted a World Heritage nomination to UNESCO in Paris.

This nomination was a highly significant milestone for Tasmania - one that we have been working towards for many years to ensure that our convict past obtains the recognition that it deserves.

Brickendon Farm Village, Woolmers Estate, the Cascades Female Factory, Darlington precinct on Maria Island, the Coal Mines and the Port Arthur Historic Sites on the Tasman Peninsula are joined by sites in Western Australia, New South Wales and on Norfolk Island in this nomination.

The Australian Convict Sites World Heritage serial nomination includes five local places that tell the story of our convict past. This complex story of forced migration and the suffering and humiliation endured by the convicts as they were used as tools of empire building is at the same time disturbing and fascinating.

Nominating the convict sites for World Heritage recognition will not only help raise global consciousness of this story, but will also raise Tasmania's profile as a fascinating and historically rich destination which will benefit tourism and the economy.

I am grateful for all the work being done by the owners and managers of each site in preparation for the assessment process. Today's programme includes an update on this process.

CONCLUSION

During my address I have highlighted a number of areas where I believe that we need to do more work, and I look forward to the outcomes of today's discussions.

One of my priorities is to recognise the achievements of owners and find new ways to support them, while also fostering community engagement with our heritage places and celebrating their diversity.

Strengthening the appeal of our heritage and pursuing developments that maximises unique, authentic, enjoyable and engaging experiences is also important.

Finalising new legislation to develop a more integrated approach to heritage management that is clear, consistent and gives greater certainty is also crucial.

Today's forum presents an opportunity to explore these and other priorities. Your feedback will be used by Heritage Tasmania to help develop our first ever State Government strategy for the historic environment.

This is an important step forward and one I believe will help chart a clearer direction while also delivering a tangible outcome from today's discussions.

It is vital that we all view ourselves as custodians of our built heritage – each and every one of us. We must value it. We must care for it. And we must protect it. Through a committed and ongoing sense of ownership, Tasmanians can make this happen.

As I have said, our history defines much of our collective identity. Our understanding of it affects how we view the world. Our built heritage is a vital part of this history.

One could argue that our relationship with our heritage is analogous to our relationship with ourselves. We must respect one if we are to respect the other.

We have had many conversations in past years about the future of our heritage. Effecting positive change has been difficult. Yet the time for action is now. We must take steps forward toward positive and constructive change.

Today's conversations and the outcomes of this symposium will help to end the old era of heritage and usher the new. It is in this spirit that I intend to introduce new historic cultural heritage legislation in the new-year.

Thank you for your attendance today. I look forward to the outcome of this symposium and have little doubt that the knowledge and skills of all of the attendees will ensure that they are positive and numerous. I announce the symposium to be open and may our work begin in earnest.

Thank you.