

## TASMANIAS HISTORY HOUSE

### SUBMISSION TO THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SESSIONAL COMMITTEE GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION B HERITAGE TOURISM SUB COMMITTEE

#### INTRODUCTION

This submission is based on a professional understanding of the role of history in public policy.

It is the result of over ten years research, observation and discussion about the most productive way to incorporate the stories of Tasmania's unique history into interpretation of the state's built heritage to provide meaningful visitor experiences around the state.

Currently Tasmanian Tourism Promotion relies on a wide range of attractive pictorial images and fairly basic messages to "sell" the state's special features.

However there is no consistent message about Tasmania's history and why the state has such an outstanding legacy of heritage buildings and sites.

Around the state there are many unique features that would appeal to national and international visitors, but there is limited information and generally poor interpretation of Tasmania's heritage.

Obviously the level of interpretation varies and some sites set an exceptionally high standard but there is a need for the State Government to accept its leadership role in charting a distinctive course of discovery for modern tourists who want to know about the society they visit.

The State Government through its Tourism and Heritage agencies can be instrumental in telling Tasmania's story in an innovative way which uses the extensive knowledge base that already exists to excite and entertain ever curious visitors.

#### RESPONSE TO TERMS OF REFERENCE

##### 1. Current and Future Potential Contribution that Built Heritage Makes to Tourism.

"Tasmania is so different from Mainland Australia"

This is a comment repeated frequently by visitors who come to the island state expecting a smaller version of what they have seen in other parts of Australia.

Tasmania's difference is a vital asset to be protected, promoted and used to tell the story of why Tasmania is different.

The natural environment of Tasmania is well known and recognized by photographers, painters and filmmakers. But it is the built environment of historic villages, stately homes and churches, stone cottages and bridges that often surprise visitors who are intrigued by the history which has created such a fascinating collection

Why does Tasmania have the largest number of heritage buildings In Australia?

Who built these structures that reflect so much of Tasmania's architectural history which spans several genres from Georgian to modern?

What are the stories behind these historic facades?

How did such a small poor state afford such grandeur?

It is easy to explain why Tasmania has such a unique collection of built heritage if Tasmania's European history as a colonial settlement is detailed.

However Tasmanian Governments have been slow to recognize the importance of storytelling in interpreting the state's history. While some individual historic sites have been well explained to visitors, large numbers of sites are not recognized because there has been a vacuum in public policy to document why specific sites are significant.

## 2. Role of Government

Many governments are concerned about built heritage because they see only a demand for financial resources to restore and maintain buildings that may be seen as no longer viable for modern purposes. Sadly it is this attitude that has seen some significant heritage buildings demolished or inappropriately renovated to the detriment of original historic merit.

Yet it is possible to persuade private investors that a well maintained heritage building can be more valuable than the standard modern concrete and glass block that proliferates around the world.

While it is always tempting to ask Government to invest more in heritage, it is also important to recognize the limits of the public sector in purchasing, restoring and maintaining heritage

However State Government can play a significant leadership role by ensuring its policies value the significance of the state's built heritage and this recognition should be built into all government promotion.

A proactive State Government could do so much more to lead and encourage private investment.

It could recognize and 'reward' individual and company heritage initiative through an awards program which permanently records the contribution of those who have taken steps to preserve our built heritage,

Similarly why not introduce a "Heritage Plaque" scheme where owners could be encouraged to find out the significance and history of their building

It is easy to see how modern technology could readily be used to convey this information to tourists as they wander around our cities and towns looking for the readily identifiable heritage plaque.

These initiatives would not place an unrealistic financial burden on government and would encourage more private investment in our heritage

### 3. Role of Tourist Organizations

It is the responsibility of tourist organizations to promote a diverse range of attractions and experiences throughout the state. Clearly tourism bodies cannot limit themselves because tourists are attracted to a wide range of visitor experiences in Tasmania.

Nevertheless it is important that tourism incorporates the Tasmanian heritage story in its overall strategy and ensure those visitors with a special interest can readily navigate promotional material to locate heritage sites. The former Director of the National Trust, Chris Tassell researched the significant interest in heritage tourism so there is an ongoing need to monitor and project interest in heritage tourism throughout the state.

### 4 Role of Heritage

It is the responsibility of Heritage Tasmania and the Heritage Council to promote respect and understanding of built heritage.

While understanding some of the financial limitations on government investing in property acquisition and maintenance, it is important to record that these two key Tasmanian heritage bodies are significantly underfunded and cannot fulfil their charters without an increase to their Budgets.

When comparing the level of funding governments have made to certain areas of the economy citing 'community benefit' as the rationale for public investment, it is hard to justify the lack of support for the bodies responsible for Tasmania's Heritage.

Clearly the only way that the Tasmania Government can take on a really strategic leadership role in Heritage Tourism is if its two key bodies are properly resourced to provide essential support.

### 5 Role of Other Jurisdictions

While anticipating a more proactive role for the State Government, it is recognized that the Federal Government should be a more significant partner in assisting to maintain the "national estate". Therefore Tasmanian leaders should use every opportunity to attract Federal Government interest and financial support.

Local Government is equally important to share and generate opportunities for heritage tourism throughout the state

It would be good to see the Community Fund create a special category for community groups to generate local heritage tourism initiatives

## Conclusion

The Legislative Council is to be congratulated on initiating this conversation about Heritage Tourism in Tasmania. It is essential that realistic recommendations are made to the State Government so that a specific program of action can be developed and monitored.

Tasmania has inherited a very unique built environment and we must all be creative and innovative in protecting and promoting it as part of the Tasmanian story.

Margaret and Henry Reynolds

Tasmania's History House,

## Role of Heritage

4. Role of Other Jurisdictions
5. Other Relevant Matters