

1 July 2015

The Hon. Greg Hunt MP
Minister for the Environment
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

FUNDING FOR HISTORY AND HERITAGE

I write as Chair of the History Council of Victoria (HCV), the peak advocacy body for History in Victoria¹ to express our concern about recent news concerning the Commonwealth's ability to contribute to History and Heritage projects, and to seek further information about a proposal to initiate a National Lottery for Heritage.

We have recently heard of changes to Commonwealth funding that will affect local History and Heritage. The HCV is very concerned to discover that there is now no current national funding scheme to provide grants for community heritage organisations and local historical associations, or to assist community and private owners of heritage properties, as a result of the Chaplains case (*Williams v Commonwealth*). Only those heritage sites on the National Heritage List can now be funded. This means that the approximately 700 smaller Victorian museums and historical organisations are now without funding or opportunities for future grants.

Investment today is essential to secure and preserve Australia's History and Heritage for enjoyment and understanding by future generations. It is often only governments that can afford to make big investments on behalf of future generations—this is the very nature of a 'public good'. Government grants can also help leverage other grants (e.g. from the private sector and philanthropists) for smaller organisations, so there is a capacity for the benefit to compound.

A sustainable funding base is important. In the past, there have been several very positive Commonwealth initiatives to fund local history. The HCV considers it is imperative to reintroduce opportunities for Commonwealth grants for the following reasons:

- History and heritage contribute to local employment opportunities in rural and regional areas, through their connections to tourism and to community growth.

- Support for History and Heritage at the local / community level as well as at regional, state and national levels is vital. It is often at the grass roots level that Australia's past is preserved.
- The preservation and communication of History and Heritage has a wide-ranging impact by fostering public engagement with, and understanding of, the past as central to community and national identity and to social cohesion.
- History and Heritage contribute to employment in the creative industries by stimulating innovation based on evidence of the past (as seen in the plethora of recent films, documentaries, plays and musical performances that have been inspired by the centenary of WW1, as well as in television programs such as 'Who Do You Think You Are').

Heritage and History have many needs that can be appropriately remedied by project funding through grant programs—e.g. conservation / preservation; exhibition / display; interpretation and signage; tours and trails; research and publication (online and in print); digitisation; development of databases; marketing activity; coordination of and participation in festivals.

In principle, the HCV would also endorse the concept of a National Lottery to support Heritage projects in the broadest sense (i.e. built, movable and intangible cultural heritage) and related historical research projects. The UK Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) provides a very successful model for Australia. The HLF annually allocates a certain amount each year for heritage projects and works because the grants are intended to be transformational. Lotterywest, the Western Australian state lottery authority, is another successful model.

The range of government grants (Commonwealth and state) available for History and Heritage projects has declined markedly over the last fifteen years. Every research project that has looked into the needs of the heritage sector identifies a shortfall between available funds and the needs of the sector. The Australian Government can demonstrate its commitment to History and Heritage and all of the social good that springs from it by (re-)creating national funding opportunities—either through direct appropriation, or alternative means such as a National Lottery.

I would like to know more about how you plan for the Commonwealth to support future History and Heritage projects, and I would be grateful for information about any proposal to initiate a National Lottery for Heritage. The HCV would be pleased to respond to any public consultation process you might wish to initiate on this matter

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have about the issues raised in this letter. My mobile number is 0420 942 581. I would also be pleased to meet you to discuss these matters further.

Yours sincerely,

Diane Gardiner AM
CHAIR

Copies to: Associate Professor Don Garden, President, Federation of Australian Historical Societies
Mr Adam Bandt MP, Federal Member for Melbourne

1 The History Council of Victoria includes representatives of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, the Department of Education and Training, the Heritage Council of Victoria, the History Teachers' Association of Victoria Ltd, Museum Victoria, Museums Australia (Victoria), the National Trust of Australia (Victoria), the Professional Historians Association (Vic) Inc., Public Record Office Victoria, the Royal Historical Society of Victoria Inc., the State Library of Victoria, the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, and the Women's Heritage Centre. Our Board also includes at least three historians employed by Victorian universities.