

**PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION INQUIRY**  
**into the conservation of Australia's historic built heritage places 2005**

**Submission by Engineering Heritage Tasmania**  
**Engineers Australia**

**Engineering Heritage Tasmania (EHT)**

EHT is a subcommittee of the Tasmania Division of Engineers Australia. Like our counterparts in all the other Divisions around Australia, we are concerned with the conservation of our engineering heritage.

Historic engineering works include harbours, factories, mines, bridges, dams, industries, power stations, communications infrastructure, machinery, and so on.

Engineering heritage items are generally under-represented on heritage registers and National Trust lists, overshadowed by buildings. EHT attempts to raise the awareness of important heritage items through the following actions:

- a) EHT has accumulated records of several hundred items of Tasmanian heritage value.
- b) We are holding biographical information on a large number of engineers involved in the conduct of engineering in Tasmania.
- c) We have conducted oral history interviews of a number of engineers of state and national significance, and lodged the tapes with Archives Tasmania.
- d) We have a plaquing program in which items of special significance are awarded either a National Engineering Landmark or an Historic Engineering Marker at formal public ceremonies involving the owners, other stakeholders and Engineers Australia. We have awarded 16 plaques in Tasmania to date (over 100 nationally).
- e) We have produced the Sullivans Cove Engineering Heritage Walk pamphlet, a self-guided tour of Hobart's waterfront for tourists, visitors and students.

This important task of recognising our engineering heritage would be hastened if funds for a part-time research officer could be provided, to support the small group of volunteers who have done most of the work listed above.

Some worthy heritage projects are mentioned in the following paragraphs.

**Survey of Historic Heritage Places**

There is definitely a need for a comprehensive survey of historic places in Tasmania, so that all items on various listings, plus other items not yet listed, are all available on the one source.

Heritage structures are of great interest to tourists. However, to meet the demand, publicity on the various items to be seen in particular localities needs to be available at all tourist outlets.

**Cost of conserving Historic Buildings**

In Tasmania the Heritage Council has some 5000 items on its register, many taken over from the National Trust list. The great majority of these are buildings ranging from Government House to humble cottages. A number of such buildings in private ownership are poorly maintained, and some owners prefer demolition rather than meeting to cost of conservation.

## **Royal Engineers Building, Hobart**

The Royal Engineers Building in Hobart was built in 1846-7 as headquarters for the Royal Engineers Regiment until 1876. It was then taken over by the Tasmanian Government Railways as offices and later as a stationary store.

Over the years it was not maintained and, when vacated by the Railways in 1983, it rapidly fell into disrepair. It was subject to the depredation of vandals and squatters, and was marked for demolition.

When the building was facing demolition, the Heritage Group of Engineers Australia took an interest in it, and raised money for restoration of this historic sandstone structure.

Since restoration the building is vested in the State Lands Department and occupied by Engineers Australia (EA), the Association of Engineers, Scientists and Managers, Australia (APESMA), and an accounting firm which runs EA's office.

Maintenance of the building is sadly lacking, as the Lands Department does not seem disposed to spending money on it. However, to preserve the building as part of Tasmania's cultural heritage, continual maintenance is required.

As part of its tenancy, Engineers Australia not only has its Tasmanian office in the building, but it also provides a meeting room for its various group activities, including Engineering Heritage Tasmania comprising a number of retired engineers working on a voluntary basis to research, document and publicise works of engineering heritage significance.

## **Abt Railway, Strahan to Queenstown**

This historic railway, built in 1896 and closed in 1963, had fallen into disrepair but, with both Commonwealth and State funding, it has been reconstructed into a heritage and tourist railway, renamed the "West Coast Wilderness Railway" and run by private enterprise.

This is an example of what the Commonwealth Government can achieve. The provision of capital funds for the reconstruction, in which many of the heritage features were reproduced or restored, has created a viable tourist asset which will enable the cultural heritage significance to be sustained into the future.

## **PROJECTS IN OTHER STATES**

### **Point Cook Air Base, Victoria**

In response to lobbying and public pressure, the Department of Defence announced in February 2004 that Point Cook would be retained in public ownership, with the airfield and the majority of the land being leased for 49 years to a not-for-profit National Aviation Museum Trust.

Given the many significant heritage items on the site, this decision was much appreciated, but is only the first step. Careful planning and substantial funding will be required to achieve the stated objectives.

## **Barwon River Sewer Aqueduct, Geelong**

This mighty reinforced concrete truss bridge was built in 1913-16. It crosses the Barwon River flood plain in 14 majestic spans. No longer does it carry Geelong's sewage to Bass Strait. The structure is deteriorating from the loss of calcium from its concrete, a technical problem yet to be overcome. Heritage Victoria agrees that its engineering heritage significance is very high but it lacks the funds to restore it. The owner, Barwon Water, is reluctant to maintain it.

There is an opportunity for the Commonwealth to provide some seed-funding to enable further tests to be carried out on potential methods of repair. Once a successful method of repair has been devised, then substantial capital funds will be needed over several years to restore the structure for future generations.