

NEWS RELEASE

National Trust demands proper consultation on local heritage proposals

The National Trust has slammed an “unnecessary, flawed and rushed” review of local heritage protection in South Australia that threatens to set the system back 40 years.



President Norman Etherington AM said today it would be “a crime as well as a blunder” not to have widespread and formal consultation with councils, community organisations and the public on a matter of such importance.

However, the State Government first needed to explain why the changes were needed, why it was in such a rush, and why promised meetings with the National Trust and other groups on heritage planning reform had not eventuated.

The Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure (DPTI) suddenly released the eight-page discussion paper on August, initially providing less than four weeks for feedback to be received.

“The National Trust is appalled by a paper which in the name of reform does nothing whatever to advance the cause of heritage preservation and opens the door for uncertainty and corruption of all kinds,” Professor Etherington said.

“What needs to be done immediately is to extend the period of community consultation for at least six months. The consultation should be launched at a well-advertised public forum with the Planning Minister in attendance.

“In the longer term it is high time we moved towards best practice by following NSW in banning property developers from making donations to political parties and campaigns.”

Professor Etherington said the damage caused by hasty and poorly designed changes could not be undone.

The discussion paper failed even to make a case for changing the system that had served the State well for decades. Most of the problems it cited were simply the fault of a planning department that had failed to deal quickly and positively with recommendations from local government authorities.

“There is no evidence that the public at large, as opposed to vested interests, thinks there is anything seriously wrong with the existing system,” he said.

Professor Etherington said there was no transparency in the “flimsy” discussion paper, with no explanation of who had identified the “issues of concern” and what was meant by concepts such as “best practice”.

“National Trust representatives who participated in the community assessment of the Expert Panel on Planning Reform fiercely disagree that this list of bullet points bears any resemblance to the conclusions of those discussions,” he said. “The most important – an end to interference in Local Heritage listings by the Minister – is not mentioned.”

Professor Etherington said he was particularly concerned by proposals to streamline the heritage listing process that were really an attempt to water it down and provide more excuses and opportunities for unwanted demolition.

“Once certainty is removed from local heritage it will be impossible to restore integrity to the system,” he said. “The hard-won gains of the last 40 years and all the money expended on local heritage will have been thrown away.”

The Trust has released an initial response to the discussion paper available at <http://heritagewatch.net.au/wp-content/uploads/Heritage-Under-Threat.pdf>

The Government’s discussion paper is available from:

<http://heritagewatch.net.au/wp-content/uploads/Local-Heritage-Discussion-Paper-final-consultation-version-Aug-2016.pdf>

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