



**TRANSCRIPT  
OF PROCEEDINGS**

**SPARK AND CANNON**

Telephone:

Adelaide	(08) 8212 3699
Hobart	(03) 6224 2499
Melbourne	(03) 9670 6989
Perth	(08) 9325 4577
Sydney	(02) 9211 4077

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**PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION**

**INQUIRY INTO THE CONSERVATION OF AUSTRALIA'S  
HISTORIC BUILT HERITAGE PLACES**

**DR N. BYRON, Presiding Commissioner,  
MR T. HINTON, Commissioner**

**TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**DARWIN BY VIDEO CONFERENCE  
THURSDAY, 28 JULY 2005, AT 12.58 PM**

**Continued from 25/7/05 in Brisbane**

**DR BYRON:** Thank you very much for coming.

**MS HILLS:** Thank you indeed.

**DR BYRON:** This is not the ideal way to conduct a public hearing, but given the circumstances it's better than nothing.

**MS HILLS:** Absolutely.

**DR BYRON:** Just to introduce myself, I'm Neil Byron and I'm presiding over this inquiry. My colleague on my left is Tony Hinton, who's a fellow commissioner, and there are staff of the commission in our meeting room here in Melbourne. We've got the transcript reporter here too. We've received a fax with a couple of dot points outlining what you wanted to talk to us about. But I'd suggest if you'd just like to introduce yourself and give a bit of the background and then go through what you think we need to know that's relevant to this inquiry, and we can have some discussion on that, if that's okay with you.

**MS HILLS:** Certainly, thank you, Neil. My name is Jan Hills. I'm currently the president of the National Trust Northern Territory. I've been the president for a few years and I've been a member of the trust since it began up here. I joined the council some years ago and since then have been the representative on the Australia Council of National Trusts. I've had a long-time interest in heritage but I guess I've had a better knowledge of how things come about since I've been involved with the trust in a councillor role.

I guess some of the things we should address from up here are our differences, and there always are differences for the territory. We're not as far along the road in our legislation and because there's a great drive for development I think heritage is sometimes overlooked. The particular nature of the historic-built environment in the territory gets a hard time because of our climatic conditions. It's a very harsh climate. We've had cyclones, bushfires, flooding. The Katherine Museum, for instance, was affected a few years ago with flooding. We have a continual problem with white ant control which costs a lot of money, particularly if you have to wait for the people to take a run down to Borroloola or somewhere like that. So this all adds to our costs.

Also, because some of our properties are isolated, there is the possibility of vandalism and that occurred just recently as a matter of fact, because James's Store, which we own, is at Newcastle Waters. Some work was done on that quite recently and possibly because attention was drawn to it, it was vandalised soon afterwards, and quite badly vandalised in this instance. Obviously because things are so far away, it costs money to get there to supervise them, and if you have to do any type of repairs it's difficult to get people to go and it costs a lot more. It may also be difficult

to get a tradesman of the particular type required. I realise that distance is a thing for other states, but maybe with the territory it's a bit more sparse around here. Again, there would be difficulty with supervision of some of these places.

I believe you've got a printout within the completed submission. You would have a list of our properties, so you see that they range right across the territory, and of course we don't have the very fine bricks and mortar that you see in some of the places in the earlier developed states. Nevertheless we have some very significant heritage and there are a lot of people comparatively who care about that, whereas I say that in the territory we have a relatively small population and it has been one that has had a particular transient nature about it.

Certainly when I came here in the 60s the Commonwealth supervised the territory and it was a sort of proving ground for the Commonwealth public service. They came and they did their stint, and then they returned to Canberra or wherever with an added feather to the cap and probably a promotion. So there was no incentive much to stay and it was rare that people did. From that then, we haven't got the history build-up that you might have in other places. Nevertheless there are people who have stayed and of those there are quite a few who are busily writing history and trying to preserve what we have.

Having been involved in a developmental board with the previous government I know the push for development and I think that that sways everything - the point being that when it comes to putting runs on the board I think development is, particularly in a place like this, what the government wants to achieve. Just recently we seem to have lost some very unique heritage because of development. The fact about the small population is, too, that people seem to be repetitive on committees, so we're sort of spread over rather thinly. So there's a huge task to address all these matters and there's not enough time to do it all, not only with volunteers like myself - could I just say at this point that Alistair Shields has joined our situation here. Alistair is another councillor of the Northern Territory Trust.

**MR SHIELDS:** Good afternoon.

**DR BYRON:** Welcome, Alistair.

**MR SHIELDS:** Thank you.

**MS HILLS:** That's Neil Byron on the left and Tony Hinton.

**MR SHIELDS:** Thank you.

**MS HILLS:** Yes, so we have quite a task to try and monitor the particular situations that development. For instance, I'm aware that you haven't been given

many people to make a case for Darwin but one person who returned to Darwin in the last few days is going to send a submission. They've been in the UK for a couple of months. So we'll want to provide something. That person is a particularly active person with regard to heritage and she will be sending a submission to you.

**DR BYRON:** Excellent, thank you.

**MS HILLS:** I guess what I wanted to say is, apart from the volunteers who might be interested in this, because we have a very small staff situation with the trust, there isn't enough time to address some of things that need to be done. It's a bit like having too many portfolios for a minister: there's just too large an area to spread oneself over. So that there are the things that have to be attended to on a daily and weekly basis - education for instance, which needs to be addressed in this area, we just don't get around to because we haven't got the time and we haven't got the resources to do that.

When you ask people, they have an expectation that heritage will be preserved. They want to see some of that. Recently the National Trust held a walk around the area of the Darwin wharf where there's a huge development about to take place. There's a very significant site there which is where Goyder set up camp when he landed here. There were other sites of interest, notably a big shed which was used for the boom net which was across the harbour during the war. That has recently been destroyed.

One of the buildings which is heritage listed and had quite a celebration with it about 12, 18 months ago, will be subjected to extreme pressures because of this building situation. Because the plans were approved in a conceptual manner, as so often happens with developments as things go on there's inch by inch a bit further where the situation - the developer wants greater freedom to do things and this goes against what people really expected and what they wanted. Regardless of whether you are a member of the National Trust there is an expectation out there that somebody - that might be the government - somebody, the National Trust, will do something.

Frequently things have happened before this time for the ordinary person, who goes about their working day, to do enough to preserve these things. I ran a few years ago a very isolated heritage property myself and I became very much aware that people want to be there, they want to see it, they want to experience it and then they want the airconditioning and the cold beer. So you have both these sides coming to bear, but the thing is that people do want - they do want that history. So I think it's an essential part. I could go on. Maybe you want to ask me some questions before I go on further.

**DR BYRON:** Yes, I'll just interrupt you for a minute there. I probably should have

said that we were planning to visit Darwin to look at some of the heritage places and to meet yourselves and other people in person. But as I say, it's a bit difficult to justify when apparently nobody else was available to meet with us today or tomorrow, so hence we're resorting to this videoconference. But I'm pretty sure we'll be up in Darwin at some stage during the rest of the inquiry. We'd like to have a look around and to meet with you and others when we do that.

**MS HILLS:** That would be good.

**MR SHIELDS:** That would be very good. In the meantime, Neil, we've got a reasonably good web site for the National Trust that has some pictures of some of our properties that we own, and that could give you a bit of a flavour of some of the difficulties we experience here, I guess, in our remoteness of location and rugged material that some of our properties are built from.

**DR BYRON:** Yes, I've been recollecting some of the places that my wife and I visited when we were in Darwin about three years ago, particularly down around the wharf and the - I can try and recall some of the places. I have a bit of an idea and I did look at the web site too, so I've got a bit of a feel for what you're talking about, but obviously I don't know it very well. Just to elaborate on the points that you were making about the isolation, I assume that the NT branch trust also has activities in Central Australia around Alice; Tennant Creek?

**MS HILLS:** Yes, we have branches in Timber Creek, Alice Springs, Borroloola and Katherine, and we've got a management committee at Timber Creek and Pine Creek. We have properties in all those places, some of which we own and some of which are on lease. At Daley Waters, for instance, the aviation complex there, which is quite important, was just all too hard for us, and that has been handed back to the government. Just recently, because of that, there's been a little bit of upgrade and an upsurge of enthusiasm about it but it's taken a long time. In the meantime there's been a lot of vandalism but, as you can imagine, it's a long way from anywhere.

**DR BYRON:** Yes, I was thinking about the old diggings at Pine Creek and so on, and old cattle stations like Springvale. All the points that you were making about the sparseness and the isolation and remoteness, and the expense of maintaining these properties; I imagine that visitor numbers in some of the more isolated ones are probably not that great. Can you give us any feel for what sort of - I guess, income is the word for it - visitation or admission fees, and how well that helps to defray the cost of maintenance or anything like that. I think in Queensland they were pointing out that most of their National Trust properties don't break even because of the visitation numbers.

**MS HILLS:** No, our properties would come nowhere near in that category at all.

We've got a wide variety of buildings, and certainly donations are a very small part of our income. In a recent budget put-up we had donations set at \$5000 overall and that would be, I think, on the generous side and would be more than we'd get in entry fees. Most of the museums charge a small fee and it's not a huge amount.

**MR SHIELDS:** I think it's probably fair to say, Jan, in respect of the remote properties particularly, the entry fees don't go any way to helping with maintenance or operational expenditure. They really just help offset the cost of having properties open. As you'll appreciate, in the remote areas it's very hard for a very small pool of people who are able to devote time to opening and what have you. We tend to be paying a small amount for them to open it.

**MS HILLS:** The museums are generally open only for two or three hours a day because that's all we can manage to find an attendant for.

**DR BYRON:** Yes.

**MS HILLS:** The attendants are paid an honorarium. It's generally an older person in a town like Pine Creek for instance. It's not a huge population. The demise of mining has meant that it has a lot of retirees. Recently there were quite a few houses sold for \$20,000 by the local government to encourage people to come and settle there because there were so many empty houses, and because the town needed a bit of population.

**DR BYRON:** Sure.

**MS HILLS:** We've got several little properties in Pine Creek, but apart from the little museum which is open - and we have an attendant there for a couple of hours a day. That is only in the dry season when the visitation is expected, and the same situation exists at Timber Creek, where there's now just a management committee out there because at Timber Creek we had one very, very loyal member who kept the museum, which is a lovely little museum, open for long years, but she had to retire. As well as Timber Creek, for instance, the old police station house which we own but which is gradually deteriorating. At the moment the executive director is trying to negotiate a deal with that, so that there might be some upkeep given to us in return for usage. But you have to wait until a local group gets some interest because they are really the people that need to carry this forward.

As I said, Timber Creek has got a lovely little museum and when the local council realised they might lose that as a tourist attraction, then people came forward, interested to say, "Let's keep it open," but the Trust itself couldn't afford to pay somebody to stay out there and do that. The Borrooloola Police Museum is very well known and it's got some grants recently. It's been recently restored, but it's all done on volunteers, and I tend to think that the volunteer aspect - the figure that was put in

the papers that we submitted - was far less than what the National Trust volunteer hours in the Territory are. I noticed in the papers that it's been put at 1040 hours.

I looked at the volunteer hours at Burnett House, which is a major attraction in Darwin, which serves teas on Sundays, and I worked there quite a number of times during the year, and I talked to the person in charge there, and I think the volunteer hours are far more near three and a half thousand hours rather than 1000. Anyway, I've dragged on a bit about answering your question, but - - -

**DR BYRON:** No, that's good, thanks. Tony?

**MR HINTON:** Jan and Alistair, I'd like to add my thanks to Neil's for your participation today, particularly given the particular task of handling participation by video, so thank you very much. Importantly, also your comments from a Northern Territory specific perspective is also valuable to us. The very detailed submission we have from the Australian Council of National Trusts, which I'm sure you've participated in, does give us a wonderful umbrella organisation written submission. But today, to hear your particular comments on matters specific to the Northern Territory are important for us, so thank you, including of course Jan's comments before Alistair arrived regarding the climate, the distances, the vandalism and whatever.

One thing I'd like to pick up on that Jan mentioned is the pressures from development. I was a little surprised that you didn't also pick up pressures from neglect. We're finding that, in the areas of buildings privately owned, one of the key pressures is almost demolition by neglect because the owner doesn't have the resources to maintain the property. Perhaps that's not a major issue for the Northern Territory in circumstances where much of the historic heritage buildings are in public hands rather than private hands, or maybe I'm overstating that. I'd welcome your comments on this other category of pressure; that is, pressure from neglect.

**MS HILLS:** I would think there's quite a lot of neglect for properties that are in private hands.

**MR SHIELDS:** The Wesleyan Church is probably a good example of that.

**MS HILLS:** Yes.

**MR SHIELDS:** A little old church very much in the centre of Darwin with a lot of development pressure for the site, a low building in a very bad state of disrepair. It was heritage listed against the owners' wishes, and it was almost, I think, a case of not just neglect but probably wilful neglect on the part of the owners to seek to have it fall down around them so that they would then be able to develop the site.

Ultimately, and not a very fantastic result I think, the Territory government bought the building itself and relocated it in the Botanic Gardens and - - -

**MS HILLS:** Reconstructed it.

**MR SHIELDS:** Reconstructed rather than restored it.

**MS HILLS:** It's not really a heritage building any more. It was a sort of a compromise situation, but for the realists it's not really a heritage building. I was going to say about properties that the National Trust of course has its own list, and I've visited a couple of old Territory homesteads just this last weekend, and they're on the register of the National Trust, and I think with encouragement some station owners would look after those. Just yesterday, after I was talking to someone who knows a lot about them, they were referring to a homestead on a very well-known property owned by a very well-to-do owner, and saying how disgraceful it was that it was falling down.

I think if we had some way of actually getting to the owner, the person who ultimately sits at the far end, maybe they would do something about it, but certainly their managers don't see that. They're pressurising the situation. For instance, I was told that portable yards are so close to this little cemetery that they're pushing against the rails around the graves, and all you need is one animal to push on that fence and the cemetery itself will be trampled and then it will just disappear, whereas that is really a very important part of our pioneering history. You have to educate people, and maybe in this particular instance we need to go to the top on that one. Again I went out to visit one in the gold country, and it's a long way to go and visit that, and I would say that the people themselves don't go out there all that often, but there's a child's grave for instance there.

Particularly the people that are there now that have been on the station for only about 18 months, I feel sure that with some encouragement they will look after that little homestead and the grave to stop trees growing and cracking of the stone, and the little pen that was brought in from Townsville and all that sort of thing because they display an interest. I think there's a possibility of doing those sorts of things. I don't enough has been done to show people here that heritage can be an additive. It can be an asset. You only have to look at overseas and see the number of people who join the National Trust so that they can visit in the UK to realise that heritage is a growth industry. We just haven't gone along that path enough.

**MR HINTON:** Shifting focus a little, I'd welcome your comments on the Trust's, in Northern Territory, relationship with the NT government, with two particular aspects in mind. One is in terms of your perception about how they handle their own properties that might have historic heritage characteristics and, secondly, their attitude to the overall objective of conservation of historic heritage places and

buildings. We'd welcome your comments as a key player, not-for-profit organisation in this sector as to the role, also very crucial, regarding the objective, that is, public sector role, the government role.

**MR SHIELDS:** I might kick it off and Jan will add to or correct what I say. I think for a large number years the National Trust was seen of the owner of last resort for heritage properties and I think that we went through a period where really to ensure the building was looked after we accepted ownership of it. So the government would have a building, it might have finished its useful life, or from the point of view of the bureaucrats it would seem to have finished its useful life. It would be offered to the National Trust, we'd feel we'd have to take it to look after it. We ended up with a big portfolio of properties without enough income base to deal with it. We've had to take some difficult decisions over the last few years and rationalise those properties and I think you've heard Jan, for example, say with Daly Waters we just weren't able to - it's so remote we had no ability, I guess to look after it; it was being vandalised.

So we gave it back to government, said, "Look, we've done what we can." That has become a catalyst and local people have got involved in that building. I think it's coming along nicely. Death Adder River railway station is another example of that. We weren't looking after it well but now it's a well-run, vibrant, community based organisation is looking after it now and it seems to be building upon that.

**MS HILLS:** Led by a train enthusiast, so it's developed from that and it's very successful at the moment.

**MR SHIELDS:** So if you went back a few years I'd say the government probably had not a terribly great interest in heritage. It recognised it had to be looked after, it didn't really have the resources or expertise to do it. They tried to sort of push it out to us and we used to get funding to help with restoration and what have you but it was never enough - and I suppose everyone says that to you, "It's never enough," and once you've restored something it still needs to be looked after. I guess you've heard all that. With our very concerted effort to take a more, I guess, businesslike approach with our properties and the handing back of some of them, I think we've forced government to think about it and how to look after some of its own buildings a bit better. So I think they're improving there.

I think that still the fundamental issue is that there's always budget pressures. It's really getting heritage and heritage properties far enough up the agenda for people to want to look after them and want to restore them and have an adaptive re-use and make them worthwhile assets. It probably is, across the board, something that we as a community rather than as a National Trust need to make people want to have their properties heritage listed and want to look after them. I think we've made some progress with the government. They do have a dedicated heritage area and there are some quite passionate people in the area, of course struggling for budget as

everyone else is. We'd all like to see more devoted. Is there something you want to build upon or add to that, Jan?

**MS HILLS:** Yes, I wanted to say that I think if we get something with this new heritage review, the review of the act, which our present minister did get before cabinet just before the last election - it has been a very slow process but I feel she is sincere about doing that. It's just how much it might be watered down before it actually gets through the parliament. But at the moment our Heritage Act doesn't really give us any real teeth. The other thing about it is that there's no local government involvement. It occurs to me for instance, I think we need to alert people. I myself have thought of appealing to particularly the Greek population because, for instance, there's a tremendous pressure in Darwin. We just see all these old buildings going and there are apartment blocks just springing up like mushrooms, so that all the old government E-type, J-type houses have been shifted out to the rural areas so that a lot of them are no longer there as examples of where we've come from.

Certainly when I came here 40 years ago Greek housing had a particular role and a particular style and I think we have to appeal to the Greek sense of pride in our community to get them to recognise that they should be keeping some of those houses which were so important in our development. The same could be said for some of the other housing around. So I'm not quite sure where we start on that one, but I do think that we have to start involving people at that community level to make them proud of our very, very important multicultural development in Darwin. I don't think there's another city in Australia that has been quite like it. In fact, I'm quite sure there isn't now.

**MR HINTON:** You mentioned the review of the act. What sort of process does the government have in mind there? Is it sort of a consultation review or is it internal to government review? Is there a public timetable or - - -

**MS HILLS:** No, what they did, they employed a consultant - Peter James, wasn't it?

**MR SHIELDS:** Mm'hm.

**MS HILLS:** He came up to the territory and conducted consultations with the National Trust. We certainly were involved at the council level, at a local branch level. He offered to meet with any group of people right around the territory. So it was a very consultative process and the heritage and environment branch sent a person with him - that was a person who was there on contract at the time - and they went round, over a period of several months, right round the territory. There is this document that we were given and it was produced with options and discussion in it and then Peter James went through all that. From that, we made written submissions,

anybody who wanted to. I certainly did, I know that other councillors did, the trust itself and so forth. So then a document went forward to cabinet and I must admit they sat on it for a fair while but it did go through just prior to the election. So that's in train.

When you ask about our relationship to government, I can only say that our executive director sits on the council, on the HEC, so there's some liaison there. We did have some meetings with the director of that area last year and occasional meetings with the minister. I think we get on reasonably well. I certainly get on well at a personal level with the minister and the various people. I think it would be fair to say that we're not happy always with the decisions that come forward. One of the things about this new legislation is that it makes provision for the fact that there will be a set time for places that are put up to be assessed. There is a set time limit. At the moment there are over 100 properties before the heritage unit for assessment, so they're that far behind that it's quite a ludicrous situation to be in.

Now, this is not good for developers but it's not good for us either because we'd like some sort of expectation that we could be sure that this was going to be saved instead of it just goes on and on.

**MR HINTON:** Timely decision-making is important.

**MS HILLS:** It's a big commitment money-wise. Pardon?

**MR HINTON:** Timely decision-making is important for everybody.

**MS HILLS:** Exactly - and it does make provision for that, but what they're going to do with those 110 places before this comes in is - you know, it must be a problem for them because someone has to pay for that.

**MR HINTON:** You're giving me the impression that in terms of community attitude your perception is one of it being not sufficiently active pro-heritage rather than there being community objections to heritage. Let me explain that a bit further. In some states we're getting signals that, particularly in urban residential areas, community reaction can be quite negative about the objective associated with conservation and heritage buildings, partly because of the pro-development issue and having their property rights eroded by regulation. But you're giving me the impression that in the Northern Territory it's rather a concern that there's lack of community support for the heritage objective rather than outright objections to the objective. Is that an overstatement or understatement?

**MS HILLS:** I think it is a little. Certainly in this inner area it's an objection to heritage listing, isn't it, Alistair?

**MR SHIELDS:** It's very much a not in my backyard objection, I think. So a lot of building owners generally will say, "I'm happy about heritage," but if you want their property to be listed they'll be against it because they'll see the diminution in property value, particularly in an area, which most of our CBD is. Where it was once a fairly low-density development area, it has now gone to a reasonably high-density development area. So if you were forced through heritage declaration to keep the, you know, World War II era house on the block when the blocks all around you were redeveloped as units, you would see that as a reduction in value. So we have had some resistance for heritage declaration, particularly in the CBD area.

**MR HINTON:** One issue we've got, perhaps a second order one, is in relation to how the system handles buildings that mightn't be designated heritage today but in 50 years' time they would seem to be well worthy of saving and we had better think about that now, because it might disappear in the next 50 years.

**MS HILLS:** That's right.

**MR HINTON:** The so-called "newer buildings concept". Is there an issue here for - particularly if you have in mind Darwin where you've got post-Cyclone Tracy construction, that many would argue - or would perceive those buildings as relatively new and therefore the heritage issue, historic conservation issues objectives don't really arise. Is that a characteristic of Darwin post-Cyclone Tracy? Maybe some of those buildings should be saved.

**MR SHIELDS:** Are people interested in saving the sort of Tracy trauma-type housing and what have you?

**MS HILLS:** Well, they're certainly not at this point. Some of us are thinking about how this could be brought into place but I guess there's a real need for some recognition or some process whereby we might start on this journey because at the moment we're losing - as we've said, we're losing all those houses that were put up by the Commonwealth, for instance. They were made to particular plans and they were replicated.

**MR HINTON:** In the 70s.

**MS HILLS:** Most of them have disappeared. Pardon?

**MR HINTON:** These are the ones constructed in the 70s.

**MR SHIELDS:** I think it actually goes right from probably - well, it goes from about World War II right through to the late 70s when the territory ceased self-government. I think the post-Cyclone Tracy buildings largely were done by the Commonwealth in response to Cyclone Tracy and the devastation there. There's the

new building style that occurred then and I don't think anyone really has - apart from a few of us talking about it, I don't think anyone has actually addressed it in terms of looking at whether there would be nominations under the act and whether they would be protected.

**MS HILLS:** We still have in the CBD Sidney Williams huts. But, just recently, there's a 30-storey building, a 33-storey and a - you know, these are springing up and this is what I was just talking about. There's no way that we're going to be able to keep some of these very important buildings really, because there just won't - well, people just won't wear it, the developers and the people who own them. There's a particular Chinese building, for instance, in Cavanagh Street. Now, for those of us who know Darwin and love it, it's a particularly interesting building. It's stone, it has got barred windows. It's called jokingly the opium den. There was a well in the backyard. The family who owns it, there are differences of opinion because it's owned by some people in Sydney and some in Darwin, branches of the family, and it's a highly significant building, isn't it? Whether we can - you know, it's been persuaded not to be listed before. Some of us have put it forward again, but at the moment with 110 cases before it, there's no point; none whatsoever. So we really are waiting.

**MR HINTON:** Presumably though the system has scope to queue-jump in the sense that if a building is not listed but under consideration on that long list, it doesn't matter so much if no-one wants to do anything with the building. But if I put in a development approval or application to take that site and put up a high-rise building and thereby demolish what's already there, that in itself, that application activates consideration for heritage values such that you then jump the queue, jump up the list. Is that how it operates in Darwin in particular?

**MR SHIELDS:** It doesn't by itself. There is a provision in the current legislation for an interim conservation order so that if the minister were minded to consider it and put an interim conservation order on, he could or she could. But there's no statutory requirement to do that and there's no statutory ability for anybody such as the National Trust to apply for one. We actually had a situation just exactly as you described with the Hotel Darwin which was a, you know, historically significant building on our Esplanade where the owners decided that it was uneconomic to keep using. They boarded it up.

It has been under - it has been nominated, you know, for a number of years and it's gone backwards and forwards between the minister and the HAC, you know, seeking further information and what have you about the problems with the building. The National Trust sought the minister - you know, asked the minister to put an interim conservation order, and in fact in the middle of the night the day before, they started demolishing it. We got an interim injunction from the Supreme Court to prevent the demolition of the building to have something done, but ultimately the

minister wasn't required to ever turn his mind to it. So the interim injunction was discharged after 24 hours and the building was knocked down without any real or proper assessment of its heritage values.

**MR HINTON:** But the review of the act will provide that scope do you think?

**MR SHIELDS:** The review of the act is intended to give interim protection to buildings from nomination. But I mean it's foreshadowed - - -

**MS HILLS:** And the timing.

**MR SHIELDS:** Yes, it's then foreshadowed - I suspect that will be hotly debated. It will be interesting to see whether the final results sees something as automatic as that.

**MR HINTON:** What emerges at the end of the day, yes.

**MR SHIELDS:** Indeed.

**MS HILLS:** Yes. What goes through finally.

**DR BYRON:** What we've been talking about I think is the point that a lot of the buildings that are worth keeping and passing on to future generations aren't necessarily, you know, a hundred years old. Some of them are, in Darwin's case, from World War II and some of them may actually be younger than that, but that sort of opens a whole lot of questions about the identification and recognition and the listing, and I imagine that there's always going to be new additions to the list that - we'll find places that we didn't know were there before or places that have been around will gradually realise that they actually do have heritage significance. Would you agree that, you know, it's going to be an awfully long time before we can say, "That's it We've got them all."

**MR SHIELDS:** Look, I mean, I - - -

**MS HILLS:** It's an evolving process really, isn't it? My concern is that we haven't got anything in place to allow for that.

**MR SHIELDS:** It might be gone before you get the opportunity to have that considered.

**MS HILLS:** Yes. Like, what I'm talking about, the housing at the moment that was built maybe in the 60s and 50s, the particular type of house that the Greek people built here, because that is how they lived, and nowadays people are tending towards more modern homes. But the Greek house was particularly - it was built as

a family house, just like you see people in Greece, or I did years ago, where they all sat on the veranda, and all the wrought iron and things like that. I don't want to see that disappear, but we need some sort of provision to help us to keep that in the community.

**MR SHIELDS:** And part of the challenge I think is not only is some of it relatively new, because we're talking about the 50s and 60s, some of it is not particularly pretty either, you know, in terms of people's practical ideas of what's pretty. We don't have lots of, you know, lovely old stone mansions or things like that. A lot of what is interesting from the point of view of our heritage, you know, can be what some people would say unattractive. They can be rickety old fibro houses with galvanised iron roofs and building with galvanised iron sides. They can be the sort of Greek residences that Jan is talking about. It wouldn't fit someone's idea of the stately home you'd like to - - -

**MS HILLS:** It's not Como.

**MR SHIELDS:** It's definitely not Como, exactly. We don't have a lot of pretty property.

**DR BYRON:** It's a lot easier to raise public funding for the pretty and the photogenic as opposed to the - - -

**MR SHIELDS:** Absolutely.

**MS HILLS:** Absolutely.

**DR BYRON:** - - - interesting and important but a bit ugly.

**MR SHIELDS:** And that's one of our big challenges, because most of our interesting important stuff is a bit ugly, you know, in that practical sort of sense.

**DR BYRON:** Sorry, just - - -

**MS HILLS:** Getting away - yes.

**DR BYRON:** Carry on.

**MS HILLS:** This is sort of a bit outside the current discussion, but I would like to mention it whilst it comes to mind when we're talking about difference. I consider that, you know, nationally we do have a few things that are very significant, but in particular, the Victoria Settlement, I was reading again the criteria for national listing, and I believe that the Victoria Settlement is something that should be listed nationally, and it was the most northerly attempt to establish on Australian soil. It

failed, but the significant building remains there. It's just a wonderful place in a very picturesque and wonderful harbour. I feel that as a part of Australian history, that should be recognised nationally. I just throw that in.

**MR HINTON:** Thanks.

**DR BYRON:** That brings me to one of the points that I was leading up to, and we're talking about the list of places that are identified as being worth saving for future generations is going to grow, and yet the money to look after the places that are identified is let's say pretty stable. The question of having identified places that are worth keeping and placing on, where's the money going to come from, and I can think of a couple of sources like, you know, earning from admission fees and tearooms or may B and B's and things, income from memberships, maybe some philanthropic donations of people with money, and then of course there's funds from taxpayers through various levels of government.

One of the things that we're grappling with is, you know, how does one decide how much the money comes through governments at various levels as opposed to, you know, those other sources, and if you think of national, territory or local ratepayers, et cetera, one way is to think about who gets most of the benefit out of retaining properties as heritage conservation, and to say well, you know, X per cent of the benefit goes directly to people who live in that area from having this place maintained and looked after. Some goes to the broader population of that whole state or territory, and then some of the benefit is for all Australians. I think, you know, it's a bit difficult to sort of sort through that and say how much of it should come from Australian public as a whole as opposed to from the territory level or from people who live within 50 miles of the place. Have you thought about that at all?

**MS HILLS:** I guess it depends on the significance in relation to the people in the area, doesn't it? I mean, Alistair mentioned the Adelaide River railway station, and that's been taken up at a local level, and I think that's a very good way of dealing with a property such as that, because I guess it's part of the old Commonwealth railway, but it seems to work very well, and it's a building that could be - it's close enough to habitation and it's a building that can be worked on with some assistance. For instance there's an awful lot of volunteer hours gone in there.

So that under a grant scheme, you can manage something like that, but things become a lot more difficult when you've got substantial properties that require a lot of maintenance and you haven't got the expectation of earning. I mean, we have a property that we rent out at the moment. I think the income was in the order of 80,000 or something for the year, but the expenditure for upkeep was almost the same. That's not a commercial proposition. Also apart from properties, the National Trust has a need to fulfil other areas in the sense of advocacy and education and these type of things. So we need to have money for some of that.

If we're not going to get it through excess amounts out of properties, we need to have some source of funding, and I think we play an important enough role in the community to warrant that. I guess that's getting a little off the subject. So I won't go down that one, but - - -

**DR BYRON:** Just to clarify that point when we're talking about what the territory government is doing in heritage and how that might evolve in the near future, do they see - how do they see the trust in the Northern Territory fitting into what the Territory government does for heritage? Do they see a continuing role for you, and if so, is that as a property owner and manager or as an educator and sort of public outreach communication sort of function or - - -

**MS HILLS:** I don't know that we've had that frank a discussion as that. At the moment we still have our funding that they provide. I think at the moment the status quo remains, and that they see it as looking after the properties that we have, but they are tending to - they do have a defined amount to spend on properties across the territory, and they're taking on some of those responsibilities.

**DR BYRON:** But do they differentiate between, you know, a certain amount of money that's for property maintenance or a certain amount of money that's for public education and outreach?

**MS HILLS:** No.

**DR BYRON:** They only give you money for property.

**MS HILLS:** They do give out money that helps maintain properties, but our grant money is untied. Would that be fair to say?

**MR SHIELDS:** So we get a fixed amount every year which is just a contribution to us, and then we make grant applications for specific things.

**DR BYRON:** Okay.

**MR SHIELDS:** And they might be education programs or to do studies or to work up a conservation and management plan or it might be for physical works. We see trends backwards and forwards over the years, and I think the trend a few years ago was to - most of our physical works-type grants have been knocked back and we were winning some of the plan-type ones and the education-type ones, but I think it's probably gone back to a bit of a balance in the last few years.

**MS HILLS:** Yes, physical things. But the government does spend money on some of the little places. For instance in some cases, it's better if Parks and Wildlife look

after some of the little buildings that are out there. We handed back a place called Bonney Well, and Parks and Wildlife have been able to - because they have people and rangers out in the area, they're able to do something about that, and last week I attended a sort of opening of a little museum down in Litchfield Park which is being now looked after by - this is an old homestead, just a tin shed, but it's been given a bit of a facelift and an interpretive museum display has been put there just in the last month or so, and Parks and Wildlife are keeping an eye on that because they've got rangers who visit there all the time, et cetera.

**DR BYRON:** Yes.

**MS HILLS:** So that's a very good outcome in that situation.

**MR HINTON:** Have you got experience as to how effective seed money is for residential buildings; that is, an owner of what could be described as worthy of conservation living in a house but doesn't have the resources to maintain the roof or whatever. Is there a program where you can get either a rate rebate or a subsidy towards funding the maintenance expenditure; even low interest rate loans? Do you have direct experience and, if you do, is that sort of technique effective in generating a change of attitude by the owner to maintain the property?

**MS HILLS:** I can't think that we've had a situation where it's been effective to actually encourage people to do something. Certainly when I was on this heritage property I applied to the Heritage Branch for funding to assist in getting a new roof, and I got funding to do that.

**MR HINTON:** Part funding, not full funding.

**MS HILLS:** No, but it was a substantial amount for what I wanted to do. It's a unique building, and certainly the health and safety people wouldn't have needed to be around, but they provided very good funding. I suppose about two-thirds, three-quarters of the funding came from the Heritage Branch, and after that I applied for funding because I had a problem with drainage. That was a very minor amount but, yes, they will come across with moneys for those sorts of things for private owners. I just don't think we have a huge number of private owners in recognised heritage buildings that I can think of.

**MR SHIELDS:** No, I can't remember his real name - the Queen Mother - what was his name?

**MS HILLS:** James Bellman?

**MR SHIELDS:** Peter Morgan.

**MS HILLS:** Peter Morgan.

**MR SHIELDS:** Peter Morgan was a fellow in the CBD here who had one of those World War II houses that personally applied to have it heritage listed, and he was successful, I think, in getting some moneys for ongoing maintenance and painting and what have you. There also is a regime by which in an area where you're rated you pay your rates and you can get a rebate back from the Heritage Advisory mob in DIPE, so there is a form of rate relief. I think we could do more. One of the issues is the sorts of grants that Jan's talking about and the sort of ones that Peter Morgan applied for; that's all part of the same pool of money that we're competing with for our buildings and anybody else with a heritage thing is too.

**MS HILLS:** We don't all get the funding together.

**MR SHIELDS:** No, so for example if there was to be an enormous increase in the amount of privately owned dwellings that were heritage listed where they were applying for grants to help, they'd be competing against us for those grant moneys as well, so it wouldn't be an increased pool. I think something like an increased pool obviously would help. Your suggestion of low interest loans, I think, would be one that might have a bearing on people's decisions. I can imagine somebody in one of the newer places you're talking about; that it's so hard to get people interested in restoring them. If people could see, "Well, I could go to the bank and pay my normal loan for my renovation, or I could go here and get a low interest loan," and have to go through a proper heritage management regime, that combined with your rate rebates and what have you might just tip the balance and get a few more people thinking about it and taking more pride in their places.

**MS HILLS:** I don't think it would be difficult to get that with a reasonable minister. It's the same sort of thing that's been used for farming development and that type of thing in the past here in the Territory, so I could see that as being a possibility. The present government has put aside \$200,000 per annum to assist with maintenance of heritage buildings.

**MR HINTON:** Yes. I imagine that that particular issue has a much higher profile in state capital cities where the number of potentially heritage listed buildings requiring maintenance that are held in private hands is quite large.

**MS HILLS:** Absolutely.

**DR BYRON:** Changing the subject, I was going to ask you about some of the World War II features around Darwin. Particularly I was thinking about all the old airfields as you go down the highway heading south. Last time I was there a couple of years ago, apart from a sign, it seems that somebody could make a case that they were a very important part of the Australian defence effort. During the war there

were thousands of aircraft that took off from all those airfields along the highway there.

**MS HILLS:** Yes, just recently one of the members of parliament was successful in diverting the double highway at Noonamah so that one of those strips would be retained, rather than a highway that goes through it. So the highway goes down to that particular strip and goes across, and that's involved shifting the water pipeline and all sorts of things. It's a massive effort. There is a provision in the new Heritage Act for serial listing, and I know there is an intention to list a lot of World War II sites. I myself have a significant World War II site on my property down the track, and I've individually nominated that for heritage listing. I know that there are a few in, but I do know that the minister - actually she mentioned it to me at the Blythe Homestead the other day, about a serial listing for some of these wartime places.

I think the important thing is to sort out the ones that are really significant and look after those, whereas others have been vandalised. There are all sorts of sites along the side of the highway down as far as just past Noonamah, and I travel the road frequently; gunning placement for instance. There are 44-gallon drums and stuff where the graders have pushed them aside and they're just left there in the bush, and every dry season you see them, and then the wet comes and it grows up again and it's really disgustingly untidy and annoys me. So we should be looking after and getting rid of all that crap, and looking after the stuff that we've got that's really significant. Of course, the Adelaide River railway people would like to take a little railway line across to Snake Creek at Adelaide River. I don't know whether you've been there, Neil - - -

**DR BYRON:** Yes.

**MS HILLS:** --- but it was a highly significant site. It has been vandalised over the years. There's a little bit of a difficulty because it is on aboriginal land, so we have to work with those people to do anything there, but there are moves to maintain what is left there, white ants and vandalism aside. So there are moves in the Northern Territory about the World War II stuff, and in fact Adelaide River - the tourism people have been working in that area. I live in Carmarthenshire, and Adelaide River, along with the railway, will be developing its wartime history as a tourist focus for that area. Perhaps that answers a little bit of your question.

**DR BYRON:** Yes, what you were saying about picking the best of it and making sure that that's well looked after, because there's probably so many sites scattered around the Territory that it would be almost impossible to look after all of them.

**MS HILLS:** Indeed, and some are really - I mean, you can see from Adelaide River to Darwin there is just so much. You can pick out where the generators were sited at

the side of the road. I can anyway. The generators are there for Forty Mile Camp. You can look along the ridge and that goes for miles up there where they had a camp. On my own block I suppose it would be 50 places where people lived; that it was lived and worked. There's cement blocks and things like that everywhere. They're not terribly robust, some of them, and will eventually disintegrate, but I think there's plenty that can be looked after. Of course, some of the people have come back since all that signage was put in - 88, wasn't it - when we had the 50 years or whatever it was. Since then other units have come back and put their signs at particular places along the way, so there's been a little building on that original signage, so it is being looked after to that extent. Tourism, I think, will help with that. There's a few tourist activities centred around that type of thing, so that in itself will help keep it alive.

**DR BYRON:** Do you think it means anything to foreign tourists?

**MS HILLS:** It depends which foreign tourists you're talking about, but certainly at the time we had that big reunion there were a lot of Americans and American widows coming to see where their husbands lived around Batchelor. People come looking for their relatives. I've met people who come looking for where their father served, or where their brothers were and all that sort of thing. When you say foreign tourists, yes, I think to some extent. Maybe not to the same extent, but there are other countries that had an involvement, even if it was on the other side so to speak. I think if you're a historian it doesn't matter, if you want to come and look at the history of an area or a region or a country, you're going to come and look at it all. You're not going to say, "Well, that's another nation. I'm not going to look at that," so I think it's got potential.

**DR BYRON:** I've just about run out of questions, but is there anything else that you think you need to tell us? I guess, if I can give you a few hints, we're particularly looking for suggestions on how the process for identifying and listing and so on might be improved, or how well the existing system for ongoing management of heritage places works and how that might be improved; generally any way of improving the system that looks at things like clarity and responsibility, and knowing who's responsible to do what and accountable for the results and that sort of thing. I'm not particularly trying to lead you to write the report for us, but those are some of the areas where we're really open to suggestions.

**MS HILLS:** What you're saying is that it would be good to have some sort of fairly basic criteria, or not necessarily basic, but some standard criteria?

**DR BYRON:** Yes, and systematically followed.

**MS HILLS:** To differentiate between the national and the state or territory listings perhaps. Is that what you're meaning?

**DR BYRON:** Yes, I think that's probably always a bit of a judgment call of what's national, state or territory, or local significance, and I guess if it makes a difference, not only in terms of the level of statutory protection, but also in terms of the access to funding that comes with it, then it's probably important to get that distinction right, and to be quite clear and have a coherent approach to that throughout the country.

**MS HILLS:** Yes, so certainly it would assist us if there were some basic rules, for want of a better word, that assisted us in the development, I think, of our heritage regime. I think we've got a long way to go here.

**DR BYRON:** Yes, that comes back to - - -

**MS HILLS:** Certainly if there were suggestions about what the ordinary person might expect in assistance, that would be a help.

**DR BYRON:** As you started off, Jan, there's a lot of places in Northern Territory that seem to have a case for being looked after, yet the money and the people, other resources to do that, is fairly slim.

**MS HILLS:** That's right.

**MR SHIELDS:** So is the answer - I mean, we all think there should be more government funding and I guess the National Trust should receive more, too, but is the answer in a long-term sense - and you've talked now about how the number of buildings that, you know, should be looked after is going to increase over time as well, is the answer to get the community to see heritage listing and heritage as a more positive thing. So that rather than seeing the heritage listing of their own property as some sort of burden, but see it as a positive, so that rather than bodies like the National Trust having to be the owners of last resort to these sorts of properties, that they will continue in private ownership with private owners who are proud, who perhaps do get some concessions along the way to help them be proud I suppose, but whose ultimate driver is they want to live in a place like that or they want to own a place like that and they want to look after it I don't know how you do that, but - - -

**MS HILLS:** I think it's an educative process and an awareness process because I don't think people here are sufficiently aware for instance that - just looking at our own scene, I don't think they're sufficiently aware that we need to act now to look for the future. I agree. I think we should be giving incentives to people to take more interest certainly with our local stuff like the old homesteads that I was talking about before and the cemeteries on the stations and the old cattle yards that were built out of timber, et cetera. Really and truly the only way they can be looked after is by the people that are out there. There is no other practical way of doing it.

So we really need to make them aware, educate them and perhaps provide them with a bit of an incentive, and I don't really think that would have to be huge dollars. So if we're looking at the outback stuff, I think that's how that can be done, and when we're looking at the township - and there's some wonderful - I mean, we've been focusing on Darwin I guess because we live in Darwin, but both Alistair and I were in Alice Springs in March, and we looked on the east side of Alice Springs which had some wonderful examples; wonderful examples of homes there, and innovative design and things that should be preserved.

We really need to educate the owners of those places because otherwise they won't want to have them listed. But whilst ever we've got the legislation that we're dealing with at the moment, we're just sort of caught in a bind at the moment. It doesn't matter what we do. We can't get the stuff through to get it listed, but really we've got to be looking at those people in the town and making them educated and aware, too, and giving them perhaps the rates incentives and the low interest loans. I think that's a good idea for the town-type people.

**DR BYRON:** I guess the opposite side of that is that governments are always under pressure to put, you know, more money into schools and hospitals and roads and the list goes on.

**MS HILLS:** Yes, everybody wants a slice of the cake.

**DR BYRON:** Yes. So if you say it's always going to be hard going to get more money out of government at any level for heritage conservation, what else can you do? Well, one of it is to try and get as many of these heritage places to stand on their own two feet, you know, to be able to - to sort of financially viable and sustainable without relying on taxpayer money because it's always going to be hard to find, and that might require some innovative or entrepreneurial approach. I don't know what. I haven't got any ideas, but I'm just casting around for - and maybe the Adelaide River train station is an example of something that seems to be - you know, the local community grab it and run with it and it works and maybe we need more success stories like that.

**MS HILLS:** When we talk about rates, that's local government. When we talk about loans, that could be sort of federally administered. But one of the ways in which governments could help - for instance, if we looked at the east side of Alice Springs, the way would be to keep rates down so that people would say, "Okay, this is the housing precinct. It's not going to be pressured because of the march onwards of rates and things," so that people feel a need to knock down the house and put up a multi-storey building that's going to house more people.

Quite often with the pressures of city development, really what happens is the farms and things are rated out. For instance, I live 10, 12 K's from Adelaide River,

and I can see that in the normal way of things - say, 50 or a hundred years from now - somebody will be wanting to break that up and have housing there. My intention is to try and stop that. But, you know, ultimately it's rates that cause people to move on. It's rates that get rid of the little fruit farms around Brisbane and all that sort of thing and the dairy farms here and there. So government does have an opportunity to preserve some of our heritage by saying, "Okay, we will give these people an incentive to stay there." So it's not actually giving away money, but it's not letting it be a deciding factor.

**MR HINTON:** Jan, doesn't that come down to clarity as to land use rather than incentives not to go somewhere else; that is, if it is designated farming land, then it's not eligible for residential development? Isn't that the way to proceed rather than - - -

**MS HILLS:** Well, let's get away from the farm use and come back to the east side Alice Springs, and so let's keep that as low-rise simple housing if you like.

**MR HINTON:** Well, precinct designation as to what is acceptable building happens right around Australia. In many suburbs, you are restricted to not go beyond a second floor for example, and that's locked into the zoning of that area.

**MS HILLS:** Yes.

**MR SHIELDS:** I think zoning in the Territory is something that hasn't really been explored as a way of maintaining heritage, and, you know, you certainly see in some of the other states where you might have a whole suburb of houses of various heritage, and they tend to put restrictions on people's ability to change the sort of scope of the facade and the scale of buildings on whole streets.

**MR HINTON:** Substantive covenants that are - yes.

**MR SHIELDS:** Yes. You see, we don't have any of that here, and so you will see in some of the older residential suburbs, people will knock the house down and build something that's completely out of character with the surrounds, and it happens on an ongoing basis, doesn't it, Jan?

**MS HILLS:** Yes. I guess we need to lobby for that. It's another job for a few number of people.

**MR HINTON:** Yes.

**DR BYRON:** Yet another one.

**MS HILLS:** I'm hoping you might provide some sort of incentives for people - for

government to do it.

**DR BYRON:** Yes.

**MR HINTON:** We're certainly trying to bring together in a document some sort of best practice identification for the intersection of planning and the heritage objective. That's one of our big challenges, particularly through operations of local governments around Australia. I know that's not Northern Territory, but it's certainly for much - for the states, it's a big issue.

**MS HILLS:** For much of Australia it is, yes.

**MR SHIELDS:** And some logical reasoned arguments are certainly going to help us in our future lobbying as well.

**MR HINTON:** Conceptually it also applies for the Territory.

**DR BYRON:** Yes. I think that just about does me for now. I can't think of anything else. Is there anything that either of you wanted to say by way of wrapping up?

**MS HILLS:** No. I just think that the National Trust is an organisation which is very well recognised, and I think it has a hallmark of respect in the community, and I think we've got a place in the community and we really need government to recognise that we are a worthwhile organisation I think.

**MR HINTON:** You have a substantive brand name, Jan.

**MS HILLS:** Regardless of whether they have - pardon?

**MR HINTON:** Sorry to interrupt you, but you do have a substantive brand name right round Australia; National Trust.

**MS HILLS:** Yes, but I mean it's international as well.

**DR BYRON:** International brand as well, yes.

**MS HILLS:** The National Trust brand, and I think we're evolving a little bit, too. I mean, we are interested in landscape and all that sort of thing as well. So we do have an interest outside of buildings, and of course buildings sit in landscape, and oftentimes it's the pressures of development which destroy that. So we would like to be less worried about white ants in buildings and more worried about perhaps educating the public and advocacy generally which would take off the pressures for us really.

So if we could have the public taking care of their own buildings or the government taking care of theirs, then we could step back and perhaps get into a different sort of a role. That would be very good.

**DR BYRON:** Yes, I think that's probably a very good point to finish on if that's okay with you.

**MS HILLS:** Yes. Thank you for your time.

**MR SHIELDS:** Yes. Thanks for the opportunity.

**DR BYRON:** Okay. We'll be in Perth on Monday morning, and the hearings will continue there. But we'll try and make a point of getting up to see you in person before this is over.

**MR SHIELDS:** We'd like to welcome you here.

**MS HILLS:** Yes, we'd be happy to show you some of the things that we've talked about.

**MR HINTON:** Thank you.

**DR BYRON:** Thank you both very much.

**MR SHIELDS:** Pleasure.

AT 2.22 PM THE INQUIRY WAS ADJOURNED UNTIL  
MONDAY, 1 AUGUST 2005

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