Risk Assessments in Heritage Planning in Victoria


by

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Albury 2003
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Introduction

Cultural Heritage places are particularly vulnerable during natural disasters. There is a considerable body of literature that discusses disasters and their effects on cultural property (cf. Spennemann 1999, 2003).

The 1990s were the official International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. Did the widespread educational activities during this decade make any impact on the community of heritage managers? A pilot study of the attitudes of heritage managers in New South Wales showed a widespread lack of awareness about the effects of natural disasters in heritage properties (Spennemann 1998). A repeat study in 2002 confirmed the results (Graham & Spennemann in press; submitted).

But even before the 1990s, natural disasters were acknowledged as a serious problem. Following the devastating Ash Wednesday bushfires of 1983, the State Government of Victoria recognised the need to develop fire hazard maps for all shires covered by the Melbourne Metropolitan Planning Scheme. As a result a series of reports were produced (cf MMBW 1984a; 1984b). These are generic hazard assessments and do not provide specific information on heritage places. However, it could be expected that based on such hazard maps, fire management plans for local properties could and would be developed.

This report is the second in a series assessing whether heritage management in in Victoria takes natural disasters into account. This report draws on the body of heritage studies written for local government areas in Victoria.
Methodology

The Sampling Frame

The sampling frame comprises all local government area heritage studies written between 1985 and 2003, as they were available at the Central Library of the Department of Infrastructure, Melbourne.

Methodology

Heritage Studies are shelved in that library under Dewey Code 720.9945 and following. All heritage studies were pulled off the shelves on 30 May 2003. It is likely that a small number of reports may have been borrowed by Heritage Victoria or other departmental staff. Also not included are any reports that may be held by Heritage Victoria in the process of review and acceptance, which have not yet been made public. The sample available for analysis comprises 99 heritage studies with a total of 258 volumes.

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Characteristics of the Sample Population

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Findings

The results of the survey are extremely discouraging. Not a single one of the studies consulted made any high-level reference to natural hazards or their impacts. The studies concentrated on the identification of the physical description of identified properties as well as the assessment of cultural significance. The only management-related issues addressed where planning controls and guidelines for property maintenance.

Conclusions

As local government area heritage studies are the foundation on which local councils are basing their decisions, such decisions will only be as good as the documents drawn up by the consultants. While recommendations on planning controls and guidelines for recommended maintenance are important for day-to-day decision-making they need to be augmented by risk management strategies.

Until such time that natural and human-induced hazards are included in the planning regimes for cultural heritage properties, there is little hope that effective protection for cultural heritage places will occur. The recent losses in the bushfires in the Victorian and New South Wales Alps attest to that.
Bibliography


Graham, Kristy and Spennemann, Dirk H.R. (submitted) Heritage managers and their Attitudes towards Disaster Management for cultural heritage resources in New South Wales, Australia. *Local Environment*


Appendix 1:
Reports assessed in this Survey

? (nd) Marong Heritage Study. Landscape Places. ?: ?.
? (nd) Marong Heritage Study. General Places. ?: ?.
? (nd) Marong Heritage Study. Mining Places. ?: ?.
? (nd) Marong Heritage Study. Index of Mining Sites. ?: ?.


Department of Planning and Urban Growth (1990) *French Island. Places of Historical of other significance.* Melbourne: Department of Planning and Urban Growth.

Dobbie, Meredith and Jackson, Fran (1995) *Landscape Heritage Study: Mt Eagle and Glenard subdivisions, Eaglemont.* [no place]: Meredith Dobbie and Fran Jackson.


McInnes, Margaret (1992) *City of Knox Heritage Study Part 1*.. [no place]: Margaret Inned.


