

4 December 2003

SUBMISSION .....5.....

Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital  
and External Territories  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600



Dear Secretary

**Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories  
Inquiry into the adequacy of funding for Australia's Antarctic Program**

I write to make a submission regarding this inquiry, in particular to address one aspect of the Antarctic Program, the conservation of cultural heritage places under the care of the AAD.

**Australian Cultural Heritage Places in Antarctica and the sub-Antarctic Islands**

Australia's Antarctic Territory and the sub-Antarctic islands contain a large number of important cultural heritage sites including the following places (or parts thereof) included in the Register of the National Estate database.

Davis Station Group, Davis Station (Registered)  
Mawson Station, Mawson Station (Registered)  
Mawsons Huts, Dumont D'Urville Station (Registered)  
Old Casey Station, Casey Station (Indicative Place)  
Wilkes Station, Casey Station (Indicative Place)  
Macquarie Island Nature Reserve, Tasmania (Registered)  
Heard and McDonald Islands (Registered)

Some of these places, and I believe certain other places, are listed as Historic Sites and Monuments under the Antarctic Treaty. Unfortunately I have not been able to readily find a complete list of just the Australian sites to provide to you.

The AAD's website contains the following information about historic sites and monuments.

**"Historic sites and monuments**

There are other places we value in the Antarctic because of their role in the history of human presence in the region. They may be associated with early exploration, with epic tales of survival, or with the establishment and operation of early Antarctic stations. Some of these have been listed under the Antarctic Treaty as historic sites and monuments.

Through the AAD, Australia is committed to conserving those places and artefacts that constitute our cultural heritage in the Antarctic region, and that contribute to our national sense of identity.” (<http://www.aad.gov.au/default.asp?casid=216>)

All of this indicates that Australia has a rich and highly significant collection of cultural heritage sites in Antarctica. For example,

“Mawson’s Huts Historic Site is of national and international heritage significance. It is rare in a world context as one of six surviving complexes from the heroic Era of Antarctic exploration: a period of great human adventure and achievement that marked the first period of land-based scientific research and geographic discovery on the last continent to be explored.

Mawson’s Huts Historic Site is unique in the context of Australia history as the only surviving site representing the work of an Australian Antarctic expedition during this period... [the expedition] laid the seeds for an eventual claim to a large portion of Antarctica by [Australia]...” (Godden Mackay Logan 2001, *Mawson’s Huts Historic Site, Conservation Management Plan*, p. x)

### **Management of Australia’s Cultural Heritage Places in Antarctica and the sub-Antarctic Islands**

The management of these cultural heritage sites rests with the Australian Antarctic Division. However, some cultural heritage sites on Macquarie Island are formally the responsibility of the Tasmanian Government although practically these fall under the care of the AAD.

Regrettably, over many years this responsibility has failed to attract the level of priority and support it deserves. For example, in a foreword to the Mawson’s Huts conservation management plan the AAD Director wrote,

“The AAD recognises the cultural significance of the Mawson’s Huts Historic Site and the importance of conserving it. The Government has not resourced the AAD itself to undertake conservation work at the site. Nevertheless, the AAD has, over many years, provided support to bodies that are interested in conserving the site and will continue to do so.” (Godden Mackay Logan 2001, p iii)

Accordingly, even for this site of *national and international heritage significance* the AAD could not fund the conservation management plan for the place. In addition, out of an annual overall budget of about \$100 million, it could only provide about \$650,000 spread over 3 years towards the conservation of the huts. The remainder being raised by a private charitable foundation.

This is the situation for perhaps the most important of Australia’s cultural heritage sites in Antarctica. For the other cultural heritage sites the situation is probably worse.

As the AAD indicates these cultural heritage matters are not a priority for the Government, the Parliamentary inquiry is an opportunity to recommend a change such that cultural heritage matters are given a high priority.

It is important to note the Commonwealth is about to commence a new heritage regime which is intended to provide greater protection and support for the conservation of both national and Commonwealth heritage places. This regime is welcome, and it should result in the improved conservation of cultural heritage places in Antarctica and the sub-Antarctic islands. However, it is also worth noting the AAD is part of the same portfolio that has been developing the new heritage regime for years, all under the direction of the same Minister. Greater priority could have been given to these cultural heritage places years ago but this has not happened.

It may be argued the Mawson's Huts conservation program, involving minimal Government funding and substantial charitable support, is the ideal model for the conservation of Australia's cultural heritage in Antarctica and the sub-Antarctic islands. While superficially appealing, this approach is deeply flawed. The Australian Government, and the AAD in particular, has a primary responsibility for the management and conservation of these cultural heritage places. This responsibility will be underscored by the new Commonwealth heritage regime. It is not a discretionary or secondary activity to be undertaken only if charitable funds and voluntary enthusiasm lead the way.

The AAD sees itself supporting the efforts of others in conserving these cultural heritage places. This view must be reversed. The AAD must lead such efforts and be prepared to fully fund them from its own resources. If support is available from other sources then this may be welcomed but it should not become a pre-condition.

### **Conclusion**

Australia has a rich and important collection of cultural heritage places in Antarctica and the sub-Antarctic islands. Some of these places, such as Mawson's Huts are of national and international significance. The management and conservation of these places is a primary responsibility for the AAD.

Unfortunately, the AAD indicates these cultural heritage matters are not a priority for the Government. Noting the forthcoming new Commonwealth heritage regime, the Parliamentary inquiry should recommend a change such that cultural heritage matters are given a high priority within AAD programs and funding. The inquiry should underscore the AAD's primary responsibility for these matters, and stress these are neither secondary nor discretionary.

The AAD must lead efforts to manage and conserve these cultural heritage places, and be prepared to fully fund them from its own resources. Support from other sources may be used to assist in such efforts but should not qualify the AAD's primary responsibility.

Yours sincerely

Duncan Marshall