

Video transcript - The Hon. Greg Hunt MP, Minister for the Environment

Transcript: Pre-recorded video message for the Imagined Past Imagine Futures ICOMOS Conference 2013 Centenary of Canberra, 1 November 2013

Welcome everybody to the ICOMOS 2013 conference, I apologise I am not with you in person, but I am committed at home in Victoria.

I really want to talk about three things today: a little bit about Australia's heritage and your role in that, secondly I want to address the issue of the context of where heritage fits in the Coalition's Cleaner Environment Plan, and thirdly the initiatives and how we can draw on the community and draw on those within the heritage community.

So in terms of our heritage, for me there are really four major areas. The first, of course, is Indigenous heritage - in the magnificent background and history which comes with the great cultural icons of Uluru and Kakadu and so many of Australia's areas. Many of you are involved in conservation, promotion and rehabilitation of Indigenous heritage and, in particular, helping to promote and keep alive Indigenous heritage.

Secondly, there's our extraordinary natural heritage, perhaps most famously the Great Barrier Reef and Ningaloo Reef. But wherever you are in Australia - whether it is the Bungle Bungles, whether it's the Great Ocean Road in Victoria and that incredible coast line - around Australia you have world leading examples of natural heritage. And our job is to help protect it and your job is to be ambassadors, to be conservators and to be those that will warn when there are threats.

The third thing, of course, is our early European heritage, and there is our support for magnificent icons such as the Port Arthur Penitentiary, the Victorian Gold Fields and so many examples of both convict and free settler early activity, 200 years ago through to a 100 years ago.

Then, of course, we have our contemporary history, which is a history of a completely diverse multicultural country which, in my view, is as balanced as any country in the world. It draws people from everywhere, it melds them together. And this may take the form of the extraordinary work that you see at MONA the Museum of Old and New Art in Tasmania, the Opera House, perhaps most famously as our most obvious contemporary icon, or the different communities and societies that are brought together.

Now that's the heritage. So where does this fit within our overall Cleaner Environment Plan?

For us there are four pillars. Clean air, which is all about reducing our emissions and improving our air quality, but doing it in a way where it's not about big taxes, it's all about initiatives for real practical local action.

The second is about clean land and this involves young people through a 15 000 strong Green Army. It involves the Landcare movement bringing together those on the land to help protect and improve our physical heritage.

Then there's the clean water arm of our four pillars and for us what clean water is about is the Reef 2050 plan (which is a personal passion), water security in Northern Australia and the

magnificent Murray Darling Basin and in particular the agreement, which has bipartisan support to put it on a sustainable basis. So many people from different parts of Australia have contributed to that.

And then the fourth of those pillars is heritage. And so this is where I now want to go into the key initiatives. There are for us four major community-based heritage initiatives and each of you I hope can participate in at least one of those if not more. We already have a modest, admittedly, \$4.4 million heritage grants programme. We're adding an additional \$1.4 million for small scale community heritage grants. In particular we're focussing on grants of up to \$10 000. It could be for a rehabilitation project for an existing community operation such as the Ballarat tramways project, it might be a historical society, it might be a historical record. You find the best projects and we will be in a position to decide and support.

Beyond that, there is the Green Army. So the Green Army is of course best known as an environmental project, but it is also about heritage projects - so where it's safe and appropriate for young people to work in restoration of heritage buildings, they could be doing a heritage garden, they could be working in a place such as The Briars on the Morning Peninsula in my own area just as an example, they could be working at Sage's Cottage - things which are practical where they might rebuild a heritage garden, refurbish heritage buildings, help establish a heritage display. It's all part of building skills and supporting the environment and heritage.

Then we go to the icons programme. So we have our National Heritage Icons programme of which the centrepiece is the Port Arthur Penitentiary. We have again a modest grant of \$1.5 million but it's all about restoring, refurbishing, rehabilitating one of Australia's great heritage icons.

And then the fourth arm of our heritage initiatives is a programme I want to announce today and that is we will be restarting and completing the Australian Heritage Strategy.

Now I would be very keen to get advice from the people at ICOMOS 2013, those that have expertise in the field. As part of this there will be an outreach programme. We will work with the experts and we'll also make sure there is an exposure draft for commentary. We will be providing some funds to the Federation of Australian Historical Societies and we will be providing funds to the Australian Heritage Council.

But above all else, you are the conservators, you are those that know and champion and stand for Australia's heritage - whether it is natural heritage, whether its Indigenous heritage, whether it is early European heritage or whether it is contemporary cultural heritage. So come forward with your ideas, participate in the community heritage grants programme, in the Green Army programme, in the National Icons programme or in the Australian Heritage Strategy.

I thank you for what you do and I wish you all the best. More power to you and there is an open door and invitation to be part of the great national project of conserving, improving and celebrating our heritage.