

# National Trust Contribution to Sustainable Heritage

**ABSTRACT:** The National Trust movement has established an international profile from its beginnings in the United Kingdom where the National Trust of England continues to be a significant conservation agency to this day. The National Trust of Australia (WA) (NTWA) was established in 1959 using the model of the English National Trust and was reconstituted in 1964 under a Western Australian Act of Parliament as an independent community based organisation.

The NTWA has steadily been achieving great things for the community of Western Australia and conserving built and natural assets for local and international community appreciation. Having achieved its Jubilee Year in 2009 the NTWA continues to be a role model for other national trusts in Australia and beyond.

This paper will reflect on the creation of national trusts and their achievements internationally. It will then review the progress of the NTWA from its beginning to its current place taking in its approach to creating a sustainable environment for its contribution to society.

The aim of this paper is to raise awareness of the role of National Trusts for their contribution to cultural and social sustainability and their involvement of community in achieving their goals of conservation and education.

(This is an exploratory paper leading towards further PhD. research)

## **Introduction**

This paper reviews the background to the formation of the national trust movement, its expansion internationally and then focuses on the Australian trust movement and Western Australia in particular. The national trust movement evolved through community action to conserve and protect society's heritage. There have been excellent achievements with the National Trust (referring to the collective of England, Wales and Scotland and is used thus throughout the paper) now responsible for a large number of significant buildings, land and

coastline. Other national trusts have adopted a similar model and principles and many are supported by government legislation giving them ongoing sustainability with privileges associated with government agencies such as funding but often operating as independent community based non-profit organisations. Australia, a relatively young nation, adopted the national trust model in 1945 when community members determined to save a number of early colonial buildings in the heart of Sydney, the capital city of New South Wales. And so it began in Australia. Western Australia is considered a very successful National Trust model with its advocacy, independence and growing reputation in adaptive re-use of buildings and conservation and interpretation of Aboriginal heritage.

The history of the national trust movement, its internationalisation and subsequent development in Australia, and Western Australia in particular, are explored.

### **National Trust Movement**

The National Trust movement was started in England in 1895 by three individuals who were concerned for the conservation and protection of interesting buildings and open spaces. They established the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest and Natural Beauty (Bailey, 1925; Sinclair, undated). According to Bailey (1925) by 1907 the National Trust was already well down the pathway achieving its conservation and protection of buildings and lands such that a special Act (the National Trust Act 1907) was established to re-incorporate it as an association for, among other purposes, “the permanent preservation for the benefit of the nation of lands and tenements” (buildings) (National Trust, 2011a). At the time it was also incorporated as a not-for-profit association under the Companies Acts 1862-1890. Since that time it has amassed considerable holdings of buildings and lands. It is the largest owner of coast line (709 miles (~1140 kilometres)) in England and currently has responsibility for 350 historic houses, gardens and open monuments including 255,000 hectares of countryside. The National Trust has a membership of 3.7 million, 61,000 volunteers and an annual budget of \$412.9 million. More than 17 million people pay entrance fees into trust properties and “an estimated 50 million people visit open air properties” (National Trust, 2011b).

The successful model established by the National Trust incorporating non-profit and charity (and tax deductibility) functions has been adopted internationally and the concept of the national trust movement has spread across the world with organisations becoming established across Europe, United States of America, Canada and other distant nations.

### **International Extension**

The national trust movement has extended across the world to places including France, Germany and Spain in Europe to United States and Canada to Asia (Korea, Taiwan) Africa (Zimbabwe), Barbados and Malta. “Each organisation is different but they share similar goals, legal constitutions and structures, and for over 30 years have been coming together under the umbrella of the International Conference of National Trusts to share information and best practice, to develop solutions to common problems and to show solidarity with other members of the movement” (INTO, 2011).

Following the 10th meeting of International Conference of National Trusts (forum for national trusts to share information and best practice) in Edinburgh members agreed to establish the International National Trusts Organisation (INTO) which was founded in 2007 as a non-profit organisation and a registered charity. INTO now represents “a network of 34 national trusts and similar organisations from around the world who share a common interest in conservation and enjoyment of heritage. Heritage includes built and natural, tangible and intangible” (INTO, 2011). INTO’s mission is to “promote the conservation and enhancement of the heritage of all nations for the benefit of the people of the world and future generations” (INTO, 2011).

### **Australian National Trusts**

In 1945 the first state of Australia to adopt the national trust model was New South Wales. The threat to colonial buildings in Sydney raised awareness among the community of the need for the conservation and protection of historic buildings. The South Australian National Trust (SANT) was established in 1955 as a not-for-profit non-government body. SANT currently has over 100 properties, 28 nature reserves and around 200,000 visitors annually. In 1956 Victoria established a national trust as an independent community-driven non-profit non-government organisation. In 1959 Western Australia National Trust (NTWA) was established when there was identified a “need to promote heritage conservation” (NTWA, 2011a). NTWA was reconstituted under the National Trust of Australia (WA) Act 1964 as an independent community-based organisation (NTWA, 2011a). Tasmania National Trust was established in 1960 as a non-profit member based community organisation. Motivation for its establishment was for the conservation of an 1838 built Georgian style house. In 2006 it was reconstituted under a new National Trust Act proclaimed by the Tasmanian Government. Queensland established its National Trust as an independent body under the National Trust of Queensland Act 1963. It has 7,000 members, 300 volunteers, 12 properties and receives some 350,000 visitors annually to its properties (QNT, 2011). In 1976 the Northern Territory declared its national trust as a non-government organisation through the passage of an Act of the Legislative Assembly (NT, 2011). The Australian Capital Territory National Trust located in Canberra the centre of Australian government was also established in 1976.

The iconic brand of the Australian national trusts, an old, current and new eucalyptus leaf, has become a well established symbol of Australian national trusts, symbolising the past, the present and the future. It epitomises the Australian character.

A Council of National Trusts was formed in 1965 to better coordinate the activities and lobbying of the Australian national trusts (ABS, 1991). The ACNT is based in Canberra and its allocated powers vary from time to time with changing the needs of the independent national trusts.

### **Western Australian National Trust**

Formed in 1959 and reconstituted under legislation in 1964, the National Trust of Western Australia (NTWA) celebrated its fiftieth year in 2009 with the release of a significant compendium on its achievements. Its origins arose from an awareness of the need to conserve and protect the state’s heritage. Today NTWA has approximately 4,500 members and 300 volunteers, over 120 properties under direct or shared management. NTWA Mission is to “conserve

and interpret Western Australia's heritage (historic, natural and Indigenous) for present and future generations" (NTWA, 2011a). The aim of NTWA is to establish its brand locally, nationally and internationally (NTWA, 2011a) and to work closely with the community to achieve its Mission.

### **Sustainable Nature of the NTWA**

The NTWA is established under an Act of Parliament however that hasn't stopped successive governments from reviewing its autonomous position and its independence. In 2010/11 the NTWA underwent its most recent government review. In the 2010/11 Annual Report the President reported "the Public Sector Commission formed the opinion that not only are the Trust's current governance arrangements generally good, there is an organisational commitment to providing good governance as well as a focus on developing and improving governance procedures" (NTWA, 2011b, p4). This outcome, as with previous reviews with the same findings, provides support for the future of the NTWA.

Forward planning is a key undertaking of NTWA. Strategic plans are developed for each aspect of operations. The NTWA also develops conservation plans for each of its properties, built and natural, and is assessed annually against criteria included within the Annual Reports which are tabled before Parliament through the Minister for Heritage. NTWA has a strong code of governance established to ensure protocols such as the Burra Charter are maintained for the conservation and protection of built and natural assets under its control. The Burra Charter is "considered the best practice standard for cultural heritage management in Australia"<sup>1</sup> (ICOMOS, 2012) and these form part of the conservation guidelines for conserving properties. This approach enables NTWA to build on a strong foundation for fund raising to conserve and protect properties under its stewardship.

Working closely with government agencies brings about relationships that improve the likelihood of achieving long term partnerships for exchange of expertise, planning and innovation where government buildings and lands are involved. Partnerships in conservation works for built and natural heritage ensure NTWA has a viable future with access to resources that would not be readily available to non-government and corporate organisations. Partnerships include the three levels of Australian government; local, state and federal. Each has its range of needs, wants and desires and some provide access to grants and other funding.

The NTWA also has a strong community based focus and expresses itself as working with volunteers, not for volunteers. This presents opportunities for support to NTWA and for volunteers alike. Volunteers groups are encouraged to raise funds (through tax deductible appeals established under the NTWA) and apply for grants available for their areas of expertise or need for built and natural heritage. Recently the Avondale volunteer group has been successful in raising funds for land management while Aboriginal groups, in conjunction with NTWA, have successfully attracted funds for cultural heritage training, skills development and on-ground

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<sup>1</sup> Australia ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) is a non-government, not-for-profit organisation of cultural heritage professionals formed as a national chapter of [ICOMOS International](#) in 1976

works (NTWA, 2012, p13). The NTWA provides support through sound governance, administration and recognition at local and annual functions.

Creating awareness, providing advocacy and developing educational programs greatly assists NTWA to spread the messages of the national trust movement. By raising awareness of issues and providing levels of advocacy for a range of interests NTWA maintains a relatively high profile in the community. By developing school based educational and informative programs NTWA is also creating awareness of the need for action among teachers and school children, and the children's parents. Programs such as East Perth Cemetery conservation and interpretation, school photographic heritage-based competitions and school visits develop a new level of understanding amongst the community. This then contributes to the sustainability of the national trust as it attracts future members and volunteers.

Corporate sponsorship also plays a key role in assisting the NTWA achieve its goals. Partnerships which bring kudos to corporate industry are sought after opportunities in the climate of sustainability. By partnering with a high profile organisation such as the NTWA, corporate bodies can achieve considerable recognition in the community. Mining companies have partnered with the NTWA to conserve and interpret Aboriginal rock paintings in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. Other organisations have sponsored Aboriginal training and development programs such as the Gabbie Kylie Foundation based in the south east of Western Australia which provides archaeological and anthropological excursions with combinations of Aboriginal elders and youth, university students and academic experts onto remote lands and waters on-country with benefits of cultural awareness as part of the activities.

### **Options for the Future for NTWA**

While reflecting on the achievements of the National Trust (England) it should be noted it has undergone considerable change during the past decade as the number of properties and their maintenance has increased and funds have diminished. Restructuring has played a key role in it regaining its momentum. This has provided salient lessons for other national trusts around the world. The policy on acquisition of properties has also taken on a different approach. Sunnycroft in Shropshire, a 1997 acquisition by the National Trust, was only accepted on the basis that a substantial dowry be provided, and it was (Sinclair, undated). This provides at least some surety that funds will be available for the sustainable management and maintenance of the property into the future. The NTWA has developed a policy similar to that of the National Trust so that donations and transfers of buildings and other assets are generally not accepted without substantial financial assistance. This has impacted the acquisition rate of properties however it has meant that properties should be better maintained into the future creating a more sustainable basis for heritage conservation and education.

Despite its significant achievements for built, cultural and natural heritage, the NTWA aims to maintain a low profile. However, the NTWA achievements create awareness within the community, corporate and government circles. There may be community and financial benefits for the NTWA to begin actively promoting the national trust movement to increase membership, volunteer base and funding and sponsorship opportunities. Historically Western Australia has generally not been a positive place for philanthropy. However over the past decade there has

been an increasing level of recognition by corporate society of the values of philanthropy. Partnering with corporate entities can be a double edged sword with a need for considerations of worthiness, obligation and public relations for both parties. With sponsorship there are commitments for recognition of the current partner and constraints on future partnerships for similar if not the same assets or programs. This can create a dilemma when additional opportunities for sponsorship and partnerships arise. With its positive approach to sound governance the NTWA does not yet appear to have encountered this situation. Additionally, its projects are widely distributed across Western Australia (WA) so far avoiding conflict of sponsorships.

Building membership as has been done by the National Trust is a worthwhile goal however the small population of Western Australia does limit this opportunity. Increasing NTWA membership would provide a stronger base for advocacy and for volunteers.

### **Conclusion**

The national trust movement has established itself internationally basing itself on the National Trust and securing the support of government, in most cases, for legislation incorporating them variously as community lead, non-profit independent organisations. Governments may be subject to limited budgets for programs outside core budgets and is often without the ability to attract private partnerships and sponsorships along the same basis as the national trust movement. The movement provides an alternative to government management of heritage assets making national trusts an ideal mechanism for governments to conserve and protect heritage places and to provide heritage education, informing the community and tourists alike.

NTWA has experienced several reviews in recent times. On each occasion it has been endorsed for its governance and its management of places. The legislation under which it is incorporated provides for its autonomy from government and this makes it attractive to corporate and community interests. NTWA's sustainability policy adopted is to encourage a viable future for heritage assets and sustainable heritage conservation outcomes through appropriate use and adaptive re-use of heritage places (NTWA, 2011, web). Conceivably this can ensure a sustainable future for the nation trust movement in Western Australia.

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