

COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT WITHDRAWS COMMUNITY HERITAGE SUPPORT

The FAHS Council is profoundly disappointed to inform the 100,000 members and 1000 community/volunteer historical and heritage societies and museums across Australia whom we represent, that after at least thirty years the Commonwealth government will no longer support the FAHS or other forms of voluntary community heritage. In the current round of budget talks neither the Minister nor the department is willing to find ways to support our sector.

The implications for FAHS are disastrous. We are already trimming staff hours and are abandoning some of the projects that we had planned for 2018. While we are determined that FAHS will live and work on, we are not sure what functions of the FAHS can be saved. Unless there is a change of heart or an alternative source of funding can be found, the organisation will have to be severely shrunk and most functions closed.

We will be winding down our publications and training guides, and our future capacity to participate in the GLAMPeak project to assist the digitisation of historical societies' collections is now in jeopardy. FAHS will be greatly limited in its ability to represent and support community volunteers and societies in their invaluable work of collecting, preserving, researching and publicising our history and heritage, and in their contributions to education and tourism.

Until about four years ago there had for many years been community heritage grants offered by the Heritage section of the Environment department. These had been somewhat wound down, but following the Williams Case or Chaplains Case in 2014, which challenged the capacity of the Commonwealth to provide funds to groups or causes not mentioned in the Constitution, the Environment department discontinued its Community Heritage and Icons Grants to small community groups. By contrast, some other areas of government have continued to offer a range of community support grants.

FAHS had been offered an Icons grant (\$80,000 p.a. for three years) because of its role as a national body supporting community heritage and we presented a case to have it continued. We argued that as a national body based in Canberra we were still eligible, and at our suggestion an alternative way to transfer the money to FAHS was implemented. That worked very well and, as you would all have observed, the FAHS has significantly increased its activities and profile over that period, especially through the employment of an Outreach Officer.

More broadly, because the Commonwealth has moved out of support for community heritage, it now plays a minimal role in the protection and preservation of Australian historic heritage except through world heritage and national heritage sites. Under the current regime it is unlikely that there will be any financial or other recognition of voluntary community historic heritage.

The FAHS welcomes any community support that our members can offer, and any suggestions of how we might fund ourselves and operate in the future. To this end, and so all our members are fully informed, we will be distributing an information sheet about the work that is undertaken by voluntary community history and heritage volunteer societies.

To explain the importance of the FAHS and its work, please write to Minister Frydenberg (Minister for Environment & Energy, 695 Burke Rd, Camberwell VIC 3124) and your local federal MP.

A sad time.