

## **Response to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage's Media Release concerning The Australia Institute Report, *Playing Politics with the Federal Heritage Regime***

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The Australia Institute report released yesterday, *Playing Politics with the Federal Heritage Regime*, raised four major issues.

- Why did the Minister delay making a decision on the nomination of Bradman's birthplace for inclusion on the National Heritage List (NHL) until after the federal election?
- Why did the Minister provide \$50,000 to the Don Bradman Heritage Trail project under the *Sharing Australia's Stories* program when the application for the project was not lodged until at least seven and a half months after the application period for the program had closed?
- Why did the Minister provide \$50,000 to the Cootamundra Shire Council for the Australian Cricket Captains' Walk project when the Council did not lodge an application and the evidence suggests the funding was, to use the Council's words, 'arranged by' the Nationals Member for Riverina, Mrs Kay Hull?
- How was the Prime Minister's office involved in the events surrounding the rejection of the nomination of Bradman's birthplace and the decisions to provide the grants to the Don Bradman Heritage Trail and Australian Cricket Captains' Walk projects?

### ***Did the Minister delay the listing decision?***

In a media release issued yesterday, the Minister has claimed that 'the Australian Heritage Council letter was signed and sent on 5 October 2004'. If this statement is correct, it would mean that the Minister was not required to make the listing decision until after the federal election.

The conclusions in The Australia Institute report concerning the delay were based on the statement of reasons for the decision that was published by the Minister in October 2004, or thereabouts. The statement of reasons states:

*The Council duly completed its assessment in accordance with statutory requirements and provided it to me by letter dated 5 September 2004, in accordance with subsection 324G(2) of the EPBC Act.*

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Exactly the same statement appears in three other statements of reasons that were published in relation to decisions that appear to have been delayed until after the federal election concerning Eurama, Golden Grove House and Mildura Public Cemetery.

The statement of reasons concerning Bradman's birthplace was published on the Department of the Environment and Heritage's website after the decision was made and has remained there, unaltered until the morning of 17 August 2005, when an amendment was made to change the date concerning the AHC assessment from 5 September to 5 October 2004. At 12pm on 17 August 2005, the statements of reasons concerning Eurama, Golden Grove House and Mildura Public Cemetery had still not been amended.

The Minister's claim that the 5 September 2004 date was merely a typographical error in the statement of reasons may have been more credible if he had not made the following statement in Parliament on 16 August 2005.

*... in relation to the listing of Bradman's birthplace ... I did check, because I have had inquiries from a newspaper already today about this, and was told that the advice from the Australian Heritage Council on the listing of Bradman's birthplace at Cootamundra was not received by me and was not even issued by the AHC until 29 October, which was at least a fortnight after the election.*

These events suggest that the truth is either:

- the Minister's statement of reasons was correct, his statement in Parliament was wrong and his media release is wrong;
- the Minister's statement of reasons was wrong, his statement in Parliament was correct and his media release is wrong; or
- the Minister's statement of reasons was wrong, his statement in Parliament was wrong and his media release is now correct.

Irrespective of which one is correct, the Minister should be asked to explain how these events could occur and how he could provide three different versions of the events, including two different versions within the space of 24 hours. Further, these facts demonstrate that the Minister's claim that The Australia Institute report has been 'discredited' is unfounded and were an obvious attempt at obfuscation.

***Why did the Minister provide \$100,000 to the Bradman-related heritage projects?***

The administration of the *Sharing Australia's Stories* program is the most serious issue arising from The Australia Institute report. The key facts revealed in the report are as follows.

- The application period for the first round of the *Sharing Australia's Stories* program closed on 15 October 2004.

- According to the Minister, almost 1,000 applications were received in relation to the first round of the *Sharing Australia's Stories* program.
- Cootamundra Shire Council was one of a number of vocal critics of the Minister's decision not to include Bradman's birthplace on the NHL.
- In March 2005, Cootamundra Shire Council met with the Minister and the Prime Minister's office.
- In a letter to the Cootamundra Shire Council dated 23 March 2005, the Minister suggested that the Don Bradman Heritage Trail project would not be eligible for funding under the first round of the *Sharing Australia's Stories* program.
- At some time after 31 May 2005, an application was lodged by Cootamundra Shire Council, the Bradman Museum and the State Library of South Australia in relation to the Don Bradman Heritage Trail.
- On 4 July 2005, the Minister announced that the Don Bradman Heritage Trail and Australian Cricket Captains' Walk had received funding under the first round of the *Sharing Australia's Stories* program. On 5 July 2005, the Minister announced all of the projects that received funding under the first round of the program. Only 22 of the almost 1,000 grant applications were successful.
- Cootamundra Shire Council has confirmed that it did not lodge an application in relation to the Australian Cricket Captains' Walk, despite being the grant recipient. It has stated that the grant for the project was 'arranged by' Mrs Kay Hull.

The Minister has still not provided an adequate explanation of these events.

During question time on 16 August 2005, the Minister stated:

*After lobbying from Kay Hull MP and from Alby Schultz MP, I did seek to find a way to commemorate Bradman's unique place in Australia's history and Australia's sporting heritage. I did start working on the concept of a Bradman trail, something that the department strongly supported. We needed to find funding for parts of that Bradman trail ... . I asked the department to find funding for aspects of that trail. As I understand it, the Sharing Australia's Stories program was identified as an appropriate source of funding.*

This statement confirms that the Minister and the Department devised the concept for the Don Bradman Heritage Trail.

In Parliament on 16 August 2005, Senator Christine Milne asked the Minister about the grant that was provided to the Australian Cricket Captains' Walk. However, the Minister failed to provide an answer.

This leaves several major issues to be resolved, including the following.

- Was a grant application lodged in relation to the Australian Cricket Captains Walk project and, if so, by whom?
- How was Mrs Kay Hull involved in the decision to provide \$50,000 to the Australian Cricket Captains' Walk project?
- Why did the Minister award a grant to the Don Bradman Heritage Trail despite the fact that the application was not lodged until at least seven and a half months after the application period for the grant program had closed?
- Why was the Minister and the Department involved in devising a project that receiving funding under a community grants program?
- Was the Prime Minister's office involved in the decisions to award funding to the Don Bradman Heritage Trail and Australian Cricket Captains' Walk projects?
- What issues were discussed at the meeting between Cootamundra Shire Council and the Prime Minister's office?
- Why has the Minister decided to award funding under the *Distinctively Australian* program to projects that are not related to places of national heritage significance or places of heritage significance that are located in Commonwealth areas?

A copy of the original statement of reasons concerning the Minister's decision to reject the nomination of Bradman's birthplace can be obtained by calling The Australia Institute on (02) 6125 1270.