

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE REPORT, *ACCESS TO HERITAGE: USER CHARGES IN MUSEUMS, ART GALLERIES AND NATIONAL PARKS* BY THE SENATE ENVIRONMENT, RECREATION, COMMUNICATIONS AND ARTS REFERENCES COMMITTEE

**MINISTER FOR THE ARTS
AND THE CENTENARY OF FEDERATION
JUNE 2000**

Commonwealth Government Response
*Access to Heritage: user charges in museums, art galleries
and national parks*

As a result of these considerations, the Government believes the first step for any implementation of the Recommendations is a consultation process involving the various levels of government, the affected industry sectors, and other relevant bodies such as the Statistics Working Group of the Cultural Ministers Council. This consultation process will have the aim of developing options on how best to further implementation generally of the Recommendations.

The Government's responses are as follows for the individual recommendations of the Inquiry.

RECOMMENDATION 1

The Committee recommends that the Department of Communications and the Arts, in consultation with State/Territory authorities, local government and relevant peak bodies, should sponsor research into the effect of user charges on access and equity in libraries and archives.

Response

The Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (the Department) will undertake consultations with the peak bodies in the library and archival fields. To this end, it will convene a meeting to consult on the general research needs in the sector and how best such needs may be addressed within the sector. The Department's role primarily would be a facilitative one for any proposals that might arise from the meeting. Organisations proposed to be invited to the consultative meeting include the:

- Australian Library and Information Association,
- Council of Australian University Librarians,
- Council of Australian State Libraries,
- Australian Council on Archives, and
- Australian Society of Archivists.

Invitations would also be issued to key Commonwealth agencies such as the National Library of Australia and National Archives of Australia.

RECOMMENDATION 2

The Committee recommends that the Department of Communications and the Arts, in consultation with State/Territory authorities, local government and relevant peak bodies, should sponsor research into the influence of 'user pays' on access and equity in the regional, local and volunteer-operated museum and gallery sector.

Response

The small museum and gallery sector is very reliant on the assistance of volunteers for their day-to-day operations. In addition, few institutions in the sector have guaranteed access to resources, or regular funding, in comparison with the arrangements in place for the larger national or state sponsored institutions. The main body providing funding for research and developmental activities in the small museums and gallery sector is the Heritage Collections Council (HCC) established under the Cultural Ministers Council. The HCC is chaired by the Commonwealth through the Department and its membership includes representatives of the Commonwealth, the States and Territories, local government, museum organisations, and heritage institutions.

The Department will refer the recommendation to the HCC in the first instance with a view that it develop or sponsor a research strategy on the impact of user-pays issues for the small museum and gallery sector. Any research would be conducted by professional organisations in the field such as Museums Australia or by means of commissioned activities or commercial consultancies.

RECOMMENDATION 3

The Committee recommends that the Department of Communications and the Arts, in consultation with State/Territory authorities and relevant peak bodies, should sponsor research on the relationship between user charges and visitation in cultural institutions.

The Committee recommends that Environment Australia, in consultation with State/Territory authorities and relevant peak bodies, should sponsor research into the relationship between user charges and visitation in national parks.

Response

The Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts through the Statistics Working Group collects on a continuing basis visitor data and associated information about activities of cultural institutions generally. In particular, data is collected on the operation of museums and galleries and the cultural impact on the community of their activities. This analytical work is undertaken by the Department in conjunction with regular surveys of cultural activities that are conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

The Department will place the relationship between charges and visitor numbers on the work program for further consideration by the Statistics Working Group.

Environment Australia has as a general principle for National Parks a policy of user pays in situations where it is economically viable to do so. The economic viability for charging depends upon factors such as the size of the Park; impact of the charges generally on the community; and the number of entry points and levels of staffing and resources in the Park. Generally, fees are charged for the larger Parks such as Uluru and Kakadu but not for smaller Parks. Further research, along the lines recommended, would be both useful and relevant for data on the cost of collecting fees and the start-up and maintenance costs for the necessary associated infrastructure. Also, it would be particularly useful to have comparative studies between institutions that in recent years have decided to remove entry fees and similar charges and those institutions which have introduced user charges for the first time.

Environment Australia supports in principle research in the areas nominated by the Recommendation and will raise the issues in appropriate forums with the States and Territories.

RECOMMENDATION 4

The Committee recommends that the Department of Communications and the Arts, in consultation with State/Territory authorities and relevant peak bodies, should sponsor research into the trend of user charges and similar revenue versus budget funding among cultural institutions.

The Committee recommends that Environment Australia, in consultation with State/Territory authorities and relevant peak bodies, should sponsor research into the trend of user charges and similar revenues versus budget funding among nature conservation agencies.

Response

The Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts supports in principle research along the lines proposed by the Recommendation. However, such activities would involve the undertaking of specialised investigative activities including assessing management attitudes and intentions within institutions. Any such investigations by their nature would involve commercial-in-confidence arrangements and other sensitive issues. It is believed that research in these areas is best conducted by independent experts in consultation with the Department. The Department will place the issues nominated in the Recommendation on its program for further research, initially by the Communications Research Unit.

Environment Australia supports in principle research into the issues relating to user charges as opposed to budget funding among nature conservation agencies. It will raise the nominated issues in appropriate forums with the States and Territories.

RECOMMENDATION 5

The Committee recommends that the Department of Communications and the Arts, in consultation with State/Territory authorities and relevant peak bodies, should sponsor research on the relationship between user pays policies and management emphases in cultural institutions.

The Committee recommends that Environment Australia, in consultation with State/Territory authorities and relevant peak bodies, should sponsor research on the relationship between user pays policies and management emphases in national parks.

Response

The Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts supports in principle research into the connection between user pays policies and management emphases in cultural institutions. However, for reasons outlined under Recommendation 4, it is believed that any research in these areas should be conducted by independent experts in consultation with the Department. The Department will place the nominated issues on its program for further research, initially by the Communications Research Unit.

Environment Australia supports in principle research into the issues relating to user charges as opposed to budget funding among nature conservation agencies. It will raise the nominated issues in appropriate forums with the States and Territories.

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