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PRIME MINISTER

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LAUNCHING OF "HISTORIC PLACES OF AUSTRALIA - VOLUME ONE"

I am delighted to be here today to launch this latest volume in the series on historic buildings and places in Australia being published by the Australian Council of National Trusts.

This book, "Historic Places of Australia: Volume One", presents a collection of environmentally important areas and towns. The text describes many of the interesting features of their history and architecture, and the photographs are a distinctive and sensitive record of an older Australia.

The earlier volumes in the series dealt specifically with historic buildings. This book deals with the whole environmental setting. It will take readers on a journey into many of our yesterdays, from the days of the clipper ships, lying off Port Fairy to the pearling luggers of Broome, to the mansions, majestic homes and public buildings of the colonial era.

It is an exciting journey, enriching our knowledge of Australia's past and our appreciation of some of Australia's beautiful places.

The quality of the volume is a credit to the trust movement, and to many people who have given honorary help in its preparation. It is a good example of how a voluntary conservation organisation, by virtue of hard work and dedication, can make progress in achieving its aims and goals.

In the introductory section, Mr Rodney Davidson, the Australian co-ordinator, acknowledges the honorary work of the experts who have contributed to this volume.

I should like to thank Mr Davidson, the President of the Australian Council of National Trusts, Mr Justice Sir John Moore, and the Chairman of the Australian Council of National Trusts, Mr Victor Parkinson, for all they have done for the National Trust Movement in Australia.

The Government warmly acknowledges the help of all the people who contributed to this work. The Commonwealth interest in conservation and preservation is wide ranging, embracing both the natural and cultural environment.

However, the protection of the National Estate is not the preserve of one level of Government, or one group of people. It is something in which the whole community is involved.

The Commonwealth is pleased to be a partner in this national activity. In 1976 we appointed the first commissioners to the Australian Heritage Commission to advise us on the preservation of the whole Australian environment, and to compile and maintain a national inventory of those significant places which should be preserved for our benefit and that of future generations.

The national inventory is recorded on the newly created register of the national estate. This register covers the significant parts of Australia's environment: its homes and buildings, historic towns, churches, landscapes, its bushland, and the whole of our natural heritage.

The register is being used as a basis for developing programmes and policies to protect, improve and present properties and places forming part of the national estate. Already there are some 5,000 places registered.

The Act setting up the Heritage Commission requires that Commonwealth Ministers, Departments and authorities take no action which adversely affects a place on the register unless there is no feasible or prudent alternative.

All Commonwealth decisions aim at all times to keep a proper balance between conservation and responsible development in the national interest.

The Heritage Commission, together with the provision of Commonwealth funds, has helped to create a wide awareness, at all levels of Government and the community generally, of the range of the national estate, made by both man and nature.

The Government is well aware of the part National Trust bodies have played in preserving Australia's heritage. They have been pioneers in the great and responsible task of preservation and conservation. The National Trusts have played a significant role in getting the register established quickly.

With respect to the buildings in our cultural environment the Trusts have made the major contribution so far, because the Heritage Commission accepted for the register those places already classified by the Trusts.

For some years Commonwealth Governments have supported the National Trusts, providing funds to help them meet administrative costs and special grants for preservation and restoration work on old buildings.

As I have said, this book places emphasis on the protection of areas as distinct from individual buildings. This is consistent with the importance given to the total heritage by the Venice Charter of the International Council on monuments and sites.

This book has left a great impression on me. It's more than words and pictures - it's a living and vital portrait of a special part of our history. I hope it will encourage Australians to see some of the beauty and history of Australia at first hand.

I warmly commend this book to you. It has a rightful place in this great National Library, and I'm sure it will have a place in other libraries around Australia.

I hope it will also find a place on the bookshelves in your homes.

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