

Media Release
Immediate release
Embargoed 00.01AM 15 April 2021

A call for World Heritage Listing for Australia's unique collection of 19th century imported portable buildings

A campaign to be launched by Dr Barry Jones on 15 April would see about a hundred Australian buildings, some of them very humble, take their place on the UNESCO World Heritage list alongside the Great Pyramids, the Taj Mahal and the Eiffel Tower.

The campaign will raise awareness that Australia has the world's most extensive and best-preserved collection of 19th century prefabricated buildings. They include houses, shops, churches, schools, a lighthouse and even the NSW legislative council chamber. The thing that unites them is that they were all shipped from across the world to our shores from the 1840s onwards.

They are important not just to the history of Australia, but to the history of the world, because they reveal a great deal about the development of world architecture and because they are the physical evidence of a global trading network which had to adjust to the rise of the steamship, the Californian Gold Rush, the Crimean War and the opening of the Suez Canal.

The organisers of the campaign are calling on state governments to adopt the proposal and recommend it to the federal government so the Commonwealth can champion the cause for World Heritage listing.

Campaign organiser Professor Miles Lewis says: "The huge importation of buildings from overseas is a really exciting aspect of Australian history, because there has been nothing comparable in scale elsewhere in the world."

Australia has 104 surviving 19th century prefabricated buildings. 63 of them are in Victoria, 16 in NSW, 13 in South Australia, 4 in Tasmania, 3 in Queensland, 3 in Western Australia, and 2 in the Northern Territory and. This is more than the rest of the world combined. Many of the buildings are already protected under relevant heritage controls, but they are not recognised collectively for their contribution to world architecture.

Remarkably Australia has:

- The only Singapore-made wooden buildings known to survive in the world.
- German wooden buildings which also appear to be unique.
- United States made buildings, of which only one is known to survive in the USA (and that in storage)
- More than a dozen iron buildings made in Glasgow in the 1850s, though only two survive in Glasgow itself

- Both wood and iron buildings by twenty-one English makers, very few of which can be identified in England itself.

These buildings are in every state of Australia, and the Northern Territory, but the majority are in Victoria. Victoria stands to benefit most from the prestige of the listing and from the tourism which results from it. Geelong will benefit most of all, because it has more of these buildings than any local government area in Australia.

Convenor of the campaign, Tony Isaacson, says “A World Heritage listing is an important thing for the country concerned. It gives a boost to national pride and identity, and it generates tourism. Two-thirds of the buildings in this proposal are in Victoria, and it will be a bonanza for the state and for all states that get on board.”

Making a World Heritage nomination is a major exercise, in which the Commonwealth Government requires the support of the relevant states - in this case all of them – and it can take from five to ten years. And this proposal is further complicated by the large number of properties involved. But it already has great support within Australia and from overseas.

- The Hon. Dr Barry Jones is both the former federal Minister for Science and the former vice president of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. He will be speaking at 136 Sackville Street, Collingwood, VIC at 6:15pm
- For interviews contact Tony Isaacson, mobile 0418 381 638
- For a copy of the World Heritage proposal go here:
<https://www.dropbox.com/s/k3yt3bsuf1907z0/WorldHeritag2proposaln.pdf>