



# NATIONAL TRUST *Of* AUSTRALIA (WA)

## WEDGE AND GREY SHACK SETTLEMENTS

### Cultural Heritage Assessment



The assessment commissioned by The National Trust of Australia (WA) and prepared by Godden Mackay Logan Pty Ltd in collaboration with Context Pty Ltd found the shack settlements of Wedge and Grey, located to the north of Perth in Western Australia, meet the following criteria for entry onto the Western Australian Register of Heritage Places

- Nature of Significance – aesthetic, historic and social
- Degree of Significance – rarity and representative

In addition the shack settlements were also found to meet the criteria for the Assessment of Local Heritage Places and Areas.

The assessment was based on physical site investigation, review of relevant documents, social survey and analysis (web-based surveys, group meetings and interviews), interviews with academics familiar with these places, and government officers working in heritage management or associated with the management of these places.

### Cultural Heritage Values of the Shack Settlements

The assessment found the settlements to have aesthetic, historical and social significance at State-level, and that both tangible and intangible attributes provide the evidence of these values. In other words, these values are evident in the layout of the settlements, in the built forms and infrastructure systems, in the community spaces and structures, in the landscape setting, in people's relationship with place, and in the traditions, cultures and social networks. Further, these settlements have a particular and distinctive aesthetic value; while the organic and idiosyncratic aspects of the shack aesthetic values may challenge a usual understanding of aesthetic, this aesthetic strongly reflects the history and location of the shacks and most importantly is a community aesthetic value closely entwined with its social values.

### Western Australian Legislative Assembly Shack Inquiry of 2010

**The assessment report considered the 2010 Shack Inquiry in the following terms**

While the inquiry did acknowledge that there are cultural heritage values at Wedge and Grey as assessed by the National Trust and more specifically that these places have 'social heritage' value. The committee was not persuaded that there was 'building heritage'. The Shack Inquiry proposed that equity considerations should be given more weight than heritage. Further, the inquiry found that 'the development of recreational nature-based, affordable accommodation available to all members of the public is likely to be very popular and will maintain and continue the social heritage of Wedge and Grey'.

While it is to be regretted that the Western Australian Legislative Council committee inquiring into the shacks in 2010 did not have the benefit of a comprehensive cultural heritage assessment during its considerations, this report now provides an opportunity for the State Heritage Office of Western Australia, the agency charged with advising Government on heritage matters, to action a nomination for Wedge and Grey. This will ensure that the full cultural heritage values of the settlements are able to be considered by the Government before reaching its final decision.

The view expressed by the Shack Inquiry that the social heritage could be maintained despite removal of the shacks and development of an alternative form of nature-based accommodation cannot be substantiated given our findings of the symbiotic relationship between social values and the shack buildings and shack settlement landscapes. Further, this assessment identifies that these settlements have other values – historical and aesthetic – that would be adversely impacted by removal of the shacks.

## Assessment Conclusions

### Some of the report conclusions include:

The cultural heritage values of Wedge and Grey require that the conservation policy for these places should seek to protect and maintain these values into the future. This does not necessarily mean 'no change'. Rather, given the nature of these places, communities and culture, careful consideration is needed and options assessed.

The Burra Charter provides the nationally accepted framework within which conservation policies, and associated management models can retain cultural heritage values and provide for a sustainable and equitable future.

The report indicates that management models developed on the basis of a robust conservation policy would be able to resolve issues that call for shack removal, and thus provide for equitable public access to and appreciation of the settlements and surrounding areas.

Development of a conservation policy would enable consideration of the range of issues associated with retaining or changing the shacks themselves. For example, the aesthetic qualities and unique character of these places is partly a result of their 'frontier' history that has resulted in shack landscapes that have appealing qualities. On the other hand, granting longer term tenure without appropriate controls may, in addition to necessary compliance upgrades, result in a desire by some owners to upgrade their shacks for amenity and/or investment and this could threaten the very value and character of these vernacular places.

The recognition of heritage values is only the first step in conserving the character and values of these places. Agreement between the communities and government on policies covering use (including public access and use) and limits on change will also be critical in retaining heritage values.

The shacks and their associated lifestyle express particular things about Western Australia's history and culture. The loss of the most significant examples of this unique settlement type would also represent a missed opportunity to retain an important chapter of the State's cultural history.

## Assessment Recommendations

### The report has recommended the National Trust of Australia (WA)

- *Nominates the Wedge and Grey shack settlements for inclusion on the Western Australian Register of Heritage Places*
- *Requests the State Government Minister for the Environment develop a holistic management plan which conserves and interprets the cultural heritage values of these precincts*
- *Offers to assist the Minister for the Environment in the preparation of this plan*



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