

AT BRISBANE ON FRIDAY, 3 FEBRUARY 2006, AT 9.07 AM

Continued from 1/2/06 in Sydney

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DR BYRON: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the public hearings of the Productivity Commission's inquiry into the conservation of Australia's historic heritage places. Thank you very much for coming today. My name is Neil Byron and I have been appointed the presiding commissioner for this inquiry. My fellow commissioner is Tony Hinton.

This inquiry stems from terms of reference that the commission received from the Australian treasurer with the endorsement of all state and territory governments. It covers the policy framework and the incentives in place to encourage the conservation of heritage places including built heritage. We released a draft report in early December which contained a number of draft findings and recommendations. Submissions have been coming into the inquiry following the release of that draft and we now have about 230 submissions all of which are on the web site except for a couple that have come in over the last few days.

The purpose of these hearings today is to provide an opportunity for any interested parties to discuss their submissions with the commission and put their views about the commission's draft report and recommendations on the public record. Following these hearings here today, we'll be holding similar hearings progressively over the rest of February in most of the states and territories. We are planning to finalise the report and submit it to the Australian government by the due date, April 6. The Australian government is required under the Productivity Commission Act to publicly release the final report by tabling it in the House of Representatives. Usually they have a response to that report within 25 sitting days of receipt from us.

The Productivity Commission always tries to conduct our public hearings in a very informal manner, but we do take a full transcript for the record. I should also mention that the Productivity Commission Act grants immunity from civil prosecution for any comments made in the course of making a statement, submission or giving information or a document so long as it is made in good faith. So I remind participants that these are official hearings and not just another public meeting. Interjections from the floor, et cetera, are therefore most unhelpful.

We always make an opportunity for anyone in the room who wants to come forward and put something on the public record to do so before the day's proceedings are over. The transcripts will be put on the commission's web site as soon as they have been checked for accuracy of transcription and they will also be available publicly through libraries around the country or on request from the commission's offices in Canberra and Melbourne.

To comply with the Australian government's Occupational Health and Safety Legislation, I have to inform everybody here that in the very unlikely event of an incident alarms will sound and we'll go out straight through the doors and the

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laneway down onto North Quay out the door. The other little bit of housekeeping is to let you know that the toilets are down the end of the corridor to the left. I think that's enough housekeeping.

So I'd now like to commence today's proceedings with the first participant and that's a representative of the Polish Community Council of Australia and New Zealand, Dr Janusz Rygielski, if I've got that right. If you'd like to come and take a seat at any of the microphones. Thank you for your written submission. We've read that carefully. If you'd like to just summarise the main points and then Tony and I might have some questions for you in clarification and thank you for coming.

DR RYGIELSKI: Thank you for inviting me here. I have to apologise for my accent which sometimes is hard to pick up. The persons present here who are not part of the Productivity Commission may don't know the issue.

I will start with another thanks for inviting me here in spite of the fact that my submission didn't fill the terms of reference of the commission. I appreciate very much and I have to say that it's about protection of names in Australia; historical, topographical names, which constitute intellectual property that became something that is protected. In many countries the issue of topographical names, particularly in the historical context, became very important.

In my submission, I gave some examples of changing names when it suited a particular dictator. Like, for example, the highest mountain in Czechoslovakia became Stalin. The highest mountain in the Soviet Union at one stage became Lenin's Peak. Also Bulgarians had the highest mountain with the name of Stalin. Macedonians had, not the highest, but the most important Mountain, which they named Tito. When the political circumstances change, these names change as well and quite often usually they are returned back to what it was before, because it was usually distasteful and the public didn't like it. Historians didn't like it, writers didn't like it. One more example, it is very interesting with the town in the Soviet Union, then known as Russia, which was named after Tsar, Carycyn. After 1918, they changed this name to Stalingrad. Then in recent years, they changed it to Volgograd because it's on the shores of the River Volga. In the meantime, there was the famous Stalingrad Battle which has influenced the result of the second war and currently teachers and historians have problems with explaining where it was because of this name change process.

Well, why raise this issue? First, because the Polish community in Australia is, I would say, extremely connected to the name of Mount Kosciuszko. We feel that we aren't just custodians of this name. It's not only the most important Australian name of Polish origin, in fact the only name of any significant value from the Polish community perspective. At one stage, during work on a draft management plan of Kosciuszko National Park, there was an idea to change this name or to make this name a dual name. We decided to raise this issue publicly because of, first, our connection to this name, second, because of historical origin and value of this name. We researched this topic pretty well.

By the way, I think should introduce myself a bit more. In Poland, I was a member of the State Environmental Council nominated by the Prime Minister and I published three books about mountains and conservation so I feel like a person who can say something about this issue. In Australia shortly after my arrival in 1982, I was awarded a literary grant by Australia Council and National Parks and Wildlife Service of New South Wales. Part of this grant was one month stay in Kosciuszko National Park where I could walk every trail and study everything what was possible and discuss with rangers at the time everything. It also resulted in a big article

about Kosciuszko, which appeared in the Kosciuszko National Park newsletter in huge circulation. I think we understand this topic pretty well.

We are also in touch with Allan Andrews who is now the best Australian expert on the history of Snowy Mountains. There is no doubt there was no Aboriginal name before. This touches the core of the issue. We understand the situation of Aboriginal people and the necessity of uplifting them in an economical and spiritual sense and we know that some things were stolen at one stage, like, land was taken from Aboriginal people, children were taken from Aboriginal people, names were taken from Aboriginal people, but not this particular one. This is just the opposite case. This is the case when there is a historical name given at one stage and now there is an attempt to take it from the group which feels connected as strongly as Aboriginal people are with any other piece of land in Australia.

What is also important that this idea did not come from Aboriginal people. We know what was happening behind, who was behind this and why it happened. It was just a local fourth-grade politician from a small town, Tumbarumba, being a local mayor who wanted to get some publicity. That's how the whole issue started. It happened in the year 2000 at the top of Mount Kosciuszko. Incidentally, I was there at that same time, the same very moment, because it was during Tumbarumba trek organised by Tim Fisher, so I had this opportunity to watch the whole thing from the very beginning. I could see how it was manipulated by this person from the start.

It took him about four years to raise any interest of Aboriginal people with this.

Well, now we talk with the park and I think we don't have problems with the park.

We then talked with the Aborigines and they were surprised when I handed to them my business card of our organisation which has a logo, which includes Aboriginal boomerang. I think we are the only ethnic organisation in Australia which has used Aboriginal aspect in their logo. They were very surprised and felt, I think, pretty well.

We presented a number of arguments to Kosciuszko National Park, to your commission, and also to Minister Davis. What is interesting, a couple of days ago I
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got a letter from Minister Davis and I'll read you one paragraph where he says:

The practice of dual naming of geographical features is not unique to NSW and can be found in other parts of Australia and around the world.

Milford Sound, New Zealand, for example, is also known as Piopiotahi, Mount Egmont is known as Mount Taranaki. Ayers Rock is also known as Uluru and the Olgas are also known as Kata Tjuta.

Well, as you know my submission, I gave nearly exactly the same examples of the process which, I can see, is the return to the original historical names. I think it is the correct process, but not in the case of the name, which is the historical name. We noticed that, unfortunately, in Australia there is no legal protection of historical names.

Of course not every name should be protected, but let's look at Glasshouse Mountains here not far from Brisbane. It's a collection of mountains and each of them has either Aboriginal name only or two names. As I pointed out, it is perfectly correct that we should use the name Coonoowin, but not Crookneck because Aborigines named these mountains individually. So it is historically correct. But they didn't have the name of the collection of these mountains, so what James Cook named in 1770 as Glasshouse Mountains should stay because it is the historical

name which is 235 years old. You have different opinion? Sorry.

There are other names like Byron Bay, for example, which is also historical.

Our feeling is that perhaps there should be a concept of protecting historical names which are of a certain age, like buildings. Some historical names given in Australia are much, much older than some historical buildings, which constitute the prestigious Australian heritage. Thank you.

DR BYRON: Thank you very much. We did have a very well-argued submission and presentation in our Perth hearings last year with regard to the naming of (indistinct) and the role of Strzelecki in Australian exploration. The reason that there's, I guess, no mention of that issue in our draft report is that we couldn't think of what we could say or do about this within our terms of reference for this inquiry. I appreciate the issues, but I guess I'm still having trouble thinking about what recommendation we could make and to whom with regard to place names. You know, the inquiry was pretty much about conservation of historic places and buildings. I don't think that in the minds of the Australian government when they asked us to investigate this topic they were thinking about the protection of historic place names. I understand your interest and the importance of the issue to the Polish community and I think it's a very interesting much wider question apart from just that one place name, but I'm still not sure what we can do about it.

DR RYGIELSKI: I'm here to tell you that we are in touch with a number of ethnic
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Australians and we have very strong support. You probably know that in Perth there was a public poll conducted by the West Australian newspaper.

DR BYRON: Yes, I heard about that.

DR RYGIELSKI: 93 percent of people responded that this name should never be changed. The Polish community in Western Australia is probably something like less than one percent.

MR HINTON: What was the proposed alternative name put forward by the mayor of Tumbarumba?

DR RYGIELSKI: It's really a funny thing because they didn't come with any other alternative name so far.

MR HINTON: So where does the issue rest now?

DR RYGIELSKI: Well, because it's still being considered whether it should stay, it should be changed, should be dual. But still those who came with an idea to change it didn't have the name because they couldn't refer it to something that existed from the past. There is one close connection, the name Munyang, but it means simply snowy in Aboriginal language. It was perfectly logical because the snowy area, the snow was something very unusual to them, so they introduced this name, but it applied to the main range of the Snowy Mountains. Mount Kosciuszko never had an Aboriginal name.

The mayor of Tumbarumba, when he first came with this idea of change, said that it should be either an Aboriginal name or it should refer to shepherds who visited this area before Strzelecki. I mean, that's the truth. Both Aboriginal people and shepherds visited this spot before. But none of them knew that it was the highest point in the Snowy Mountains and none of them knew that it was the highest mountain in Australia. It needed somebody with scientific knowledge and scientific instruments to establish this **fact**.

DR BYRON: So the New South Wales government is still having this issued

looked at?

DR RYGIELSKI: Well, it is in the hands of Kosciusko National Park, because they have this group, this working group on the management plan, and it should be addressed in the management plan. They produced a draft. We gave them our submission, and now they are in the process of preparing the final version, which will include public consultations, and it didn't take place yet.

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<http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/heritage/public-hearings/brisbane060203/brisbane060203.pdf>