

HERITAGE COUNCIL ASSESSMENT PROGRAM, BACKLOG

1832. Mr J.P.D. Edwards to the Minister representing the Minister for Heritage

Given the backlog of approximately one thousand places awaiting assessment by the Heritage Council, I ask the Minister -

- (a) what places are currently on the Heritage Council's Assessment Programme;
- (b) will the Minister direct the Heritage Council to publish this Assessment Programme on the agency's website;
- (c) if not, why not;
- (d) how many staff are directly involved in the Assessment Programme, and what are the titles and public sector levels of their positions; and
- (e) what places are currently under consideration by the Minister?

Dr J.M. EDWARDS replied:

- (a)-(c) The Heritage Council's assessment program includes places actively under assessment, and also places tentatively earmarked for consideration, but not yet subjected to the Council's full assessment process. The assessment program is regularly adjusted by the Council's Register Committee in the light of new information presented to it.

The Heritage Council is actively assessing over 150 places at present. Each assessment involves gathering documentary and physical evidence; assessing significance based on the information compiled; a peer review process through the Register Committee of the Council; and communication with the affected property owners. The Council is also progressively undertaking less in-depth reviews of the places contained in the assessment backlog of approximately 1,000 places. This work is intended to ensure that those places are 'prima facie' candidates for the State Register, so that public resources are not wasted on unnecessary assessments.

Property owners have the right to expect that their initial communications with the Heritage Council are private. The Heritage Act properly requires a public and transparent process in relation to any place once it is entered in the Register on an interim basis. That occurs through the public advertising of interim registrations and the calling of public submissions. It would not be appropriate or helpful for the entire process of assessment leading up to interim registration to be open to public scrutiny. Consequently, the Heritage Council does not publish its assessment program on the agency's website.

- (d) There are thirteen Heritage Council staff directly involved in the assessment program, including the two senior officers of the Council, the Director (Level 9) and Manager, Conservation and Assessment (Level 8). There are ten staff who work exclusively on assessment and registration work, appointed at levels between Level 2 and Level 6; six of those staff are fixed term contracts for the duration of the present accelerated assessment program.
- (e) I have recently given information on this question, in my response to the Member's Question on Notice number 1540. The situation has not changed substantially since then.