

# Trust Action

## National Trust around New South Wales

### National Trust's 2011 Advocacy Agenda

Protecting heritage through the process of change

As the largest independent conservation organisation in Australia, the National Trust has a responsibility to the community to protect the nation's built, cultural and natural heritage. And since the mid 1940s our advocacy work has played a huge role, campaigning for the long-term survival of our heritage.

In February, the Trust released its 2011 Advocacy Agenda – the first time the organisation has detailed its advocacy priorities in a specialised document. By detailing its campaign priorities for the year ahead and outlining the Trust's primary conservation principles, the Advocacy Agenda is an important part of the National Trust's role in protecting places and objects of heritage significance.

Describing the protection of Australia's heritage as intrinsic to the nation's character and identity, the agenda outlines nine principles that will shape future advocacy efforts and highlights six of the many places where there is unresolved tension between the recognition of heritage values and market forces in NSW. The agenda recognises that the heritage significance of a place or item is independent of its commercial value and it is hoped the document will help motivate the new Coalition Government in NSW to protect heritage

### Community voice gains momentum at Barangaroo

The community has recently witnessed a series of extraordinary events at Barangaroo. The National Trust has been working with an umbrella group called Australians for Sustainable Development Alliance (AfSD), with a view to protecting Sydney's heritage. Central to our involvement is the Hands off OUR Harbour campaign which has gained significant momentum in the last few weeks.

While the Trust remains committed to recognising the rich and diverse maritime history of Miller's Point, it has experienced some measure of success in preventing the privatisation and contamination of Sydney Harbour.

Following the Trust's advocacy, the size of a proposed hotel extending into the harbor has been reduced and the structure brought significantly closer to shore. Furthermore, the court has recognised the Trust's argument that then Minister failed to comply with state environmental policy when approving the excavation of contaminated soil.

#### Court action

In his judgment, Justice Biscoe of the Land and Environment Court stated that had then Planning Minister not made a retrospective order to exclude Barangaroo from compliance with state planning policy remediation requirements, AfSD would have been successful in its court action dealing with contamination issues at the Barangaroo site. This order was made two weeks after the hearing had concluded. This result vindicated the Trust's concerns which will now be raised with the new Coalition Government.

The Minister was ordered by the court to pay costs on an indemnity basis after the judge criticised the timing of the law change, which wasted the resources of AfSD and the courts. The cost ruling is now being challenged by the Minister.

Papers have been submitted to the same court for a second legal challenge in relation to the fourth modification of the site's concept plan. It is being argued in this matter that the current designs for Barangaroo are materially different

for the benefit of future generations.

For the Trust, the need for government subsidies of heritage cinemas across NSW is paramount for the year ahead and will be one of the major focuses. While local film production enjoys taxpayer investment, these films cannot always secure screenings at major movie theatres. Heritage cinemas therefore have an important albeit niche role in bringing Australian stories to the public. Without funding, however, the survival of these cinemas is at risk due to the costs of keeping up-to-date with new technologies.

The document also takes the view that the assessment of heritage significance should not be buried in the planning portfolio as it currently is in NSW, and advocates for the separation of the Heritage Branch from the planning portfolio while asking for planning law reform. The Trust is calling for planning powers to be returned to local governments and sees the need to repeal laws that allow heritage items to be unreasonably delisted. Furthermore, the Trust recognises that regional heritage properties are less self sufficient than city examples. In 2011, the Trust will advocate for equitable funding arrangements to maintain regional heritage at a standard enjoyed by metropolitan assets.

Priorities for 2011 named in the agenda include supporting adaptive reuse of heritage buildings, support for public transport funding over road funding, and encouragement to apply Sydney Metro design principles and performance criteria for the protection of heritage items to all future railway construction in NSW.

The six places of heritage value named in the agenda are Barangaroo (east Darling Harbour), Ku-ring-gai, Catherine Hill Bay, Exeter/Sutton Forest, Goat Island and Newcastle CBD, but there are many more. The document states that 'it is important to interpret an area's historical importance while recognising that change can be beneficial'.



A rally in March drew support from communities around New South Wales. It was supported by the National Trust. (Photo: Jane Holmes à Court)

from previous concept plans and AfSD is claiming that a new project application should have been submitted. At the time of writing, a date had not yet been set for this court case.

The court challenges intend to provide independent scrutiny of the decision-making process leading to the current concept plan. The current development plans disregard the maritime history of Miller's Point and intrude into the Sydney Harbour Landscape Conservation Area. It is a development which chooses to demolish, dismantle, relocate and bury many of the heritage items at Millers Point.

#### Call for a Commission of Inquiry

Around 300 people protested against the current Barangaroo concept plan outside Lend Lease's headquarters on Sussex Street on Tuesday 15 March. The protesters demanded transparency and accountability at Barangaroo.

The National Trust, together with AfSD, is calling on the incoming government to commit to a public enquiry into the Barangaroo planning process. Sign the petition to ask Barry O'Farrell for a Commission of Inquiry at [www.handsoffourharbour.com.au](http://www.handsoffourharbour.com.au)

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## National Trust joins community protests against longwall mining

The National Trust has joined with a number of community action groups around New South Wales to protest against the environmental and heritage impacts of a growing number of longwall coal mines operating throughout the state. The Trust is also preparing to comment on a Scoping Paper on the coal and gas industry issued by the Department of Primary Industries, and will produce a background paper on the issue.

Longwall mining was introduced to Australia in the 1960s. The technique, which involves mining panels of coal side by side, separated and supported by narrow pillars of rock, allows mining companies better access and vastly improved recovery rates than the older methods of underground mining. Consequently the industry is expanding rapidly and longwall mining is now practised throughout New South Wales in the Gunnedah, Hunter, Newcastle, Western (Lithgow/Mudgee area) and Southern (Campbelltown/Illawarra) Basin.

Despite approval processes introduced in 2004, concern is growing about the environmental impacts of this form of mining. A main problem is that the ground above the mining voids eventually subsides and this can have significant impacts on the ground surface. Other issues are the release of methane gasses into the atmosphere, the draining of cracked creeks, river beds and aquifers – and rock falls.

### **Sutton Forest Conservation Area under threat** **By Eric Savage, National Trust Southern Highlands Branch**

Community action around New South Wales is intensifying to protect significant environments from the impacts of longwall mining. At a public meeting on Wednesday 23 March, the National Trust, the Southern Highlands Coal Action Group, Wingecarribee Shire Council and concerned residents were informed by Cockatoo Coal and its Korean parent POSCO of their intention to commence longwall mining in the Sutton Forest Conservation area. The significance of the area was formally recognised by the National Trust in 1998. Apart from its natural beauty, it includes around 40 properties dating from the earliest period of settlement in the Southern Highlands, all of which could be put at risk by subsidence.

The Sutton Forest deposit sits within the southern coalfields portion of the Sydney Basin. This sedimentary basin extends from the Upper Hunter near Muswellbrook south to the Shoalhaven over a distance of 350 kilometres. Coal



National Trust CEO and Jack Munday, President of Australians for Sustainable Development, joined forces yet again to send a message to Lend Lease (Photo: Jane Holmes à Court)

underlies the entire Southern Highlands, so there is the potential for further mining operations in sparsely populated areas such as Moss Vale, Kangaloon or west of Mittagong. Local aquifers lie above the coal seams (located around 200 metres below the surface in the Sutton Forest area) and the likely damage to these from subsidence could affect farm and commercial bores, surface storage dams and creeks that feed the Sydney catchment. If mining took place west of the Hume Highway near Belanglo thereby causing surface water to disappear from creeks, Berrima's water supply could be at risk.

While landowners can claim reparation from the NSW Government's Mine Subsidence Board for damage to their homes resulting from subsidence and ground surface cracking, there must be a pre-damage assessment made by the Board (usually before mining starts), and damage must occur before compensation will be paid. The implications for local vineyards, agriculture, trees, vegetation and the landscape are also potentially serious. The current problem with falling water levels in the Thirlmire Lakes is perhaps a pointer to what could happen in our area. Additional issues include leakage of coal seam gas (methane) into the environment and water supplies, as experienced in the Appin area.

The export of 1.8 million tons of coal per year from Sutton Forest, as proposed by Cockatoo Coal, also requires the building of a sizeable coal washing plant. If this plant were to be built, perhaps near the Boral Cement plant at New Berrima to take advantage of the rail line to Port Kembla, westerly winds could be expected to blow fine coal dust to the east from the high stockpiles toward Bowral, Burradoo and Moss Vale.

Underground longwall coal mining at depths as low as 200 meters might require the Council to declare parts of the Shire subject to mine subsidence, which could require more stringent building codes, thereby increasing construction costs and having an adverse affect on land values.

Together with other concerned organisations, the National Trust will urge the new NSW Government to apply and enforce all existing environmental controls and safeguards so that new mining operations cannot begin until a new regulatory and supervisory framework is in place. The key policy issue is to strike a balance from competing land uses to maximise the benefit to the NSW community. To achieve this balance, the Trust calls for a prohibition of long wall coal mining beneath all Landscape Conservation Areas including the Exeter/Sutton Forest landscape Conservation Area.

## Review of Vale of Gloucester listing in National Trust Register

Following local concerns about increased mining and gas-exploration in the Vale of Gloucester in the hinterland of the Mid North Coast of NSW, the Trust's Landscape Advocacy Committee is reviewing the current listing for the area in the National Trust Register.

The reasons for the revision are the distinctive geological, scenic and social values of the area, as well as its historical significance linked to its association with the Australian Agricultural Company. The Vale of Gloucester was discovered in 1826 by the company which had its headquarters at Stroud. The township of Gloucester dates from 1855.

The revised listing, Stroud/Gloucester Valley incorporating the Vale of Gloucester, will be completed and submitted to the Board of the National Trust of Australia (NSW) in the near future.



the peaceful rural landscape of the Vale of Gloucester

## Immortalised in Sandstone

Keeping a watchful eye over Sydneysiders for over a century is a veritable crowd of statues, busts and faces, some of which are well-known while others are relatively unnoticed. Carved into the facades of the city's grander 19th century sandstone buildings, often accompanied by the tools and symbols of their achievements, they are a commemoration of the challenges and achievements which are a large part of the story of the Colony.

Two projects which received High Commendations in the 2011 National Trust Heritage Awards featured our sandstone antecedents. One, covered here, involved the creation of a new statue to commemorate an early surveyor, James Meehan. It is the first such statue to be added to the Lands Department Building since 1901. The second, *Faces in the Street*, is a beautifully illustrated account of the carvings of four landmark Sydney buildings. It is covered in *Trust News*. Following from a public lecture given by Government Architect Peter Mould, the book encourages us to look skywards at the unexpected faces in the street.



Queen Victoria looks down benignly on Britannia and New South Wales: GPO Martin Place. From *Faces in the Street*

## James Meehan (1774-1826) takes his place

Lands Department Building, Sydney

By Matthew Devine

After detailed research, preliminary design and nine months of carving, in November 2010 a statue of James Meehan, early 19th century surveyor, explorer and settler, was added to an imposing line-up of early Colonial achievers installed in niches along the facades of the Lands Department Building, Sydney. The building was designed in two stages by Colonial Architect, James Barnet, the first stage being built between 1876 and 1881, and the second from 1888 to 1892. It was completed two years into the tenure of Walter Liberty Vernon as Government Architect.

Each facade of the impressive late 19th century sandstone building has 12 niches whose occupants include explorers and legislators who made a major contribution to the opening up and settlement of the nation. Although 48 men were nominated by Barnet as being suitable subjects, most were rejected as being 'hunters or excursionists'. Only 23 statues were commissioned, the last being added in 1901 leaving 25 niches unfilled. The idea to create a statue of James Meehan was prompted by the bicentennial celebration of Lachlan Macquarie's 1810 inauguration as Governor of the Colony. Despite the many challenges inherent in creating a likeness of someone long gone, the statue was installed at the end of the bicentennial year.

### A remarkable man

Irish-born James Meehan was transported to NSW due to his involvement in the Irish Rebellion of 1798. He arrived in Sydney in 1800 and, as a teacher and skilled surveyor, was assigned as a servant to the Acting Surveyor-General, Charles Grimes. Within two years he had been on two major expeditions and, by 1806, had been conditionally pardoned.

He continued to work on departmental duties and, from difficult beginnings, a remarkable man rose to be an important colonial surveyor, explorer and settler, surveying and mapping large areas of the country. The early towns of Sydney, Parramatta, Bathurst, Port Macquarie and Hobart were all explored, laid out and measured by Meehan.

### An accurate likeness

Commissioned by the Land & Property Management Authority (LPMA), the project to commemorate James Meehan involved close collaboration with NSW Public Works Heritage Services (NSWPW) and the Government Architect's Office. The first challenge, addressed by the Government Architect's Office, was to research what Meehan may have looked like and worn, what tools and instruments he may have used, how references to his past and subsequent achievements might be integrated, and how he would fit in with his colleagues in stone on the Lands Department Building.

The research helped carvers to prepare preliminary designs, including



The clay model



The completed statue was installed in January 2010



Carver Mason Ruben Varfi at work

preparation of maquettes. A live model who looked remarkably like Meehan's son was dressed in period costume and this allowed the development of a full scale model in clay over a metal armature, which formed the mould for a plaster model. This was then copied in Sydney Yellow Block Sandstone by stone masons at NSWPW, led by Paul Thurloe and Ruben Varfi.

As well as highlighting the major contribution of the former convict to the development of the Colony, the project continues the tradition of installing statues of significant contributors on the exterior of the Lands Department Building. It showcases the traditional stone-carving skills which are carefully nurtured by NSWPW to allow the meticulous and ongoing conservation and management of our sandstone heritage.