

Trust Action

Meeting the Minister

by **Graham Quint**, Advocacy Manager

In February, the National Trust was pleased to meet with the new NSW Planning Minister, the Honourable Tony Kelly, MLC. The Trust has had a long and amicable association with Mr Kelly in his previous portfolio as Minister for Lands. In the Trust's experience, he has had a consistent record of understanding complex heritage issues and seeking to achieve a proper balance between development and heritage conservation.

The Trust raised with the Minister a number of long running, key campaign issues including Currawong, Catherine Hill Bay, Ku-ring-gai Town Centres and regional council heritage listings.

Currawong has now been sold to the developers, Eco Villages Limited. The site is listed on the State Heritage Register and the previous inappropriate development proposal was rejected. The Trust strongly supports the ten year campaign by local residents to see this place protected and its history retained intact.

The Trust also raised its concerns regarding Catherine Hill Bay. We particularly noted the Land and Environment Court rejection of the previous planning minister's Memorandum of Understanding transferring lands for conservation purposes. Also the elevation of the site's development status from one of the Hunter Valley's least suitable sites to the top of the development priority list. The position was put to the Minister that Catherine

Hill Bay is a test case for the proper planning and conservation of coastal areas, an issue close to the heart of most Australians.

It is reassuring that Mr Kelly has not yet endorsed the Ku-ring-gai Town Centres Plan with its indiscriminate and excessive promotion of development at the expense of Ku-ring-gai's distinctive built and natural heritage. The Trust put the case for urban consolidation within (non-historic) existing higher density building stock, rather than demolition in urban conservation areas and multi-storey development adjoining heritage listed properties.

As Minister for Planning, Mr Kelly has ultimate responsibility to ensure that local councils act to recognise and protect their local heritage through the listing of places as heritage items on their Local Environmental Plans. The Trust raised with Mr Kelly the extraordinary variation from one regional council which has 890 listed heritage items, to five councils with no heritage list at all. The Trust noted that previous planning ministers had argued their 'facilitation of development proposals via a streamlined planning system' on the basis that councils had recognised their heritage in Local Environmental Plans. At that time, the Trust argued that this was an unfounded assumption and that a great deal of work needed to be undertaken to ensure that local heritage was recognised and protected.

The Trust emphasised its position as supporting development that respects both the built and natural heritage and which reinforces each suburb and town's sense of place, those special qualities that attract residents and tourists alike. Such a process works well in other countries and in those parts of our state where heritage protection has been successfully promoted and accepted.

Regional News

From Everglades House and Gardens The start of a beautiful partnership

by **Oliver Burton**, from Sport for Jove Theatre

One of the National Trust's most beautiful properties, Everglades House and Gardens in Leura, was home to a new flock this January, a flock of actors. The first annual Leura Shakespeare Festival, launched by the National Trust and Sport For Jove Theatre, played to sold-out audiences over the weekends of the 9/10 and 16/17 of January 2010.

A total of over 1,500 guests attended the repertory season of two of Shakespeare's most beloved plays, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*. These productions made for a beautiful pairing - both written in the same year and both dealing with the passion of youth, rites of passage, loss and love.

Director Damien Ryan, an actor and director with the Bell Shakespeare Company, brought the Festival proposal to the Trust in November 2009, after conceiving of the idea whilst visiting the Gardens on a family holiday.

With a rapid turnaround needed to hit the January Festival dates, Everglades Manager Scott Pollock and the Everglades Fundraising Committee swung into action. First there were the basics like creating a project plan with a timeline; and the risk management plan covering traffic management and crowd control. Then the heritage Gardens were prepared and maintained to cope with the influx of patrons. A ticket office was set up to manage pre-booking sales and the Fundraising Committee prepared food and beverages to raise money at the performances.

Publicity was vitally important to get this new production off the ground. Sport For Jove and the team at Everglades promoted the festival across the region with leaflets and posters being distributed around the Blue Mountains in



Advertisement poster for the Leura Shakespeare Festival

National Trust properties, local businesses and tourist centres. Countless radio interviews and a few ticket prize giveaways led to a Festival sell out.

Everglades shone as the young performers gave excellent performances, bursting with energy and vitality and using the Gardens' space to full effect. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, playing in the afternoons, was staged not only at the exquisite Garden Theatre (Australia's only purpose built outdoor Shakespeare stage) but also in 'the glades' space - a beautiful forest setting complete with trees, rocky outcrops and a bubbling brook. *Romeo and Juliet* on the other hand, took advantage of nightfall so that as the play darkened so too did the lighting.

After the final performance of *Romeo and Juliet*, the Trust and Sport For Jove Theatre announced their hope for the Festival to become an annual celebration of Shakespeare's works and to explore other National Trust venues that could host performances.