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MEDIA RELEASE

DEMISE OF HERITAGE OFFICE SYMPTOM OF BROADER ASSAULT

Mounting community concern that the conservation of heritage and the environment is under attack has worsened with the announcement by the NSW government of a major restructure at the Department of Planning. NSW Heritage Office staff will be integrated into the Department of Planning, effectively dismantling the Heritage Office.

The National Trust has condemned the move. Tina Jackson, executive director of the Trust said, "This move is set to further undermine the conservation of heritage in the state of NSW. The decision comes on top of recent changes to planning and heritage arrangements which threaten heritage conservation on multiple fronts."

The current State government review of the NSW planning system seeks to speed up development approvals, a laudable goal, but this shouldn't be at the expense of heritage protection.

"As much attention needs to be given to character, history and heritage values as timeframes" Ms Jackson said. "The one size fits all system of state-wide default planning codes proposed in the review must be supplemented with codes that will protect areas of heritage or environmental significance."

"People want flexibility to upgrade their properties to meet their requirements, but they also want to protect those special features and settings which make their property valuable, which is often the reason people choose to live in a heritage property or precinct in the first place. Once a character streetscape is destroyed it is gone forever," Ms Jackson said.

The NSW Heritage Act is also currently under review. Submissions have not been made public by the Minister, with nobody privy to the review's contents except the Department of Planning.

Part 3(A) of the NSW Planning Act, introduced in 2005, enables Minister for Planning Frank Sartor to approve developments deemed 'State significant', overriding environmental and heritage legislation.

The Trust is currently mounting a campaign to save historic Catherine Hill Bay from overdevelopment. Under Part 3(A), Minister Sartor has the authority to green-light current applications by two developers to build 900 houses at the Bay. The developers, Rose Group and Coal and Allied, have signed MoUs with the government to facilitate development.

Tina Jackson said, "Catherine Hill Bay is a rare gem, featuring intact buildings and streetscapes from the 1870s. It is rich in biodiversity and home to endangered species. The current 100 homes in green hinterland front a pristine surf beach. The proposed 900 dwellings would destroy its heritage and environmental values."

A Save the Bay rally will be held Sunday 24 February at 10 am at Catherine Hill Bay.

“We call on the community to back the Trust in opposing both this development and the dismantling of heritage protections in NSW”, said Ms Jackson. “The recent changes to heritage protections at legislative and government level make the Trust’s role as the community’s voice more important than ever.”

The National Trust is a community charity formed in 1945. Its mission is to conserve environmental, built and cultural heritage.

Trust Executive Director Tina Jackson is available for comment.

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