



THE NATIONAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA (NSW)

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NATIONAL TRUST FIGHTS HERITAGE ACT REVIEW

The National Trust has called on the State Government to reconsider key recommendations of the NSW Heritage Act Review released on 19 March, which may undermine protection of heritage places in the state.

National Trust (NSW) President Dr Zeny Edwards said, "In a bid to achieve bureaucratic efficiencies in the heritage planning system, heritage is downgraded".

A particular sticking point is that the recommendations collectively centralise decision-making to the Minister for Planning, which means that he can override the recommendations of the Heritage Council and delegated authorities such as Review, Expert and Ministerial Panels. In addition, the Minister has the sole power to choose the members of the Heritage Council and these panels. The concentration of power in one individual may throw into question the application of due process in the selection criteria and appointments of these bodies, which is essential to ensure that community concerns about their independence and expertise are addressed.

The success of the original Heritage Act (1977) was in providing a transparent, accountable and fair process for the management of heritage for the benefit of the community. The proposed changes open up new avenues to contest heritage protections, reinforcing the erroneous view that the existing system is an impediment to development.

Dr Edwards said, "Another concern for the Trust is a proposal to remove all organisational representatives from the Heritage Council, in favour of 'skill' based positions. This would threaten the National Trust's membership. The Review rightfully acknowledges the National Trust as the "peak community-based non-governmental organisation for heritage conservation in NSW". Its membership of the Council is crucial as the independent representative of the community statewide and not merely in the cities."

The Trust's detailed response to the range of recommendations is available at www.nsw.nationaltrust.org.au

Dr Edwards said, "The Trust continues to have concerns about current directions in heritage conservation and we welcome the opportunity for dialogue with the Minister on his and the Government's case. The Trust is committed to working with the Government to conserve places of environmental and heritage significance for future generations".

The State Government's Heritage Act Review recommendations come at a crucial time for communities throughout NSW who are about to participate in the annual National Trust

The National Trust is Australia's oldest conservation charity. It is not-for-profit and independent, relying on support from its members and the community to assist its work – which includes advocacy for the protection of built, natural and cultural heritage, conservation and education.

Festival, 'Our Place', to celebrate the heritage of our natural and built environment in all its richness.

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Graham Quint, Acting Conservation Director, is available for comment.

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