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MEDIA RELEASE

NATIONAL TRUST LISTS THE SKY

The National Trust (NSW) is set to classify the day and night sky over NSW as a heritage item worthy of preservation.

The imminent listing is particularly timely in the run up to Earth Hour on 29 March, when lights across the city will be turned off, reducing the light pollution that prevents us from enjoying the night sky in all its glory.

National Trust (NSW) President, Dr Zeny Edwards says the day and night skies as viewed from NSW have extraordinary aesthetic, historic, social and scientific significance for all Australians.

“The Southern Cross and the Milky Way are defining symbols for Australians.”

“Our sky pre-dates life on earth and is known to have been highly significant to the Aboriginal people who have depicted the sun, moon and stars in art and dreamtime legends. The night sky has special significance to the indigenous Australians’ quest to understand the motion of celestial bodies, eclipses and how events in the sky influence life on Earth.

“The day sky also has exceptional historic value to European settlement. The voyage of Captain Cook to the southern seas was intended to view the transit of Venus and for the first time accurately measure the distances to the outer planets in our solar system. Within a week of the First Fleet’s arrival on these shores, British Astronomer, William Dawes, had established an observatory at Dawes Point.”

The movement of the sun, moon and the stars guided our early Australian explorers and the Southern Cross, as depicted in the flag of the Eureka Stockade and our national flag, is an iconic symbol of Australia.

Dr Edwards said, “Our sky is the only vista common to the whole country. We hope the listing of the sky will be a unifying symbol to help focus awareness on the need to protect our environment in the broadest sense.

“Unnecessary lighting of buildings at night diminishes our enjoyment of the stars, and the wide blue skies for which Sydney is so well known are increasingly obscured by smoggy haze. A clear view of the sky is the right of every Australian and should be preserved. Switching the lights off for Earth Hour will remind us of this special aspect of our natural heritage which we take for granted.”

ENDS

Graham Quint, National Trust Acting Conservation director, is available for comment.

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