



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

MEDIA RELEASE

Upper house inquiry puts heritage in focus

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

22 October 2021

The Standing Committee on Social Issues – a committee of the NSW Legislative Council – has today delivered its report on the inquiry into the review of the *Heritage Act 1977*. The report marks a significant step in the NSW Government's review of the State's non-Aboriginal heritage legislation, which was initiated earlier this year upon release of the Government's discussion paper for reform.

The committee's report makes a series of recommendations to improve both the Act itself and its implementation and administration.

The committee Chair, the Hon Peter Poulos MLC, stated, 'We have a shared responsibility to be diligent custodians and stewards of the State's heritage, so it is protected and passed on to future generations in the same or better state in which we inherited it. This important inquiry was an opportunity to assess, with the benefit of expert testimony, whether the *Heritage Act 1977* remains a fit-for-purpose instrument to facilitate this shared responsibility.'

'There is little doubt that many of the Act's provisions and controls are still workable and well-resolved, providing a robust framework for the identification, management and protection of State-significant heritage in New South Wales. However, its continuing strengths should not make us complacent or oblivious of areas where significant improvements and gains can be made to modernise the Act and better align it with contemporary, best-practice approaches to heritage conservation.'

'Contemporary understandings and approaches to heritage have moved on considerably from when the Act commenced in the late 1970s. Despite previous amendments, some of the Act's concepts and assumptions no longer reflect the way we think about heritage in its varied forms and different aspects. Heritage is so much more than our significant buildings and monuments' Mr Poulos added.

'Clearly, there are opportunities for improvement. However, simply modernising the architecture of the Act, whilst an important reform, does not go far enough in addressing some of the concerns we heard from owners of State-listed heritage in navigating the system. To really move the needle, a more modern Act must be accompanied by a commitment to better resourcing, better recruitment and training of regulatory staff, enhanced customer service and outreach, better leadership and a shift in the prevailing culture or attitudes to conservation and change. Many of these things cannot be legislated for but instead require other interventions.'

The report makes 26 recommendations to improve the identification, protection, management and celebration of the State's heritage, including a range of actions to improve support for owners of State listed items and to make sympathetic adaptive re-use and activation more attractive and viable options.

Information about the inquiry is available on the committee's website:
<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-details.aspx?pk=2814>

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For further information, please contact the office of Committee Chair, the Hon Peter Poulos MLC, on (02) 9230 2249.