

**Submission
No 32**

INQUIRY INTO REVIEW OF THE HERITAGE ACT 1977

Organisation: Parramatta Female Factory Friends Inc.

Date Received: 23 June 2021

To: The Honourable Peter J. Poulos MLC
Parliament of New South Wales
Chair, Standing Committee on Social Issues

23rd June 2021

Subject: NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into the Heritage Act 1977

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to this Inquiry. As a recognised advocacy and key stakeholder group, **the Parramatta Female Factory Friends Inc.** wish to make the following comments and recommendations:

TERMS OF REFERENCE:

a) *the need for Legislative change to deliver a heritage system...that reflects best practice heritage conservation, activation and celebration.*

b) *the adequacy of the Act meeting the needs of the community and the protection of heritage.*

1. COMMENT: Clearly the Act needs to be reviewed in respect to best practice heritage conservation, activation and celebration.

Case in point: The Heritage Council NSW signed off on the Western Sydney Start Up (WSSH) within a National Heritage Listed site with no public consultation, only an objections opportunity, no publicly available Heritage/Master Plan (MP) and with no relevant Consolidated Conservation Management Plan (CCMP). It is quite outrageous.

Best practice activation is not to place 200+ office spaces within the earliest and most intact purpose-built female convict site in the nation with no MP or relevant CCMP.

Best practice heritage conservation, activation and celebration must be the telling of the narratives of a place and its interpretation **in the first instance**. **The Act must provide for this. The Act must reference annual budgets for this.**

2. COMMENT: The value of and protections for a site on the State Register must be clearly articulated and strengthened. What protections are there for a property listed on the State Register?

Case in point: There were no protections under the Act for Willow Grove (c1875) remaining in situ at Parramatta. This case foreshadows loss of protection for all other sites listed or future listed on the State Heritage Register. Removing a building from its context is not best practice conservation. **The Act must address this.**

Currently there is confusion in the community as to what protections heritage items truly have and what meaning heritage has in practice and in the context of development.

The Act must not only meet the needs but also **the expectations** of the community.

c) other **NATIONAL HERITAGE LISTED SITES:**

The Act must protect and include reference to state owned assets which are National Heritage inscribed. Protection and management of a state owned National Heritage site must be specified and include intersecting Federal and State responsibilities.

Case in point: The Parramatta Female Factory & Institutions Precinct. Under the current Act, inappropriate activation has occurred despite the site's exceptional significance and status.

REF: DISCUSSION PAPER CATEGORY1: *Exceptional state significant heritage to be identified and rigorously managed to ensure our most iconic items are conserved to the highest standards.*

COMMENT: Exceptional state significant and National Heritage state owned sites not only need to be identified and rigorously managed and conserved **but interpreted and activated to the highest standards, in consultation with key stakeholders and in a manner appropriate to a site's**

significance and history. The Parramatta Female Factory & Institutions Precinct - specifically the Parramatta Female Factory and footprint with extant c1818 - 1825 original buildings, yards and other fabric from the convict period, is a **CATEGORY 1** heritage site - it is of “**exceptional heritage significance**”.

What protections and management models are there for this site and like sites, within this Act? Why can Category 1 be subject to adaptive re-use with reduced opportunity for interpretation and no reference to significance?

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. Focus Question 1. It is imperative that the composition of the Heritage Council of NSW includes a practising academic historian and or social historian with specialised knowledge in heritage and with specific knowledge and deep understanding of any site or buildings being assessed etc. There should be nominal positions for community representatives who could bring informed perspective on the specific matter being dealt with. There is community perception that HCNSW simply “rubber stamps” projects. **The inclusion of a true “community member” with knowledge of the specific building/site being dealt with, would help allay community cynicism and assist in better outcomes.**

2. Focus Question 18. Heritage tourism requires vision, fiscal support, political will and commitment.

Case in point: Parramatta is the crucible of our history from time immemorial. With a World Heritage site on its boundary, the Parramatta Female Factory & Institutions Precinct with its multiple histories, has the potential to rival Port Arthur in visitation. The importance of this National Heritage site has been recognised in the local and wider community, attracting over 20,000 signatures supporting its UNESCO World Heritage listing. A petition was first presented to State Parliament in 2016 and then in Federal Parliament in 2020, passed the scrutiny of the Federal Petitions Committee and is now with Federal Minister Ley and State Minister Harwin to consider further action. **Given the site’s significance and visitation potential, a business case is imperative. The Act ought to cover such action.**

3. Focus Question 19. Public heritage buildings must, in the first instance be valued for the stories and experiences held in their walls and external spaces. Places such as the Parramatta Female Factory are exceptional and so important in the Australian narrative - convict and institutionalised women and children’s history is so rarely told; **such a place must be interpreted, conserved and developed according to best practice in the first instance and in consultation with key stakeholders under the Act.**

Adaptive re-use must be appropriate and relevant to the age of a site or building, its tangible and intangible value, its meaning for those stakeholders whose history is in that place and, meet community expectation. It is critical that these sites are interpreted and open to all Australians to experience, understand and celebrate.

“Heritage is our legacy. It is the stories, memories and collective experiences of our state in physical form...Our heritage deserves to be protected and cherished.”

Minister, The Honourable Don Harwin MLC

The Act must be reviewed and strengthened to realise these clearly articulated sentiments and goals. We look forward to commenting on the Review in due course.

Yours faithfully

Ronda Gaffey

Secretary

On behalf of the Parramatta Female Factory Friends Inc.