

INQUIRY INTO REVIEW OF THE HERITAGE ACT 1977

Organisation: Camden Historical Society Inc

Date Received: 27 June 2021

**Submission
No 73**

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27 June 2021

Submission to the Review of the Heritage Act (NSW) 1977

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to this inquiry into a Review of the Heritage Act (NSW) 1977.

The Camden Historical Society is a community-based organisation whose aim is to preserve, conserve, and promote the history and heritage of our local area.

The Camden district has many heritage assets, some already listed as state significant, and numerous others with potential to be state heritage listed. Much of Camden township is a Heritage Conservation Area, which has the potential for State Heritage Listing. Several local heritage assets, including parts of the township, their association with the early development of the Cowpastures, and their connection with the Macarthur family, have potential for National listing.

The heritage of the Camden district promotes economic growth, job creation and tourism, and the heritage assets in the Camden district contribute to social cohesion, community resilience and sustainability. Heritage is highly valued within the local community.

The Society would encourage the New South Wales Government to continue supporting heritage in the state, particularly in our local area. A number of local heritage items are privately owned, and these owners should be supported to conserve these important community assets.

It would be highly desirable to see more heritage items open for public access, and adaptive re-use, open weekends, or community events are all desirable ways to accomplish this aim. However, the idea of adaptive re-use and activation should be carefully balanced with retention of the original fabric and context of heritage items. Insensitive, incompatible, or inappropriate uses should not be supported. Changes that alter the ability to interpret the heritage items should be avoided, and financial and other incentives provided to owners to preserve context, restore fabric, and provide public access wherever possible.

Our heritage should be preserved for its intrinsic value, and not necessarily '*put to work*' (p.7) for economic growth and employment opportunities. The Society is concerned that heritage items may be assessed primarily for their ability to be profit making ventures. The Society is further concerned that '*changes*' (p.17) is code for short gain commercial gain at the expense of long-term preservation and conservation of the state's heritage assets.



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The impact of heritage on people's lives is not always measured economically, its long-term impact on a community and its sense of identity and place is highly significant.

The objectives of the Heritage Act are still relevant (p.9), and heritage protections should not be lessened. Improvements in assessment processes may be appropriate, but not at the expense of the preservation of heritage.

The most important criteria for members of the Heritage Council (p.9) would be a deep knowledge and appreciation of history and heritage, and the conservation and preservation of heritage assets.

Philanthropic and community investment (p. 11) should be encouraged and incentivised, but for the intrinsic value of the heritage item, not for the aim of making profits. Ideally support should be provided to enable heritage items to be available for community use, rather than leased for commercial ventures.

Heritage assets should not be seen as tools in planning outcomes. Planning in developing areas should respect the existing heritage items and their context, and care taken to preserve sufficient curtilage. The society is concerned that some in the community see this review as an opportunity to lessen the protection of heritage assets in New South Wales and make their removal, or alteration, easier for any future development of a site.

The society is concerned that any 'streamlining' (p.17) process does not mean a watering down of statutory protection of heritage assets. On the contrary, there is a danger that 'streamlining' is code for the abolition of this protection. There is possibly a need for enhanced protection for heritage, not lighter-touch enforcement (p. 19).

Heritage sites should not be seen in light of just 'aesthetically pleasing sites for cafes, bars, hotels and shops' (p20). The value of heritage places is much more than their role as sites for commercial activity.

Greater community engagement with our heritage would be highly desirable. Preservation of the context of heritage assets is essential in understanding their significance. The society commends any proposal by the state government to 'promote an understanding of the State heritage'. (p. 20) A greater understanding of heritage will enhance the protection, preservation, and conservation of heritage assets and 'the contribution that heritage' makes to economic growth, job creation and tourism. The promotion of an understanding of heritage leads to social cohesion, community resilience and sustainability.

The society is concerned that some in the community see 'activation of public heritage assets' (p. 22) as code for selling off publicly owned heritage assets by the state



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government. Transfer of state-owned assets to local communities (possibly via their councils) would be highly desirable. The community would prefer to see these used as meeting places and facilities for community groups and events, rather than leased or sold for economic benefit or commercial use, and for public access to be retained.

Heritage should not be subject to contemporary whims or ideas of what should be valued at the present time. Preserving our heritage is not just about the needs of the contemporary community, it is about acknowledging and respecting the past, and preserving our heritage for the future.

The Camden Historical Society appreciate the opportunity to be part of this stage of the process and would like to be kept informed of further developments.

Yours sincerely,

Ms Jo O'Brien
Assistant Secretary

(All page numbers and quotes from the Review of NSW Heritage Legislation Discussion Paper, April 2021)