

**Submission  
No 169**

## **INQUIRY INTO REVIEW OF THE HERITAGE ACT 1977**

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Submission by Mr Vasilij Schlusser

Proposal to amend the Heritage Act.

My submission only deals with heritage of the built environment by the Australian population who colonised Australia since 1788.

We must keep Aboriginal heritage items separate from these items. Historically, culturally they are separate subjects. I, for one, do not understand aboriginal heritage. But I do understand heritage (of the European type)

I use your Discussion Paper, DP, published under the auspices of the Minister for the Public Service and Employee Relations, Aboriginal Affairs, and the Arts, to refer to some subjects by quoting it.

Discussion

Please note that NSW does **not** have a strong history of heritage preservation as the DP erroneously claims on p6, first sentence. Just two example periods of heritage destruction under the motto of economic development

1. The 1960s and 1970s saw the wholesale destruction of heritage buildings (Victoria Street, The Rocks area) until Green Bans finally led the Federal Government to intervene and impose a 40 year moratorium on NSW heritage demolition.
2. The last 20 years or more: sees the wholesale destruction of heritage buildings and precincts, such as giving away public land to build the Casino complex on the Barangaroo foreshore for the benefit of a rich private person; the whole Darling Harbour precinct's continued trivialisation as a Disneyland theme park of Sydney's working history; in repurposing Bridge St heritage sandstone buildings into now redundant high class tourist hotels, in the demolition of Windsor Road Bridge despite strong local protests; in the impending Willow Cove house demolition in Parramatta.

On p6 of the DP, the sentence

*The NSW Government's policy priorities of customer service, a strong economy and well-connected communities with quality local environments have also highlighted shortcomings of the current heritage system*

expresses sentiments expressed several times more in the DP, that directly lead to the conflict of interest that exists between your concept of economy, and quality local environments. That conflict is being fought out by the present government bypassing the heritage act on the grounds that repurposing, demolitions etc are justified because they will

generate directly jobs and secondary employment,

will attract local and foreign tourists and therefore earn money for NSW,

Any Government shall not in the present or in the future justify heritage destruction based on economic necessities or priorities.

Please, when considering modifications to the heritage act, consider just two local cases with disastrous outcomes to the *quality local environments* (your formulation)

1. The Parramatta historic precinct say within 1 km radius of St Johns Cathedral has been completely destroyed by the random appearance of overbearing skyscrapers in very narrow

colonial streets now that dwarf the very fragile but rich historic heritage below them such as St Johns Cathedral, Town hall, Plaza, railway station etc.

A barbed wire fence 40 years age around this historic precinct with danger notices attached Hands Off this heritage precinct would have preserved and improved what was a budding quality local environment that could have grown into an attractive unique heritage site of genuine historic buildings, and human history in competition to the Sydney CBD.

2.The Castle Hill town centre as a local quality environment, is no more. The monster Castle towers shopping complex (like a castle surrounded on four sides by a high speed road system moat) has killed all local pedestrian traffic and small businesses; the few heritage buildings are fenced off, not accessible to the public; and the Metro station stands in a windswept artificial park, completely disconnected from the rest of the town and reachable on three sides only by crossing busy streets on three sides at traffic lights.

On p 10 of the DP

*....Owner incentives could be expanded. Around one-third of items on the State Heritage Register are privately owned..... Options could include a range of better designed legislated supports or program responses that could:*

*Assist with the cost of adaptive reuse and heritage activation to encourage commercial or community ventures that will **stimulate economic growth** and have indirect economic and social benefits.....*

I totally disagree with such attempts to couple stimulation of economic growth with preservation of our heritage buildings.

Please do not use UK examples such as the UK Heritage Enterprise Grants Revitalising Bideford Hall near Nottingham as examples what could be done in NSW. The UK has tens of thousands of heritage sites, that cry out for preservation. NSW has at the most say 600 privately owned heritage listed buildings and say 1100 government owned heritage listed buildings; a total of 1700 items so listed. Government has hived off the responsibility for the upkeep of many heritage buildings to stand alone Corporations as it has hived off many museums, libraries etc, Government might have nominal ownership but refuses to expand any such facilities for the benefit of the public and should therefore take no credit.

#### P18 The REFORM PROPOSAL

*The Minister responsible for heritage could be responsible for determining, in consultation with the Heritage Council, the regulatory thresholds for standard exemptions, fast-track applications and standard applications for permits under the Act. This would ensure the application and exemption process is flexible and responds to community need making it easier for heritage owners to maintain and conserve their properties*

No, This must be avoided i.e. avoid to politicise the *thresholds for standard exemptions, fast-track applications and standard applications for permits under the Act*. This would be political interference as we see it today when bypassing the heritage act.

#### My Conclusion

Realities on the ground such as the evident destruction of our heritage buildings in the name of the economy, indicate the need to strengthen the heritage Act. But not in the way the present government envisions this revision as proposed in part above.

The guiding principle for any amendment of the Heritage Act shall result in a resounding YES:

Does the amendment to the Heritage Act benefit the Common Good of NSW?

There shall be no covert or overt interference to that answer.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to express my ideas on the subject of proposed amendments to the Heritage Act.

V Schlusser