

**Submission  
No 191**

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

**Name:** Dr Cameron Hartnell

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## Review of the Heritage Act 1977 - Submission

To whom it may concern,

I am a heritage professional with a doctorate in heritage management and over 15 years of experience in the field. I work regularly with the Act and have a good understanding of the heritage process.

The heritage profession should be understood as the management of change in our historic and significant places. I support change in heritage places and want NSW to grow and prosper. I have learned that it is vital that decisions over the management of heritage places is based on a well-considered understanding of the history and significance of a place to ensure that change is located in areas of reduced sensitivity, and designed appropriately. I find that the proposed amendments to the Act weaken the heritage process and would partly undermine our ability to make good decisions over the future of our most special places.

In my view, the existing Act generally remains effective legislation that meets the goal of protecting heritage places and managing change. Changes to the Act should focus on updating some minor aspects while retaining its core. I do not believe, as is claimed in the discussion paper, that the act is “widely considered to be out of step with trends in heritage conservation”. In fact, I’m not sure I have ever heard this. In my years of experience, I have learned that clear regulatory measures are necessary to ensure quality outcomes. Heritage is a discipline of judgement and the introduction of a more vague process may only encourage the creative interpretation of requirements and greater confusion and uncertainty between the regulator and owner.

A detailed understanding of a place and its heritage sensitivities is central to the ‘celebration of our history’. Some projects are relatively straightforward and should not be hindered by heritage administration. Others take time and hard work before the richness and beauty of a place is revealed. It is hard to understand how a more vague and less rigorous process would increase appreciation of our history. It is equally hard to understand how watering down heritage requirements would make heritage a cornerstone of NSW communities, quality local environments and beautiful public spaces. I would think greater capital investment in these places would be the better approach to meeting that goal.

Careful consideration and improvement of the administration of heritage is always an appropriate goal. Simply reducing requirements to make heritage ‘easy’ is certain to have poor outcomes. It should be noted that the expertise at Heritage NSW has already been reduced over recent years, with some diminution of our ability to find quality solutions to the need for change.

The government’s review of the Act should include hearings, draft white papers and draft bills to allow concerned members of the community to continue to engage with this process.

Regards,

Dr Cameron Hartnell  
Senior Heritage Consultant - GBA Heritage