

I'd like to acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, the traditional custodians of the land we meet on today. I pay my respects to their Elders past and present, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island People here today.

Thank you to the National Trust for the work you do, year in year out, as trusted advocate of Australia's built, cultural and natural heritage.

Today's National Trust Heritage Awards are a wonderful opportunity to celebrate heritage excellence in NSW.

The National Trust Heritage Awards are a highlight of the heritage calendar. The NSW Government, particularly the Office of Environment and Heritage, and the Heritage Council of NSW, proudly sponsor this significant event.

Today we'll celebrate the dedicated industry professionals who make it happen – who preserve our heritage for communities across NSW.

We'll celebrate community groups passionately devoted to heritage. And we'll celebrate individuals who've committed their professional lives to conservation.

There are some extraordinary submissions this year, reflecting a broad spectrum of the NSW community. From large to small, individual to community.

One area of great need is heritage trades. I want to give special mention to the submissions that recognised the value of traditional craftsmanship, and, particularly, the retention of technical building trades and skills.

One third of the submissions that the Trust received this year were regional projects.

And, best of all, the National Trust has noted a 48% increase in submissions.

I'm delighted that in response to this, the National Trust has decided there will be a new award this year.

The inaugural *Judging Panel's Special Award* will be awarded in 2016 for "promoting understanding and respect, and, in this instance, for providing a contribution to raising awareness of the first Australians".

The last year has seen important listings, most recently the Mount St Mary Campus of the Australian Catholic University at Strathfield. We've also had many regional and indigenous listings, the legacy of Professor Lawrence Nield, including:

- Redfern Aboriginal Children's Services and Archives
- St Leonards Park, North Sydney
- Baiame Cave
- Further parts of Cox's Road and Early Deviations
- Narrandera, Bathurst and Glen Innes Showgrounds
- Stroud House
- The Greek Orthodox Cathedral of Agia Sophia, Paddington
- Urana Soldiers' Memorial Hall
- Wingham Memorial Town Hall
- Avoca Homestead Complex
- The 12 pounder rifle breech loading gun, Deniliquin
- And the Old Cobram-Barooga Bridge

I have also granted interim heritage orders for heritage at risk: Landsdowne House in Neutral Bay, which I mentioned last year, which has now been listed on the North Sydney LEP and save from redevelopment as residential flats.

Thurlow House, a rare early Siedler by the Georges River, and this week was recommended by the Heritage Council for listing, and the former Coptic Orthodox Church at Sydenham.

I thank the Heritage Division of OEHL for their efforts at probably the busiest time in their existence.

As I committed last year, I'll continue to have a strong focus on delivering strong heritage protections for Millers Point, and making sure Heritage Council guidelines are reflected in the CMP's.

The Heritage Council is being led ably by its new Chair, Stephen Davies, who is bringing to his role great enthusiasm and energy. I understand that the technical committees are kicking back into gear, thank you to the National Trust for encouraging this, and there's a great momentum.

In June, our 5-year \$28.5 million dollar *Heritage Near Me* program begins. This is the largest boost to local heritage; it will see more restoration, more assistance to councils, and more roadshows for communities.

Grants are open for activation projects, and I encourage you to apply.

We'll push ahead with developing a classic Heritage Plaques scheme, taking inspiration from London's blue discs, which I hope to consult on later this year.

Yesterday, we announced that we'll invest \$73 million over the next four years in projects to enhance heritage assets along the Sydney Harbour foreshore.

The highlight is a \$23 million towards renewal of Pyrmont Bridge, which is a symbol of the activism of the National Trust in NSW.

Property NSW is working with the Office of Environment and Heritage and the Greater Sydney Commission on a proposal for The Rocks to be designated as a heritage precinct.

Now for some personal reflection, I'm greatly concerned by the quality of some previous and proposed developments in the Rocks. Development there should better respect the form, scale, character and texture of the Rocks. We need to strengthen protections in this most sensitive of places.

That's why I'm concerned about the tendency to ask: "what can I get away with?" not "what's the most sensitive design for this context?".

It makes high level guidance so "high level" as to be meaningless, a form of unspeak that alienates the community, and a four storey glass box is the default solution.

There's a growing default to juxtaposition, where juxtaposition does nothing to protect heritage values, particularly when the context is sensitive, and the layers of history are subtle.

It's not helped by language about "the old and the new" which reinforces a false historicism, which implies that our design responses are demands of history, not simple acts of choice made by communities worldwide.

It's also not helped by demanding so-called "contemporary" or "modern" materials of concrete, steel and glass for modifications or additions, while deeming more sympathetic, enduring materials as "inauthentic": a perverse outcome.

This misunderstands the concept of legibility, a requirement succinctly put as "don't lie". This can be satisfied by placing the date on new fabric or buildings, built within the prevailing styles and materials.

The big loser in this is context, and losing the chance to strengthen the urban fabric, and our sense of place. It misses the wood for the trees.

We need a new focus on deeply contextual, sensitive design, to protect and strengthen our sense of place.

Jean Louis Luxen the former secretary-general of ICOMOS said:

"The concept of conservation represents an insistence on harmony, over time, between a social group and its environment, whether natural or human-made, while the protection of this harmony is perceived as a major aspect of sustainable human development."

Our task is to try and find that harmonious way of change.

We need good quality local practice, grounded in local conditions, widely dispersed through simple guidance to owners, builders, government, and community

As Luxen puts it, reflecting on heritage practice globally:

"Management methods based on strong traditional customs and practices are considered to be the equivalent of 'management plans'-and, as a matter of fact, are sometimes more effective."

That's true. Care for our vernacular was nurtured by many here in this room. Your own Chair, Clive Lucas, Ian Stapleton, others such as Ian Evans. They helped us fall in love with our old homes and give them new life.

This reflects principles of the Mexico Charter on the Built Vernacular. Heritage is a social and cultural right, the right to live in our own home.

As outlined in the Charter, access to one's vernacular is equally a right of community, and an obligation on government to sustain, nurture, and make accessible.

The NSW planning system has been remarkably silent when it comes to aesthetics.

But the success of aesthetic planning is clear. Just look at any traditional European city which has maintained its simple by-laws, and has more sensitive design controls that predate heritage concepts.

Good heritage practice needs good conservation planning.

Communities should through their local plans be able to decide on their preferred future character.

That's why the NSW Government is striking a partnership with the Prince's Foundation for Building Community, which specialises in beautiful, sustainable place-making, with deep and genuine local engagement, to help us be BIMBY's: "not in my backyard" becomes "beauty in my backyard".

The evidence from the UK is clear: communities accept density when it strengthens areas' identity, amenity, heritage and sense of place.

The great majority of Sydney's new density will be mid-rise. And our most desirable mid-rise apartments are our oldest – Victorian, Edwardian and interwar apartment blocks. They offer a quality and street presence lacking in much contemporary design.

These can be the inspiration for our future growth, and strengthen suburbs of similar aesthetic inspiration through a more harmonious way of change.

The Government Architect, Peter Poulet, will play a bigger, more strategic role in how Sydney changes. He'll be the most civic Government architect since Walter Liberty Vernon.

That's why we'll be tasking Peter with delivering guidance material:

- to discourage knock-down rebuilds, and encourage sensitive adaptation
- on restoration of our high streets, shop fronts and awnings, to return quiet, shade, grace – and people-toourvillages
- on vernacular laneway housing, to encourage a more resilient city on vernacular infill, because the terrace house and mansion house have an enormous future in Sydney; they're our missing middle
- and, along with our work with the Prince's Foundation, to encourage characterful mid-rise, inspired by the best of our heritage, to give communities choice.

To paraphrase Christopher Alexander, we can have patterns of density and design, which re-sew the urban fabric, and even repair the damage of past decades.

I acknowledge the NSW Chapter of the National Trust of Australia for its incredible work to manage the ever-expanding Heritage Festival, and of course, the annual Heritage Awards.

Without the Trust, we wouldn't have achieved many of the important listings of the last year.

I thank the judging panel for their knowledge, experience and, of course, their time.

I congratulate Clive Lucas on his new term as President of the National Trust in NSW and CEO Brian Scarsbrick, for his on-going work –and all the devoted employees and volunteers.

I look forward to the year ahead, and again thank everyone here for sharing our common task of protecting and celebrating the built, cultural and natural heritage of NSW.