

**Reece McDougall- National Trust Heritage Awards 2016
Lifetime Achievement Award Reciprocate**

Thank you very much.

I feel very privileged to receive this award which has been previously presented to such heritage icons and mentors as Jim Kerr, Joan Domeclj and Sharon Sullivan

Given my original background as a forester I feel very fortunate to have been given the opportunity to work in the heritage field.

There are very few jobs where you can honestly say you look forward to going to work each day.

I think the main driver is the fact that the product of your efforts is an outcome for the good of the community both present and future generations. It is a common thread for all of us here today regardless of which area of heritage you are involved with

The other thing, which I am always concerned with, is that governments and community's forget that heritage is not just the interest of a few individuals it is an integral part of our local amenity and is a significant contributor to our quality of life.

We could learn a lot from Aboriginal communities in that respect where heritage is regarded as an essential element of their health and well- being.

I have also been very fortunate to have had the opportunity to work at all three levels of management in the heritage area- being a community organisation, the National Trust, NSW Government and the Private Sector.

In these roles I have had the benefit of working with some fantastic enthusiastic people who were, and are still passionate about heritage and its long term conservation and use.

My first introduction to heritage came when I was employed by the National Trust as a part time research officer to prepare its submission to the Terania Creek Inquiry into the logging of rainforests.

The rainforest campaign of the Trust in combination with other conservation organisations such the Total Environment Centre of

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course was successful and the government decided to cease logging and preserve the remaining large parcels in National Parks and Nature Reserves. It was a no brainer there was no justification or benefit in logging a resource to extinction and the public was increasing sympathetic to its protection.

Working some 60-70 hours a week I was so pleased to be finally offered a full time position of 40 hours a week.

The Trust had a great conservation team – led by John Morris and Peter James included Brendon Donahue, Richard Mackay, Grace Karskins, Tony Brasil, Don Truman, Everlyn Hickey, Siobhan Lavelle to name but a few and our later addition Graham Quint who must himself qualify as a heritage living treasure .

I was also fortunate to have Ivor Whyate as my mentor.

He taught me the importance of keeping a copy of every correspondence and the critical thing of making sure it had a date on it.

Nothing upset Ivor more than being handed a letter where there was no date.

I was an exciting time with ever changing issues and campaigns to work on with the prime objective of achieving a lasting outcome for the good of the community and future generations.

After the move to the NSW government including Department of Agriculture , Rural Fire Services, Sydney Water and AWT I was so excited to be given the opportunity to work in the area I loved most - by taking on the role of Assistant Director at the newly created NSW Heritage office.

By the way I should never have got the job.

Being my usual nervous self at interviews I came in to shake the hand of the panel and immediately knocked a jug of water over them.

It very hard to recover from this but I did manage a second interview which offered me the job.

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My 10 years at the Heritage Office were some the happiest and sometimes most stressful times of my working life.

It is so easy to achieve some great outcomes when you are backed by such a fantastic team of some 40 individuals.

And even more so where you have a supportive and enthusiastic Minister.

What a golden time for heritage. The heritage Office was an independent agency which had the freedom to provide sound independent advice to the Minister.

My you he or she didn't always take it as is their prerogative but there were some great achievements.

While a lot of people viewed the administration of the Heritage Act as more a policing role our clear focus was not on this but on the promotion and celebration of heritage.

My team recognised that the community and political ownership of heritage provides a much more effective measure for achieving the long term conservation of the State's heritage than statutory controls.

It should also be remembered that Ministers love good publicity and if you do your homework and get the owners and other interested parties on side you achieve front page stories in the papers and the precious 5 minute grabs in the nightly news on the TV.

In addition and I am sure Minister Speakman would know this you get this great publicity and there is no danger that you are going to be criticized by your opposition – it is all good news.

On my very short list of my favourite listings I would include:
Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome where we had Minister Refshauge in a red Bi-Plane as part of the announcement of State Register Listing.

Similarly the listing of the Former seaplane Airbase at Rathmines where we organized for one of the last catalinas in operation to fly past above the head of the Minister as he announced the listing with tears in the eyes of the former RAAF officers attending the ceremony as the planed soared overhead.

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The listing of the old growth forests on the north coast was also a major step forward in recognizing our environmental heritage includes natural areas.

By far the most satisfying and most stressful was the listing of the entire town of Braidwood in 2006.

I still remember the instructions of the then Minister Frank Sartor of needing to arrive quietly at the town to make the announcement only to arrive by noisy helicopter in the middle of playing fields and inquiring neighbours coming out everywhere to see what the fuss was about.

Back in the car on the way to making the announcement the Minister asked so what's so bloody important about this town.

I politely informed him that it was still in its originally planned Georgian grid.

The Minister responded -your got to be kidding I have to get up in front of everyone say it is being listed for its Georgian grid. What the f is a Georgian grid?

Despite his in initial; doubts the listing did happen.

It was a very sad day for all when the t Heritage Office as an independent agency ceased and was incorporated as a Branch in the then Department of Planning.

I was even more disappointed to learn last week that the heritage staff of OEH have been moved out of its much loved home of the former Kings School at Parramatta.

I cant count the number of times that having meetings on such an impressive site which exemplified adaptive reuse was a factor in getting owners and developers to understand that conserving heritage did not mean everything had to remain frozen in time but could be sympathetically used for other purposes.

I am sure the Minister will immediately reverse this bad decision in the near future

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After a brief period of service on the Planning Executive which sometimes mirrored a Sienfield episode I again was fortunate to be given the opportunity to work with Aboriginal staff and community's at the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water I have great memories and experiences from this time.

One of the key projects was the preparation of a new Aboriginal Heritage Act which aims to identify and conserve aboriginal Heritage rather than provide an approval process for destruction and I can remind the Minister that we are still waiting for its finalisation and gazettal.

My last work experience in the private sector at GML was surprisingly satisfying

Surprising not because I had to work with such people as bad boy Logan but I wondered whether my goal of achieving good heritage outcomes could be achieved in a commercial environment where the aim was to get business and make a profit.

The thing I found was that by getting in early with clients it was possible to get win win results. Most clients are happy to achieve a heritage dividend for the community in partnership with a profitable development and to its credit GML is a consultant that does have strong principles for good heritage outcomes in taking on sensitive and complex projects.

As to the future

I am concerned that government heritage will revert back to processing applications and what my friend Don Truman referred to as policing the policeable instead of focusing on the great benefit in the promotion and celebration of heritage.

I can't remember when I last saw a SMH front page positive story on heritage or TV coverage of a heritage listing or initiative.

Living in the Shire and as one of your constituents Minister I also know you will be faced with some big issues in the future starting with Heathcote Hall.

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While recognising this difficult challenge the local community are looking forward to your support for identifying a suitable option that provides for some sympathetic development to generate funds for the restoration and long term management of this important State item.

In conclusion I would like to thank the National Trust for this award. I feel very proud and excited.

Thank you