

THE NATIONAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA (NEW SOUTH WALES) POLICY ON CHANGE OF USE AND DISPOSAL OF STATE GOVERNMENT HERITAGE ASSETS

PREAMBLE

Over many years the National Trust has commented on and influenced the redevelopment of government buildings to retain their heritage values, e.g. Parliament House, Macquarie Street (1950s), the GPO (Westin Hotel Development) and the Treasury Building (Intercontinental Hotel).

In 2013, three major NSW Government-owned Bridge Street, Sydney sandstone buildings – the Lands Department, Department of Education and the Chief Secretary's Buildings were proposed for sale/lease by the State government prompting expressions of deep concern by the public to the National Trust. The three buildings were listed on the National Trust Register in the 1970s and on the State Heritage Register in 1999. As a group and individually they have the highest heritage significance. For example, the Lands Department Building "is one of the most influential and major public buildings ever established during the mid-nineteenth century in Australia's colonial history."

While the National Trust supports the concept of "adaptive re-use" to keep buildings intact and to fund their ongoing maintenance, any development proposal for these three buildings must be sympathetic. These are landmark buildings seen "in the round" with important ornamentation on their rooftops. Like the Queen Victoria Building any development would have to respect the scale of these buildings and their extraordinary exteriors, interiors and rooftops.

In 1998 the Trust adopted an earlier version of this policyⁱ based largely on an Australian Council of National Trusts' draft policy on the Disposal of Public Property.ⁱⁱ

POLICY

1. The National Trust will urge that heritage assets should ideally be used for their constructed purpose and when there is any proposal to dispose of any building its heritage values should be investigated (not only its listing on a heritage list).
2. The National Trust will urge the retention of publicly owned heritage assets when it is in the public interest:
 - a. the heritage asset or its collection has heritage significance,
 - b. public access should be available,
 - c. the place is, or may be required for public use,
 - d. it may be necessary for the state government or the public to have some influence over future land use or management decisions relating to the use of the place
 - e. the heritage significance of the heritage asset is inextricably linked with its use and ownership by the State government.
3. The National Trust believes that, as owners of publicly owned heritage assets, the community must be able to comment on the future of these assets. The community must be informed about any proposed disposal at an early stage in the process, before any decisions have been made. The community must be enabled to oppose alienation on the grounds that a publicly owned asset must be retained in public ownership as it is in the public interest to do so.
4. Government-owned buildings listed on the State Heritage Register should only be developed with the involvement and approval of the Heritage Council of NSW and developments should fully respect the heritage values of these buildings, including their scale, landmark values, significant interiors and rooftop decoration. With these developments heritage protection must not be "turned off" via means such as State Significant Development declarations.
5. The National Trust believes that, if a former government agency or statutory authority is privatised, the public retains an interest in a property of heritage significance which was

formerly owned by the agency or statutory authority, and should be consulted on any disposal and/or development proposal.

6. The National Trust believes that there should be an accelerated program to assess the heritage significance and list on the State Heritage Register buildings and places constructed in the late twentieth and in the twenty first century which are of state, national or international heritage significance.

Author: Graham Quint, Director, Conservation

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ⁱ *National Trust of Australia (NSW) Policy for the Disposal of State Government Heritage Assets, 24/11/98*
ⁱⁱ *Australian Council of National Trusts, Draft Policy on the Disposal of Public Property, September, 1998*