

11 June 2021

Harbour Trust
Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment

Submitted online: <https://haveyoursay.awe.gov.au/cockatoo-island-draft-concept-vision>

National Trust submission relating to Harbour Trust's Draft Concept Vision for Cockatoo Island / Wareamah

Cockatoo Island is one of the most important heritage sites in Australia. It is a place of national and international significance associated with colonial and industrial aspects of Australia's development. As noted in the 2009 Conservation Management Plan for the site, Cockatoo Island features "an outstanding and unique collection of physical remains, from its use as a convict gaol, through to its important role in Sydney's maritime and industrial history." The National Trust first listed various convict components of the site in 1974, and listed the entire site as an Industrial Conservation Area in November 1981, noting that:

"Cockatoo Island contains the remains of the earliest features of Australia's period as a penal colony, near Sydney. In addition it contains the earliest most extensive and most varied record of shipbuilding, both commercial and naval, in the nation. Some of these works were constructed by the convicts at the time incarcerated on the island... the site is of extreme significance as an historical, archaeological, military industrial, maritime and educational record for almost all the period of the nation's colonial and independent existence."

The National Trust's listing recognized the Island's position as a living site undergoing continuous development, however it is a place that deserves and requires the utmost consideration to ensure that any proposed works do not detract from the significance of the place and heritage value to the Nation.

The Harbour Trust's Draft Concept Vision for Cockatoo Island threatens to completely alter the very nature of Cockatoo Island that gives it such a unique place in our history. This proposal is so heavy-handed it destroys that which it seeks to celebrate. A far more nuanced approach is required that engages with this history and landscape, rather than imposing an entirely false layer upon this fragile place.

This Draft Concept Vision must not proceed.

Cockatoo Island, Sydney's largest harbour island, has immense heritage significance that has been recognised by listing on the National and Commonwealth Heritage Lists and an inscription on the World Heritage List with ten other historic convict sites, is focused on the following themes:

- Reconnect (to indigenous stories and history);
- Repair (ecological environments and existing buildings for new uses);
- Repurpose (creating new commercial uses for historic spaces and buildings); and
- Renature (modify the existing built environment to create green landscapes and gardens).

Whilst the National Trust encourage a focus on heritage interpretation and the incorporation of indigenous history into our sites, the overriding focus on creating a parkland environment and the commercialisation of the site's activities must not come at the expense of the site's important industrial, maritime and convict history and character.

The National Trust has serious concerns regarding the high level of commercialisation proposed. We understand the need for investment to ensure built elements are conserved, but this should be carefully balanced with the retention of the island's outstanding universal values. Over-commercialisation of the site and repurposing large areas will have an immense cumulative impact on the very nature of Cockatoo Island.



The National Trust notes with considerable concern the continued diminution of the 'industrial' composition of the 'great variety of maritime activity' that makes Sydney Harbour such a vibrant place by day and by night. The National Trust is of the view that this loss equates to a serious erosion of the conservation values that constitute the heritage significance of Sydney Harbour. The artist's impressions contained in the Draft Vision are extremely concerning and are absolutely contrary to the site's Conservation Management Plan principles and world heritage values. This is not a place for palm trees, slippery dips. It is not a place of "intimate scale" but rather of massive industrial and engineering achievement.

The Trust does not support the proposed level of commercialisation of the site and is alarmed by the number of commercial opportunities presented in each of the proposed precincts within the Concept Vision Plan.

Investment in historic sites can be useful if, and only if, they support the sympathetic adaptive reuse and retain the site's character and significance. This vision does not achieve such an aim.

Yours sincerely,

David Burdon
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