



## POSITION PAPER

### SALE OF SYDNEY GENERAL POST OFFICE

#### BACKGROUND

The Sydney GPO was a key item on the National Trust's first list of historic buildings prepared in 1946. It was listed on the National Trust Register in February, 1974 and protected by a Permanent Conservation Order in December, 1993 and listed on the State Heritage Register in April, 1999. While listed on the Commonwealth Heritage Register as a Commonwealth owned property of heritage significance it is not yet listed on the National Heritage List.

The GPO is probably the largest and most impressive post office building in Australia. A 2016 Heritage Report prepared by Lucas Stapleton & Johnson stated that the GPO "has defined the heart of Sydney's central business district since 1874. It is a building of outstanding architectural and artistic significance and is arguably the finest example of Victorian Italian Renaissance Revival style in NSW. Its long public colonnade is a rare and very fine architectural element in Australia."

The original building was constructed in two stages from 1866, and was designed under the guidance of Colonial Architect James Barnet (1827-1904), under whose supervision edifices essential to Australia's communication, law and order and shipping safety (lighthouses) were built throughout the colony. His vision for Sydney is seen most clearly in the General Post Office in Martin Place, Customs House at Circular Quay and the Lands Department in Bridge Street.

Built primarily of Sydney Pyrmont sandstone, the façade stretches 114 metres along Martin Place and it is one of the longest sandstone buildings in Sydney, bringing an ambiance of grandeur and history to Sydney's CBD.

In recent decades it has been carefully conserved and refurbished according to stringent heritage guidelines which have preserved the integrity of the original structure while allowing a mix of uses appropriate to enhancing its majestic character and encouraging public enjoyment of its facilities.

On May 31, 2017 the Sydney Morning Herald revealed that the Sydney GPO had been sold two months earlier in a deal that was not made public. The National Trust immediately wrote to the Prime Minister, the Federal Minister for Environment & Energy and the NSW Premier expressing the Trust's deep concerns at the outright sale of the GPO.

The Trust understands that a number of very significant Commonwealth owned properties on the Commonwealth Heritage List are not entered onto the National Heritage List. Such a situation leaves items of national significance, when sold, not subject to commonwealth heritage legislation. This situation is unsatisfactory and threatens the long term conservation of these significant items.

The Trust sought the urgent intervention of the Prime Minister, the Federal Minister for the Environment and the NSW Premier to halt the outright sale of the GPO building on heritage grounds.

#### NATIONAL TRUST POSITION

- The Trust calls for a legislative requirement that the NSW State Government and the public be consulted and invited to comment on any proposed disposal of Commonwealth owned properties of heritage significance.
- The Trust seeks the introduction of appropriate amending legislation to ensure continuing commonwealth involvement in the conservation of our national heritage assets regardless of their ownership.
- The Trust seeks the urgent National Heritage Listing of those Commonwealth owned places which meet the criteria for listing.

#### ACTION TO PROMOTE THE TRUST'S POSITION

The Trust will promote its views on this issue in the media and with the public and the Federal and NSW governments.