



NATIONAL TRUST



ACT Annual Heritage Oration 2024

The National Trust of Australia

***Thursday, April 18 2024
Shine Dome, Canberra***

The World Heritage Day Oration was held at the National Heritage Listed Shine Dome. Credit: L. Roberts

Hon Ted Baillieu AO

*Former Premier Victoria
Chair, Australian Heritage Council*



Heritage –
**The Power of Place
and the Primacy of Purpose**

May I first acknowledge Gary Kent, President of the National Trust (ACT), Rebecca Vassarotti MLA, Minister for Heritage, Mick Gentleman MLA, Max Bourke AM, who presented the Oration last year and did a fine job.

I acknowledge also, all of those, past and present, in particular the Ngunnawal, whose love of our land, whose care of our country, whose connection to this city, this place and this building in particular have provided us with a legacy that we should all treasure.

And you'll see on the sign in front of me, the Australian Academy of Science, on World Heritage Day, is celebrating 70 years, its 70th anniversary. The Academy was formed for good reasons, hopefully not because of an existential threat that had occurred some months before, when I was born! If so, they still haven't found a solution and still have a job to do.

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But 65 years ago, Roy Grounds, the famous Australian architect, was putting the finishing touches on this copper top conference venue – The Shine Dome.

And it remains today what it was always meant to be.

Not only is it on the National Heritage List. If you look at the List and the documentation that comes with the List, it's actually number one on the List, slightly aided by the alphabet, but it is number one on the List.

And for Melburnians who are proud of the National Gallery of Victoria, we have high regard for Roy Grounds. But I stress again, this building is still what it was meant to be. Its purpose has prevailed. The furniture might be a bit low now, but its purpose has prevailed.

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Now, sixty plus years ago, our mother of seven sought to ensure her three youngest saw the best of our own world at an early age. The Rock, Olgas, Queensland rainforest, the Kimberleys, the Ord, the Nullarbor, the Blue Mountains. It was our bigger home. And it was my first look at awe-dropping Australia. And for me, the awe index was seven to ten.

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Fifty-two years ago, we very uppity Melbourne University architectural students were summoned by a then young Warwick Forge, as some of you may recall, to assemble our collective passions in front of Tasma Terrace in Melbourne, a stone's throw from Parliament House where the stones were themselves being assembled to demolish Tasma.

We belonged, so we went.

Tasma Terrace, a fine three-storey Victorian residential terrace designed by Charles Webb, was saved and was given to the National Trust in Victoria by new Premier Dick Hamer, an early sign of regime change. It remains the Trust's home, and it was my first look at heritage action. Awe index on Tasma, five to six!

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Fifty years ago, this very month, I found myself on the love seat in Agra, with a love and the Taj. Awe index, ten!

As it was, our adventure took us, in turn, to the Acropolis and other extraordinary places. Places ancient, modern, treasured, ruined, alive, natural, crafted. Places where no matter the provenance, in the simplest terms, the awe was outstanding.

Places to hold the mind, places at which it made perfect sense to just stand and stare and marvel. That was my first look at the wonders of the world.

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Fifteen years ago, with my wife and our youngest, we visited the small, obscure, Scottish village of Greenlaw, just north of the borders.

Has anybody here been to Greenlaw? I'm the only one!

In a classic damp graveyard on the hill, we used a toothbrush to scrape away the years and found on just two headstones, the equivalent of ten generations of family on my mother's side.

It was a moment about family, but less about names and more again about place. This was the location where the place in the end seemed to matter more than the inscriptions. A sense of Caledonia, perhaps.

Does being the Chieftain of Victorian Highland Pipe Bands make more sense now? When I told the story at the Pipe Band's Annual General Meeting last year in Ballarat, the President said to me, 'I grew up in Greenlaw'. It all seemed like it was meant to be. Life forces, that's what they are.

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Life forces are the most powerful of all. And family usually leads. Other forces are taken for granted or overlooked and sometimes withered. But their hold inevitably varies.

And the relative power reveals itself in different ways.

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So allow me to do a little test about the life force of family. You have to participate.

Hold your hand up now if you can name the family names of both your parents.

Keep your hand up if you can name the four family names of your grandparents. Very few hands have come down.

Keep your hands up if you could name the eight of your great grandparents. There are still some up.



It gets very tricky at great, great grandparents, sixteen. Does anybody claim to know all sixteen?

But think of this. For your grandchildren, your own grandparents are their great, great grandparents, sixteen family names to think about. To contemplate ten generations, as we did in Greenlaw, is to contemplate more than a thousand names, but at least we can say they all shared a thread to one place.

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Now reflect for a moment on your sense of place.

Hands up if you have travelled internationally. Come on, this is easy. Keep your hand up if you've been to Europe. Keep your hand up if you've been to Italy. Keep your hand up if you have been to Rome. Keep your hand up if you've been to the Trevi Fountain.

Keep your hand up if you've thrown a coin in the Trevi Fountain. Keep your hand up if you know why you threw a coin in the Trevi Fountain.

Usually by this stage, most hands vanish, but that's still a lot of connection here to place.

Same game. Europe? Spain? Barcelona? Sagrada Familia? Does anybody know that Sagrada Familia is just being finished, one of the wonders of the world? Does anyone know Mark Burry? Mark has recently left Swinburne University Architecture School; before that he was at the Melbourne University Architecture School.

This room probably doesn't know that the completion of Sagrada Familia, has been in the hands of Mark Burry and his students at Melbourne and Swinburne for the last fifteen to twenty years. So when you go again, take the thread of connection with you.

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There can in my mind be no doubt about the power of place.

The power of place is a fundamental life force.

It's a life force as potent as love, as family, as faith, as aspiration, as curiosity, as belonging and as the survival instinct itself.

It's a force no less front and centre than the need for food and shelter.

Heritage places are the family albums of nation, the footprints of country and the soul of our togetherness.

Our very consciousness of life seeks foundation in such places.

Places where we shed tears in awe of great time frames, great stories, great ingenuity and great composition. Nature's score, civilisation's song.

And the poetry of place is with us through every day and every night.

It holds our hearts, it fills our sails, it stores our hopes, it nourishes our dreams.

Place is the ultimate touchstone of quiet contemplation and the wisdom induced.

First Nations communities across the world have a profound understanding of that power. Jewish communities share that understanding. They treasure place – the very promised land.

Aboriginal Australians elevate place in the language of 'Country'.

It's a power best beckoned by calm, but place lends meaning to life.



In turn, everyday Australians covet place too. The place of their own experience but also the place of their shared experience. It might be a home, a church, a school, a beach or a city, just as it might be a mountain or a valley, an ocean or a view.

There would be very few Australians who do not harbour a sense of pride at the site of the Sydney Opera House; no matter where they live, and no matter if it was designed by a foreign architect.

Place beguiles.

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Some of you will remember this: [singing]

‘There are places I’ll remember

All my life, though some have changed

Some forever, not for better

Some have gone and some remain

All these places had their moments

With lovers and friends, I still can recall

Some are dead and some are living

In my life, I’ve loved them all.’

I can’t sing, but I still love those words. The Life Force of Place!

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Our heritage movement is at the same time a sometimes troubled beast.

It is blessed with a benign and warm title but bedevilled by opaque and often obscure processes.

The language of heritage can unwitting even the most dedicated tribes and followers.

In its simplest and most common form, heritage embraces place and at least some, if not all, of community history, values, laws, regulations, assessments, listing, protection, preservation, management, monitoring, compliance, enforcement, resources and funding.

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And yet heritage is beset by tortuous encyclicals. These declarations have emerged over decades from the highest councils of the heritage industry, from UNESCO, from ICOMOS, United Nations conventions, the Burra Charter and national heritage conferences, taskforces and practices.

And these indecipherable acronyms, frameworks, themes and tools provide some structure to the business of heritage. But at the same time they often defy and disguise the essential magic of great heritage.

And for average observers, they simply bewilder. For the average punter, the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* is right up there with string theory. For young people, it's simply too easy to turn away.

Ironically, the world's greatest heritage has survived millennia and centuries without rules, regulations, listings or high governance.

It's been guarded instead by common respect, love and, yes, good fortune.

But the core values that comprise the criteria for national heritage listing in Australia are very difficult to summarise.

They are essentially: history, rarity, informativeness, categorisation, aestheticism, creativity, connection, indigeneity and individual works.

Their application and interpretation is complex at best. On the other hand, magic is so much easier to accept.



And yet even in those great tablets something is missing. There always seems to be a critical component unspoken, unrecognised and overlooked: purpose.

Jim Chalmers, Australia's Treasurer, recently said, and I quote, 'if you don't have that pilot light of purpose in you, then you've got no business being here in our line of work'. Now, he was, of course, speaking about what he does, but it's just as applicable to heritage.

Heritage needs purpose. Every property on the National Heritage List embodies three levels of purpose, albeit usually unspoken. Indeed, the same can and should be said of all listed heritage properties.

First, is the predominant purpose of the property in its original or most significant state prior to its official heritage elevation.

Second, the purpose for which its nomination for heritage status was sought in the first place. Noble or otherwise. It might be to head off threats, to seek recognition, to seek funding, to increase protection. It may even be, and it may shock you to know, just a political decision.

And third, the purpose which it is anticipated the place will have on an ongoing basis.

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Now I'm going to use an example for a particular reason.

But I started talking here about the Shine Dome. And I go back to where I started from. This building is nationally listed and holds still its original purpose and holds still the affection that it's always had.

It's remarkable in that sense.

Some of you will know the Royal Exhibition Building in Melbourne. The Royal Exhibition Building was designed and built to establish Melbourne as an international city and promote technology, trade, science, innovation, daring and internationalism.

It was a stunning success, and 'Marvellous Melbourne' was embodied.

The Royal Exhibition Building was finally listed on the State Heritage Register for the reason of securing its protection because it was threatened. Arguably it was added to the national list to increase the sense of protection by including the Commonwealth.

It was then nominated for addition to the World Heritage List, and frankly that was largely done for political reasons. Not a problem itself, but largely for political purposes.

Thirdly, the foreseen purpose of the property!

The continuing purpose of the Royal Exhibition Building, has never really been articulated. It has hosted the Australian Parliament, the Victorian Parliament, academic exams, functions, occasional events and shows, but nothing close to its original prominence.

It is fair to say its protection is likely secure, but its funding isn't. Nor is its purpose, and the supplementary controls have arguably hindered the prospect of its original purpose being restored.

And I have to tell you the energy and resources that have been wasted in the last ten years in arguments over the number of car parks and design of residential developments in the buffer zone around the Royal Exhibition Building have become a shameful distraction. Purpose has been forgotten.

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Now there's an interesting line of heritage places in Melbourne and forgive me for talking about Melbourne. I said to Rebecca that you are going to have to live through a bit of Melbourne here, but it's a thread, a line of properties.

It starts with the Melbourne Cricket Ground. Who's been to the MCG? Quick show of hands. You've been, you get it. It's state listed and it's nationally listed. Thousands of years as a gathering place behind it, and still being used for its perennial purpose after thousands of years.

But the buildings? Merely utilitarian. They come; they go. It really is the quintessential heritage place. It's treasured for the place; in fact, we had this discussion with Indigenous communities recently.

We talked about the MCG and there has been Indigenous involvement on that site for a long time. And I said, 'what does the 'G' stand for?' And of course everyone said what it stands for: 'ground.' And I asked, 'is ground the same as Country?' And they said 'yes'.

The MCG is Country, it is shared heritage. Frankly, a government that messed with the 'G' would be in deep trouble. The threat to the 'G' is only one of not being the best. It's substantially self-funded, it has huge public interest and, at its Taylor Swift best, the awe index is ten and I can vouch for that.

Just up the road, St Patrick's Cathedral, state listed, a magnificent cathedral. Marvellous Melbourne at its best. It's not on the National List. No cathedrals are. It is substantially self-funded and perhaps the wrath of God is protection enough.

Awe index, I would say eight.

Just across the road from St Pat's is ICI House. Who's been to ICI House? A handful. The architects know it. State listed and nationally listed. It's an early modern skyscraper in Chicago mode.

Utilitarian. It's still an office. Not very great offices. Doesn't function the way our modern offices function. The purpose is preserved, but, frankly, there's little public interest. It is substantially self-funded.

Awe index is probably three or four.

Nearby, is the Victorian Parliament. State listed, a magnificent building, twenty-seven years as the home of Federal Parliament, but not on the national list. Purpose, intact, but huge maintenance bills, substantial public interest, it's government funded. Awe index is at eight, one of the most magnificent legislative chambers in the world.

Curiously, the only state parliament on the national list is the South Australian Parliament. Awe index? Does anyone want to put an index on the South Australian Parliament? Let's just say it's a 'hmmm' from me.

Nearby again, the Royal Exhibition Building, which we were just talking about – state listed, nationally listed, world heritage listed, a magnificent building, powerful history. But the original purpose has evaporated.

The current purpose is unclear. It's in reasonable but poor condition. It's unsustainable. The management plan alone is a challenging read. There's significant public interest in it, and it's probably got an awe index of nine.

This thread of properties highlights the range of challenges.

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Purpose is critical to sustainability.

But purpose has not found its way into the great sermons on heritage. I believe that's a mistake.

The closer aligned the three related purposes are, the greater the prospect of permanent and meaningful protection and survival of the heritage property.



Perhaps it really is time to consider purpose as a key aspect of heritage recognition. Inclusion of purpose in a listing citation would be a compelling driver and a good start.

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So where is our heritage system at?

In Australia we recognise five levels of heritage assessment.

Local heritage overlays administered by local governments often applied in local planning schemes.

National Trusts which still have a life of their own – a community led system of recognition and it includes objects which other bodies don't include.

State heritage registers and territory registers using State and Territory legislation overseen by local heritage councils and with a range of different powers jurisdiction by jurisdiction.

And then national heritage listing – run by the Federal Department of Environment, decision making by Federal Minister and with the Australian Heritage Council, with specific and limited roles as an advisory body to the Minister, a promotional body and a body that can, through the Minister, report to Parliament, if it wishes.

A number of other bodies have oversight of national listings. These include HCOANZ, (the Heritage Chairs and Officials of Australia and New Zealand), the FNHPA (the First Nations Heritage Protection Alliance) and multiple different, Acts of Parliament, state, federal, territory and Indigenous – you know them all.

And then there's World Heritage listing determined by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee following nominations by Australian states and supported by the Federal Department and the World Heritage Advisory Group.

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So just looking at national heritage listing in Australia.

It's existed in its current format for the last 20 to 25 years since the EPBC Act was established to include the National Heritage List. In that process some 30,000 to 35,000 properties were returned to the states and territories.

Commonwealth heritage places are maintained on a separate Commonwealth Heritage List. They're the ones owned by the Commonwealth and deemed worthy of heritage protection. There are just under 400 properties such as lighthouses and offshore places in particular.

The National Heritage List, number one being the Shine Dome here, comprises:

- Natural places, being natural landscapes and open waters deemed worthy of listing and having one or more national values, and you can quite rightly think of Kakadu in that vein.
- Indigenous places being Indigenous places deemed worthy of listing, having those values. You can think of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, and
- Historic places being buildings or places of cultural significance deemed worthy of listing and again, have one of those values. And you can't go past the Sydney Opera House in that respect. There are about forty or fifty historic places on the National List.

Beyond those national lists, there are tens of thousands of state and local heritage properties.

Not all nationally listed places are awe-droppers. Some are: Uluru, Kakadu, the Sydney Opera House. Some are listed for the stories they tell of the troubled past of tragedy or of timeless miracles.

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But the truth is, heritage stocks in Australia, their protection, promotion and expansion, currently face enormous threats.

These threats include:

One, Funding. There's little current money for the heritage component of property ownership, whether for monitoring, compliance, maintenance, upgrading or assessment. Nor is there sufficient available expertise. With Federal and State budgets currently facing huge pressures, there's little prospect of additional funding. Even basic assessments of proposed projects are super expensive for proponents and assessing agencies.

Assessments are often made without assessing staff or advisory bodies being able to visit nominated properties. And tourism as a source of funding isn't encouraged currently by some places. And there are effectively no resources available for protection campaigns or for promotion of listed places.

Second threat, Delay. Current national listing assessments, typically take three to four-year time frames. For various reasons, some recent assessments have taken more than ten years. Emergency listings are rare. At best, we see two or three listings being approved per year through the Council.

Third, Purpose. The lack of clear alignment of purpose, as described above previously, increases the risk of what I call the entropy of heritage neglect. Lack of a clear ongoing purpose limits the capacity to raise funds by extending that purpose to designated areas about the place. To be frank, heritage listing simply isn't enough to drive sustainability.

Fourth, a lack of trust and confidence. Multiple public reports, submissions and events have underscored public distrust in the heritage system. These include the June 2020 Auditor-General report into the heritage system, the Samuel report of October 2020, the Adelaide Park Lands submissions, the Juukan Gorge Senate inquiry and others.

The Samuel report nominated the lack of trust and confidence in the National Heritage listing system as a leading issue. And it concluded, and I quote, 'the environment and our iconic places are in decline and under increasing threat. The *EPBC Act* is ineffective. The Act is not fit for current or future environmental challenges.' And 'it has failed to fill its objectives as they relate to the role of Indigenous Australians.' The Act 'is complex, leading to confusion and inconsistent Commonwealth decision-making' and summarised by the quote, 'the community does not trust the *EPBC Act*'.

The fifth threat is a relatively new one, and I am going to describe it as the 'Dead Heritage Movement' and the direct intervention of government decision-making. There is an overt effort underway by development and other interests supported by some government agencies to actively discredit the heritage system, the nomination process and the people involved.

This is generally framed as heritage considerations inhibiting economic development. This a deliberate movement to give heritage a bad name. Over the years, you would have heard the phrase NIMBY: 'not in my backyard'. It's been adopted to typecast and discredit heritage interests. But that's now been supplemented by the term YIMBY: 'yes, in my backyard', coined to give noble intent to economic interests and their local supporters, regardless of any conflict of interest.

Now, this will sound a little political so forgive me. In 2023, the National Cabinet held a single meeting on the heady subject of housing affordability. That meeting was followed by a media conference that made sweeping proposals to build hundreds of thousands of new homes in central city key locations, and in the process sweep away local government planning authority and dismissing heritage controls.



That proposition was then blindly adopted and promoted by State Leaders. Now as an architect, I'd say to you, reality suggests that such proposals are doomed to fail on any number of fronts. However, heritage may still be a casualty.

And I make the observation today, YIMBY is now an organisation with spokespeople. You can look up YIMBY Melbourne and under the section 'About Us', you only find one name mentioned. That's going to be a significant issue for heritage.

Now I talked about direct action by governments, and I think it's even worse. And I want to refer to the Adelaide Park Lands. And those of you who are heritage conscious will be aware that it's been an issue.

The nationally-listed Adelaide Park Lands example is a particularly sore point. One of the great urban design legacies of the world has been devastated by its own governments of both political persuasions. South Australia's successive governments have knowingly legislated away heritage interests within the Adelaide Park Lands.

They used the Adelaide Park Lands as a land bank.

The current government legislated away existing long-time state heritage registrations within the broader Adelaide Park Lands, consolidated all decision-making and removed appeal rights.

They then proposed massive institutional expansions within the other Adelaide Park Lands and ignored all advice regarding the damage to the heritage values of the Adelaide Park Lands, from the Heritage Council, from ICOMOS, from the Adelaide City Council, from the Adelaide Park Lands Association, the SA Heritage Council, their own heritage advisors and others.

Further decisions in the same vein have continued since and even more are anticipated from the master plan for the future hospital development.

National Heritage listing failed to provide protection for the Adelaide Park Lands.

The *EPBC Act* failed the Adelaide Park Lands.

One proposal was self-assessed by the South Australian Government as not requiring referral and was approved. The Federal Department had no oversight of that decision. The Australian Heritage Council strongly disagreed with that process.

A second larger proposal was referred. A public consultation took place. The decision was then made that, for essentially legal reasons, the proposal did not comprise a controlled action, and the referral was discontinued. Again, the Australian Heritage Council strongly disagreed with that process.

As far as any decisions were made by the Federal Department, they were by a delegated official. Heritage was not a consideration in those decisions.

Those decisions were not made by the Minister, nor by the Australian Heritage Council, nor by the people of South Australia either. No heritage assessment of the proposals was undertaken.

Outcomes ignored the 169 submissions of a total 178, which had opposed the developments, including the South Australian Government's own heritage advisers.

Outcomes ignored the substantial submissions of the Australian Heritage Council made over more than two years and passionate public campaigning by the Council and our consistent conclusion that the proposals would have, quote, 'a significant and unacceptable impact on the heritage values of the Adelaide Park Lands'.



Indigenous interests were not consulted.

After fifteen years of listing, no management plan had been agreed.

The decisions were reached without a visit being made to the Park Lands.

The 178 submissions made, to a very big public process, have not been made public.

In short, it's been a slow motion debacle, and I might say that this has been up there with the most disheartening heritage episodes in Australia's recent history.

2037 will mark the bicentennial of the Adelaide Park Lands. There's not a lot of bicentennial stuff we deal with in Australia. We deal with Indigenous heritage for thousands of years, but the bicentenary is significant. It will be a huge milestone in which all Australians should be rightly proud.

That leaves us just thirteen years ahead to plan for that celebration. Hopefully, that will provide an opportunity to minimise the damage done, strengthen the commitment, complete the upgrade and planning programs, develop mature edges, maximise perimeter benefits, interfaces and transport links and present the Adelaide Park Lands to the world as a sustainable triumph of urban design and public use, which is what was designed, it's what it has been and what it must stay.

Tribute then will of course fall to Colonel Light, the Park Lands architect, but just as equally to those who protected and enhanced the vision. Those who understood the everlasting power of place.

Hopefully, in 2037, and in the words of Paul Kelly, 'the wisteria on the back veranda is still blooming.'

That forthcoming bicentenary deserves so much better. And hopefully the answer to Light's own entreaty will be obvious when he asks, or when he proclaimed, quote, 'and I leave it to posterity to decide whether I am entitled to praise or to blame.'

The sixth threat, a lack of authority and jurisdictional paralysis. The Federal Department lacks authority to enforce proper management of national heritage and world heritage listings. Without clear authority, any and every level of government can blame another for lack of funds, management, maintenance, neglect and loss of values. Jurisdictions without the available time or funds are therefore reluctant to even get involved or even mount a case for better outcomes.

The seventh threat is the lack of monitoring, management plans and compliance. Around half of the current cultural places on the National Heritage List don't have agreed or current management plans. There are insufficient resources to design management plans, let alone agree to monitor maintain or upgrade.

The eighth threat is strategic neglect. What do I mean by that? The deliberate neglect of the maintenance and management of a part of an existing nationally listed property can be and is being used to establish an artificial benchmark for development elsewhere in the same listed place.

That's what happened in the Adelaide Park Lands. Rehabilitation of knowingly neglected areas of the Park Lands has been used as an offset for development elsewhere in the Park Lands despite the explicit prohibition on doing so.

Ninth is climate change. It's an easy thing to say but a more difficult concept to itemise. However, it's increasingly clear that climate change will have a significant long-term impact on the management and maintenance of heritage listed places.



This will or may include impacts on the Barrier Reef and other natural places, the degradation of rock art as a result of more extreme weather events, the maintenance of materials in cultural listings, coastal erosions etcetera.

And tenth, I want to close on this notion of threats with something else. The lack of creativity in the heritage industry. By definition, heritage interests start from a perspective, with protection of the existing. That's understandable, but the industry is also predominantly elderly and ageing. This is despite its youthful roots. When you think about the roots of The National Trusts – they were very young people who put the National Trusts together. That's why heritage should be in the hands of young people.

National cultural listings tend to reflect interest at a particular time. The contemporary relevance of those interests doesn't get reviewed much. Where are the new and creative approaches to handling heritage matters and providing for dynamic protection of our best?

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Beyond these direct threats, the Australian Heritage Council has found itself asking some simple questions of late. Does national listing work? Is it worth it? What advantages flow? And in what circumstances should a place be removed from the list? Is protection best provided by its listing?

Interestingly, First Nations communities, despite access to FPIC (Free, Prior and Informed Consent) controls, which are generally in favour of Indigenous interests continue to harbour doubts about the benefits of listing. We often hear it said of Indigenous responses – they would prefer control rather than listing without control.

So, there are threats and challenges.

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At the same time, the Australian Heritage Council has done its best to meet its own obligations.

Over the last three years we've addressed the backlog of nominations, streamlined processes, established a much greater focus on Indigenous heritage, prioritised site visits, added six or seven places to the national list, ticked off on management plans, strategic plans and heritage strategies, reached out to networks like this wherever we have visited and wherever we can and conducted a major campaign around the Adelaide Park Lands, albeit without resources and without success.

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Changes are afoot, as I suspect you all know.

Change won't be easy in the heritage world. The industry is generally inclined to the maintenance of the status quo.

But I say this very clearly. Business as usual will not deliver.

It will arguably make things worse. To be clear, I believe the Federal Minister gets it and recognises the need for change. But it's going to be a huge task financially, politically and administratively.

All power to her to be bold and simple.

New nature positive legislation is to be tabled soon. The first stages will see a realignment of decision-making with the new Environmental Protection Agency, and now, you would have read, the Environment Information Authority.

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It is not for me to do more at this stage than to note that multiple rounds of consultation have been underway for several months. I and other Australian Heritage Council members have attended several sessions.



So what is needed?

The Samuel review in 2020 made thirty-eight recommendations. Principle amongst them is the development of national environmental standards for matters of national and environmental significance.

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I have had the honour of chairing the Australian Heritage Council over the last three years. I have had the support of an experienced, intelligent and diverse Council.

We’ve seen it all. The highs. The Cuttlefish Coast. Who’s been to the Cuttlefish Coast? This is a heritage passionate group. You have to go and see the heritage of that Cuttlefish Coast. If you can’t go to South Australia, look at it online and marvel. And our site visits have been terrific.

The lows: the sparse resources and the Adelaide Park Lands campaign.

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So allow me to conclude tonight by making some perhaps cheeky, but simple suggestions for change.

First, how about we make all decision-making and submissions open, transparent and public?

Second, use our own simple, youthful language in defining heritage.

Third, prioritise an accord with First Nations heritage interests to consolidate the concept of shared Indigenous history or, quote, ‘mutual legacy’, as Tim Winton so eloquently describes it.

Fourth, merge the silos. All heritage has cultural and indigenous significance.

Five, let's rationalise the annual nominations process to temper expectations and free up resources.

Six, please, let's add purpose to the value system.

Seven, let's make listings conditional until management plans are agreed and implemented.

And eight, let's add purpose to management plans.

And nine, let's ensure offsets are based on highest and best condition benchmarks, not strategic neglect.

Ten, let us encourage mutual purpose as a source of sustainable, dynamic heritage, not just aspic.

Eleven, let's prioritise resources for monitoring management and compliance functions. Let's provide resources for dedicated promotional campaigns.

Twelve, let's legitimise regular list reviews, including prospective delisting.

Thirteen, let's say no to grants without agreed management plans.

And fourteen, let's allow young people to embrace and take control of heritage.

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And of course, give us place and give us purpose.

So give us treasures, give us tragedies, give us tears, give us stories, give us awe, give us majesty, give us the timeless, give us the spiritual, give us the natural, give us humanity.

But most of all, give us place and give us purpose.

And Australia will give us all, in return, heritage.

Heritage that endures, heritage that soars on its own account.



Heritage that tomorrow's young will in their turn seek out for themselves and in their own way stand and stare and marvel at the awe.

And I leave you with the words from some of the less celebrated lines of one of Australia's great tributes to place:

*'A stark white ring-barked forest
All tragic to the moon,
The sapphire-misted mountains,
The hot gold hush of noon.
Green tangle of the brushes,
Where lithe lianas coil,
And orchids deck the tree-tops
And ferns the warm dark soil.'*

Thanks very much. Heritage on!



Guest speaker the Hon. Ted Baillieu AO, Gary Kent (President National Trust ACT), ACT Minister for Heritage Rebecca Vassarotti MLA, Duncan Marshall AO (Chair ACT Heritage Council). Credit: L. Roberts.



The Hon Ted Baillieu AO

was appointed Chair of the Australian Heritage Council in 2021.

He brings a wealth of expertise to the role as a Life Fellow of the Australian Institute of Architects

and as Adjunct Professor at Swinburne University School of Design. Mr Baillieu is an Honorary Enterprise professor associated with the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning at Melbourne University.

He served as Premier of Victoria and Minister for the Arts from 2010 to 2013.

In 2020 he was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia for his service to the people and Parliament of Victoria and to international engagement.

The annual ACT Heritage Oration has been established by the National Trust (ACT) to celebrate World Heritage Day, which is observed around the world each year on 18 April.



The Oration provides an opportunity for a prominent heritage leader and thinker to deliver an address aimed at raising awareness and stimulating discussion about the current state and future directions of heritage nationally and in the ACT.

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