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## NSW State Election 2023: Make Heritage Matter

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**Initiative** NSW

In the lead up to the NSW State election on 25 March 2023, the National Trust (NSW) is calling on candidates to consider and commit to heritage conservation if they are elected. Here's what we're calling for, and what you can do to help make heritage matter.

### National Trust Election Platform

This is what the Trust is asking candidates and parties to do for heritage:

1. Stop disabling the State's heritage legislation. Repeal Section 4.41 (c) and (d) of the EPA&A Act.
2. Commit to stand-alone Aboriginal Cultural Heritage legislation. Table an Aboriginal Cultural Heritage bill in

2023 and ensure its properly resourced.

3. Develop options to better protect remnant urban bushland and significant trees across NSW.
4. Legislate the mandatory consideration of the Government Architect's Design Guide for Heritage.
5. Make grants available for the operational costs of heritage organisations, museums and galleries.
6. Incentivise adaptive reuse of buildings to encourage sustainable development and reduce carbon footprints.
7. Ensure the NSW Government properly cares for the State's precious heritage assets as a responsible custodian.
8. Ensure state funding is made available so that every local council can employ a local heritage advisor.

## Help make heritage matter this election

What can you do to encourage candidates to support the Trust's election platform?

1. Share these issues with your local candidates – download [this letter template](#) and email it to your local candidate.
2. Write to the editor of your local paper about these election requests.
3. Join us on [facebook](#) and [instagram](#) and share our social media posts to spread the word.
4. Attend our [2023 Heritage Forum event](#) on the 9 March 2023 Sydney.
5. [Subscribe to our e-newsletter](#). We'll share party and candidate responses with you, so you'll know what each party has committed to heritage.

## A closer look at the issues

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With the NSW State election in March fast approaching, this is a valuable opportunity to raise public awareness about major threats to our natural, cultural and built heritage in NSW, and to secure policy commitments from the candidates for our heritage priorities. Here's a closer look at our election platform.

## Enable, don't disable, our heritage protections

In May 2021, at the request of the State government, the Legislative Assembly Social Issues Standing Committee commenced a review of the *NSW Heritage Act*. The National Trust played an important advocacy role during this review. Our own detailed submission was joined by more than 300 others, many of which supported our position that the current Act did not require extensive change. The Standing Committee published its report to the government in October 2021, and the government response supported in full, or in principle, 25 of the 26 recommendations made – many of them proposed by the National Trust. The government is now in the process of drafting a Heritage Bill to amend the Act, which will undergo further consultation.

While the review process has shown that current controls are largely satisfactory, it has also highlighted that the Act would be more workable if it was administered more consistently and in a timely manner. Of particular concern, sections of **both the *NSW Heritage Act* and the *National Parks and Wildlife Act* can effectively be 'turned off' or overridden** when a project or application is deemed to be State Significant Development (SSD) or State Significant Infrastructure (SSI), under a provision in the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act*.

This bizarre situation where our heritage legislation can simply be turned off is unique to NSW, and is one of

the reasons why items that are formally listed on our State Heritage Register – such as Central Station – continue to be at great risk and without adequate heritage protection. In fact, analysis prepared by the National Trust highlights that there has been a dramatic escalation in the number of projects designated either SSD or SSI that have ‘turned off’ the Heritage Act and its protections for their impact assessment, up from 48 in 2005\* to 402 in 2021 (source: Heritage Council of NSW Annual Reports, 2005 – 2022). It is only by enabling, rather than disabling, the protections of Heritage legislation that we can hope for any serious retention and conservation of our heritage places.

## Increase funding for local heritage

At present there is a genuine imbalance in the approach to resourcing conservation and management of heritage in NSW, which is negatively affecting places considered to have protection. The majority of listed heritage items in NSW are locally listed – some 40,000 – yet the bulk of administration and funding is focused on State-heritage listed places.

**Many councils in NSW have insufficient resources to adequately manage places on their local heritage register.** In some cases the number of items listed is also sadly lacking despite there being many properties that potentially qualify. Some councils do not have a heritage adviser at all, while others have access to overstretched consultants engaged on the slenderest of contracts – sometimes for just one day of work every two months.

Heritage is one of the reasons many people choose to visit or live in our regional centres. The National Trust is requesting that government commit to establishing an adequate, long-term program for local heritage and ensure that every local council has resources to employ or have access to a heritage adviser.

Based on our own experience in offering conservation advice across NSW, we firmly believe that having a dedicated team giving local heritage advice within government will achieve far-reaching results in a cost-effective manner. Financial and practical assistance should also be made available to councils to support thorough significance assessments and ensure local heritage studies accurately identify heritage places.

## Look after our heritage

As a custodian of many heritage properties across NSW, the National Trust is acutely aware of the importance of regular maintenance to conserve our heritage places – both built and natural. **A minor investment at the correct time may not only save a heritage item, but also money and resources in the longer-term.**

Our members expect us to fulfil our obligations in caring for these places, and ensuring they are conserved for future generations. Similarly, there is an expectation that the State government must recognise its own responsibilities as the largest owner of listed heritage places in NSW – responsible for 54% of all items on the State Heritage Register.

Small yet well considered measures to repair our historic buildings also go a long way towards ensuring they will not suffer from what is termed demolition by neglect. “Now” will always be the right time to replace that missing roof tile, rather than waiting until the whole roof needs to be replaced and the interiors are ruined.

This is particularly true of places under government ownership. The National Trust insists that all areas of government are accountable for meeting their statutory obligations under the *NSW Heritage Act* to ensure these assets are adequately maintained.

We are asking candidates to support an increase in funding and higher prioritisation of resources to conserve, re-use and activate heritage-listed buildings in government care. Such funding must have as its aim actual conservation outcomes.

## Think sustainably

Making a place safe and accessible is often the first step in finding a viable new or continued use for many heritage items. Appropriate adaptive re-use not only brings new life to our heritage places, but it has the potential to generate new business and tourism in both metropolitan and regional communities, and has substantial environmental benefits.

**The National Trust firmly believes in the mantra that the greenest building is the one that is already there.** Too often we see the environmental credentials of new buildings being endlessly promoted, when their construction involves the demolition of a perfectly serviceable structure.

Released at the latest round of climate talks in Egypt (COP27), the 2022 Global Status Report for Buildings and Construction identified that the construction sector accounted for more than 34% of energy demands and

approximately 37% of energy and process-related CO2 emissions in 2021. This means that the gap between the climate performance of the sector and the 2050 decarbonisation pathway is widening.

The National Trust supports truly sustainable development that properly incentivises adaptive re-use, retrofitting, and the conservation of existing buildings. There is a stark contrast between the recent award-winning conservation and adaptation of the nation’s oldest post-1788 tidal pool in Balmain, taking into consideration rising sea levels, and the senseless proposal to demolish enormous portions of the historic 1913 Parcels Post building at Central Station to accommodate an ill-considered 200-metre tower.

*\*The National Trust’s January 2023 magazine incorrectly listed the number of projects designated either SSD or SSI that have ‘turned off’ the Heritage Act and its protections for their impact assessment, as: 51 in 2003. These numbers were incorrect and have been adjusted in above article to the correct figures: 48 in 2005.*

## How you can help make heritage matter

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### Attend event

Join us at a public event discussing the key issues for heritage.

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### Write a letter

Use this letter template to write to your local member

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### Acknowledgement of Traditional Custodians

The National Trust acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we work, celebrate and share the stories of heritage. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and we support the Uluru Statement.



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