

HERITAGE INFORMATION SERIES

NATURAL HERITAGE PRINCIPLES

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Aboriginal hand stencils, South Coast. *Photograph courtesy of National Parks and Wildlife Service*

Interior of Belltrees shearing shed, built near Scone in NSW in 1879 by architect J. Horbury Hunt.

Artefacts from the site of first Government House Archaeology Collection. *Photograph courtesy of Museum of Sydney on the site of first Government House*

Grose Valley, Blue Mountains, NSW. *Photograph courtesy of NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service*

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Australia Square, Sydney

Entrance to the central temple, Sze Yup Temple, Glebe. *Photograph by Karl Zhao*

Lands Department Building, Sydney

The bow of iron steamer, *Merimbula*, wrecked near Currarong in 1928. *Photograph by David Nutley*

Snowy Mountains Scheme. *Photograph courtesy of the Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Authority*

St Mark's Anglican Church, Darling Point, Sydney. *Photograph by Stuart Humphreys*

Belltrees Shearing Shed, near Scone, NSW.

Detail from the crypt floor of St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney. *Photograph courtesy of St Mary's Cathedral*

NATURAL HERITAGE PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE THE HERITAGE COUNCIL OF NSW

The principles in this document have been developed to guide the Heritage Council of NSW in considering community requests to protect natural heritage items and in exercising generally its responsibilities under the Heritage Act. These include recommending protective measures, such as the making of Interim Heritage Orders (IHOs) or listing on the State Heritage Register (SHR).

1.0 BACKGROUND

The environmental heritage of NSW includes components of the living and non-living environment. It consists of both natural heritage – land resources, marine, estuarine and inland waters and diverse animal and plant life – and cultural heritage, reflected in the evidence of human occupation and settlement.

Over the past 40,000 years of human occupation and, in particular, the last 200 years of European settlement, the natural environment of NSW has been modified dramatically and in many areas the rate of extinction and modifications is accelerating. The recognition of the value in conserving our remaining natural heritage estate is vital.

A broad range of legislative and non-legislative measures provides for the conservation and management of natural areas in NSW. The Heritage Act is one of them.

The definition of ‘heritage significance’ under the Heritage Act includes items of scientific, cultural, natural or aesthetic value. Thus, the Heritage Council may recommend to the Minister that an item of natural heritage be protected under the provisions of the Act, by the making of an Interim Heritage Order or nomination for listing on the State Heritage Register.

Natural heritage encompasses a broad range of areas, including natural ecosystems, geological sites, water systems, modified landscapes and parks, gardens and significant trees. The Heritage Council’s actions have to date included recommendations for the making of various orders under the Act, negotiation with affected parties, acquisition of properties, protection under an Environmental Planning Instrument (EPI), assistance by way of grants and provision of specialist advice.

The 1987 amendments to the Heritage Act provided, under section 170 of the Act, for State Government Agencies to list heritage items under their ownership and control on Heritage and Conservation Registers. In 1998 further amendments to s170 provided for the maintenance of items in registers with due diligence and the publication by the Heritage Council of management

guidelines for the conservation of these items. Items and land identified on s170 Registers may also be listed on the State Heritage Register.

The initial listing of State significant natural areas managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), Department of Land and Water Conservation (DLAWC) and State Forests NSW (SFNSW) on the State Heritage Register will provide a clear indication to the community of the importance of this part of the State's environmental heritage. The nationally developed comprehensive, adequate & representative (CAR) reserve system comprises formal and informal reserves, and protection by prescriptions.

Natural heritage values protected in these ways include:

- reservation of forest ecosystems;
- high conservation value old growth;
- wilderness;
- rare species;
- geographic variation; and
- other factors important for long term conservation.

Recent Comprehensive Regional Assessments of forests in Eden, North East and Southern NSW have provided extensive and detailed datasets including the identification of a legislatively recognised reserve system meeting criteria of comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness.

Natural areas will be included as an integral part of the nomination of items of Aboriginal heritage significance to the State Heritage Register.

Currently, little statutory protection is available for geological and fossil sites. The Heritage Council may need to give particular attention and priority to the identification, assessment and protection of this specific type of natural heritage in its strategic plan.

Consistent with the Government's 1996 Heritage Policy and the recent amendments to the Heritage Act, the Heritage Council will encourage the community and local councils to play a greater role in the conservation of items of local significance which are of natural heritage value.

2.0 PURPOSE

The Natural Heritage Principles below recognise and support co-operation with the community and government organisations in developing a holistic approach to conserving natural heritage in New South Wales.

The principles clarify and strengthen partnerships between the Heritage Council of New South Wales and the community and key natural resource agencies in NSW. There is also the opportunity to promote closer liaison between the Heritage Council and Commonwealth agencies with an interest in natural heritage.

In particular, the Heritage Council will work with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, State Forests and the Department of Land and Water Conservation and their associated scientific and advisory committees. Specialist natural heritage committees and panels established by these authorities include the Scientific Committee, the Native Vegetation Advisory Council and the Australian Heritage Commission's Natural Heritage Advisory Panel for NSW.

The principles focus on making the most effective use of all measures available to identify and conserve significant natural heritage items.

The principles recognise the importance of:

- researching, understanding and retaining the significance of natural heritage as an integral part of the environmental heritage of New South Wales;
- documenting and conserving natural heritage as part of our heritage legacy to future generations;
- promoting the appreciation of the value of natural heritage through access, education and interpretation;
- managing natural heritage items across their full range of values;
- encouraging private individuals and community custodians to care for natural heritage; and
- working in partnership with State and Commonwealth Government organisations, community organisations and private owners on strategies to identify and manage natural heritage.

3.0 THE PRINCIPLES

The Heritage Council of New South Wales recognises that :

1. The natural environment underpins the State's environmental heritage as *natural heritage*.
2. This natural heritage is an essential component of the culture and heritage of indigenous communities.
3. Significant information and expertise on the State's natural heritage is held by Government Agencies, such as the National Parks and Wildlife Service, State Forests and the Department of Land and Water Conservation, and their skilled and specialised staff and committees.
4. The provisions of the Heritage Act complement other conservation and management systems.
5. The identification of natural heritage items of State heritage significance, their listing on the State Heritage Register and the conservation of natural heritage items identified under s170 of the Act provide for the comprehensive conservation of natural heritage within the Crown Estate.
6. Community organisations and individuals play an important role in conserving the State's natural heritage. Continued community education on identifying and managing the natural estate, together with voluntary measures and heritage agreements, assist in conserving this asset.
7. The State Heritage Register plays an important public information role as a record of the State's heritage.

Therefore, the Heritage Council will:

8. Concentrate on those parts of the natural heritage environment that require special attention for identification, assessment and protection (such as scientific sites of geological and palaeontological value).
9. Consider requests for action under the Heritage Act in consultation with relevant agencies and related expert committees, in a manner consistent with the whole-of-government approach to conserving natural heritage in New South Wales (see Flowchart, Appendix A).
10. Consider requests for action under the Heritage Act to protect items with natural heritage values on a case-by-case basis and with regard to the merit of the matter before them.
11. Support government acquisition of items of natural heritage where there is no other prudent or feasible alternative.
12. Adopt the following roles in relation to natural heritage:
 - statutory protection of items of natural heritage value on a merit based case-by-case basis;
 - referral to other agencies in seeking information and comment on the place proposed for protection under the Heritage Act
 - advocacy with local government regarding items of natural heritage in schedules to local environment plans;
 - education on a holistic approach to the State's environmental heritage, through State Heritage Register listings and other measures.

APPENDIX A

REQUESTS FOR PROTECTION OF NATURAL HERITAGE PLACES

PROCESS FLOW CHART

