

# MEDIA RELEASE

**DEPUTY PREMIER  
MINISTER FOR PLANNING  
MINISTER FOR ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS  
MINISTER FOR HOUSING**

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## **ITALIAN SETTLERS HONOURED FOR CONTRIBUTION TO AUSTRALIAN CULTURE**

One of the most important landmarks in Australia's Italian history, New Italy, has been listed on the State Heritage Register.

Visiting the historic Italian settlement, near Woodburn, south of Lismore today, Deputy Premier and Minister responsible for Heritage, Dr Andrew Refshauge, said New Italy had made a massive contribution to Australia's cultural heritage.

"Nuovo Italia was established in 1882, when more than 200 migrants principally from the Veneto region in Italy were accepted by the NSW government as refugees after the failure of an earlier attempt to settle an island off the coast of Papua New Guinea.

"The settlers built houses, a church, school and community hall – they organised work and social activities and began to produce some of the nation's, and soon the world's, best produce.

"From humble beginnings this new homeland became Australia's first Italian farming community.

"In 1889 a Government report observed that the little settlement had flourished and was producing wine and fruit – all this on land dismissed by British colonists as barren and unproductive.

"By the early twentieth century the fledgling settlement had also established a small silk industry, winning awards at trade fairs in Chicago and Milan.

"But the place was too remote to sustain its early growth and by the middle of the century it had dwindled to a handful of ageing settlers. Grapevines, wells, fences and an enlarged map of the world carved into the schoolyard grounds were all that remained of this reconstructed Italian Village.

"Today the New Italy has an important new role as home to the popular New Italy Museum, which holds regular events commemorating the pioneers and their contribution to Australia," he said.

Dr Refshauge said the NSW Government was providing \$5,000 to assist the Museum and the Italo-Australian community in the development of historic tours trails and signs at New Italy.

"This museum stands as a vibrant and living monument to the important contributions made by Italian migrants, past and present, to the identity of NSW, the North Coast and Australia. This funding will help preserve New Italy's history for future generations.

"It also reminds us of the generosity of the Government of the day which assisted passage to these refugee families – allowing them to start a new life.

"We cannot underestimate the contribution of the Italian community, and indeed that of many other ethnic communities, to our rich and varied heritage.

"Across NSW there are many ethnic communities that have made a rich contribution to our history and character - Italians have long played an important role in the history of the State.

“New Italy is evidence that while Australia did not attract large numbers of Italian immigrants until the 1950s, Italian contacts with Australia actually date much earlier.

“The recognition, exploration and celebration of our multicultural heritage, such as the New Italy settlement site, is one of my key priorities as Minister responsible for heritage.

“The recent census reported that one fifth of Australia’s population was born overseas.

“Of these, Italy was the third main country of birth of Australians and Italian is still the most popular language other than English spoken at home.”

“I want the State Heritage Register to reflect our exciting cultural diversity,” Dr Refshauge said.

New Italy was identified as an important place for the Italo-Australian community during the intensive Heritage Office community consultations in 1998/9. Local communities nominate places to the Register which demonstrate the significant contribution of ethnic communities to NSW history and culture.

This initial listing encompasses two small parcels of land of what was actually a much larger site originally settled by the Italian group. A recently completed conservation management plan for the New Italy Settlement site will assist the local community manage this place and enable the New Italy story to be told to new generations of Australians.

**Contact: Lisa McLean 02 9228 4499 or 0402 313 078**