



NSW Heritage Strategy

Sustaining the past for the future – Draft for public exhibition

Department of Climate Change,
Energy, the Environment and Water



Acknowledgement of Country

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

This resource may contain images or names of deceased persons in photographs or historical content.

© 2025 State of NSW and Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

With the exception of photographs, the State of NSW and Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (the department) are pleased to allow this material to be reproduced in whole or in part for educational and non-commercial use, provided the meaning is unchanged and its source, publisher and authorship are acknowledged. Specific permission is required to reproduce photographs.

Learn more about our copyright and disclaimer at www.environment.nsw.gov.au/copyright

Cover photo: Street art in Cabramatta, Sydney, NSW: Jaime Plaza Van Roon/DCCEEW; p 5 (clockwise from top left) John Spencer/DCCEEW, Destination NSW, Adam Hollingworth/DCCEEW, Destination NSW, Bronwyn Hanna, [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Adam_Hollingworth.jpg), State Library of New South Wales; p 10 Camping up the top of Warrumbungle Ranges with lightning in the distance: Ian Tyley/DCCEEW

Published by:

Environment and Heritage

Department of Climate Change,
Energy, the Environment and Water

Locked Bag 5022, Parramatta NSW 2124

Phone: +61 2 9995 5000 (switchboard)

Phone: 1300 361 967 (Environment and Heritage enquiries)

TTY users: phone 133 677, then ask for 1300 361 967

Speak and listen users: phone 1300 555 727, then ask for 1300 361 967

Email info@environment.nsw.gov.au

Website www.environment.nsw.gov.au

ISBN 978-1-923200-74-6

EH 2025/0159

May 2025

Find out more at:

environment.nsw.gov.au



Contents

- Minister’s foreword 1
- Aboriginal cultural heritage statement 2
- Snapshot of the State Heritage Register 5
- Introduction 6
 - Why conserve heritage? 7
 - What the draft strategy will do 7
 - Who we have listened to so far 8
- Strategy on a page 11
- Our objectives 12
 - Objective 1: Embrace and reflect the diversity of our heritage 13
 - Objective 2: Empower owners to conserve heritage 16
 - Objective 3: Realise the benefits of heritage 19
 - Objective 4: Improve the state heritage system 22
- What comes next 26
- Glossary of terms 27
- References 28

Minister's foreword

New South Wales has never before had a strategy to recognise, protect, enhance and celebrate our heritage. I am delighted to present the first ever NSW Heritage Strategy as a draft for public consultation.

Heritage is no longer focused on old buildings, although we love these too.

Our understanding and appreciation of heritage, and how we recognise and celebrate our past, is changing.

Our community is made of many diverse parts. The NSW Government recognises that we live on land that has been cared for over thousands of years. This cultural heritage is an intrinsic part of how First Nations people have cared for Country. The richness of our history and culture is reflected in how we choose to recognise heritage. This draft strategy asks us to talk about what that means in practice.

This strategy comes at a time of challenge and change in New South Wales, when we consider how to build the housing we need. I believe that Heritage forms a crucial part of these discussions – a means to enhance housing and contribute to the creation of vibrant communities for people across the state.

For many people in New South Wales, heritage means much more than protecting historic precincts and buildings. While conservation remains critical, we need to expand our heritage thinking. We need to encompass storytelling, engaging with cultural traditions and acknowledging different experiences of the past if we are to fully recognise the story of New South Wales.

This strategy will help the NSW Government better support communities to celebrate, commemorate and conserve their heritage, and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to share the benefits that heritage brings.

The strategy champions activation and adaptive reuse of heritage places and spaces for the significant social and economic benefits such work can achieve. It will also help support environmental sustainability, development of new housing and public infrastructure and both ongoing and new uses of our heritage places and precincts so they are fit for the future.

The *Heritage Act 1977* provides a framework for the protection of state significant heritage. The strategy identifies opportunities to improve this framework so it can better protect the important heritage of New South Wales. It also highlights the need to improve the interactions between the heritage and planning systems to meet the challenges of delivering new housing while conserving heritage.

I am excited to present this draft strategy and I encourage all members of the community to provide feedback via the [Have your say webpage](#).

This is a conversation we need to have together.

The Hon Penny Sharpe MP, Minister for Heritage

Aboriginal cultural heritage statement

Aboriginal cultural heritage is the foundation of the state's heritage.

Aboriginal cultural heritage includes the diverse practices, knowledge, places and objects that are of significance to Aboriginal people, because of the traditions, Lore, cultural practices, beliefs and history tied to them.

Aboriginal cultural heritage is dynamic, diverse and continuously evolving. It is deeply rooted in relationships that have stood since time immemorial between Aboriginal people and the lands, waterways and seas to which they are connected, known as 'Country'. This concept of Country goes beyond the physical landscape to encompass the spiritual connections and cultural responsibilities that Aboriginal people maintain towards their land and heritage.

This strategy focuses on work under the *Heritage Act 1977*. This includes state-significant Aboriginal cultural heritage places and items on the State Heritage Register that are protected and celebrated for their intrinsic worth and the cultural benefits they bring to current and future generations.

Despite the profound effects of colonisation, which have reshaped the landscape and introduced new heritage narratives, the enduring and intrinsic Aboriginal cultural heritage values have persisted and continue to enrich our understanding of the land and its people. All too often, however, the stories we tell about places do not do justice in recognising and respecting these values.

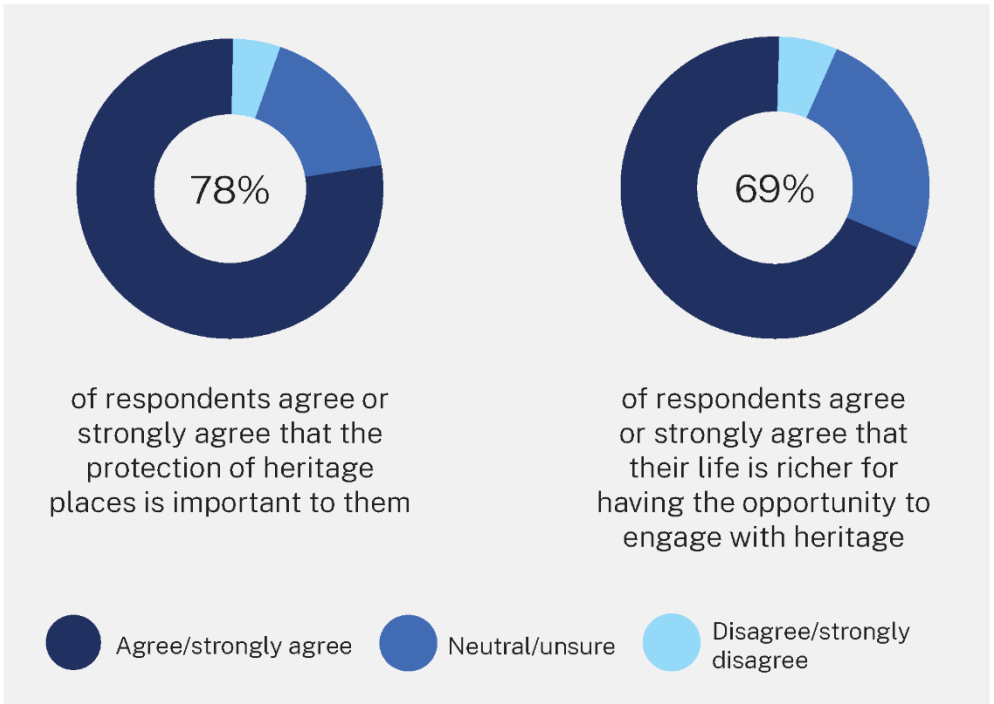
The strategy seeks to address this in principle and in action. The strategy is informed by the principles of *Dhawura Ngilan*, including recognising Indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights and upholding the principle of free, prior and informed consent. It places the continuing cultural connections Aboriginal people hold to Country at the forefront of heritage conservation, commemoration, and celebration. Central to this is the importance of truth telling – supporting Aboriginal people to share the stories they want to tell in the ways they want to tell them.

By ensuring that the voices of Aboriginal people are heard and recognised, the strategy aims to elevate Aboriginal perspectives so that the NSW heritage system reflects the complex, and at times difficult, stories of the peoples that make up the whole of the NSW community.



Brewarrina Fish Traps, Brewarrina (Destination NSW)

Heritage in NSW at a glance



\$14 billion
spent by cultural and heritage visitors in NSW

13.6 million
people visited NSW to experience culture and heritage

300%
return on investment from NSW Heritage Grants

Why is heritage important to you?



It connects us to the past



It creates a sense of belonging to a place or Country



Retaining and reusing heritage places contributes to sustainable development



It should be preserved for future generations



It adds to the character of a place

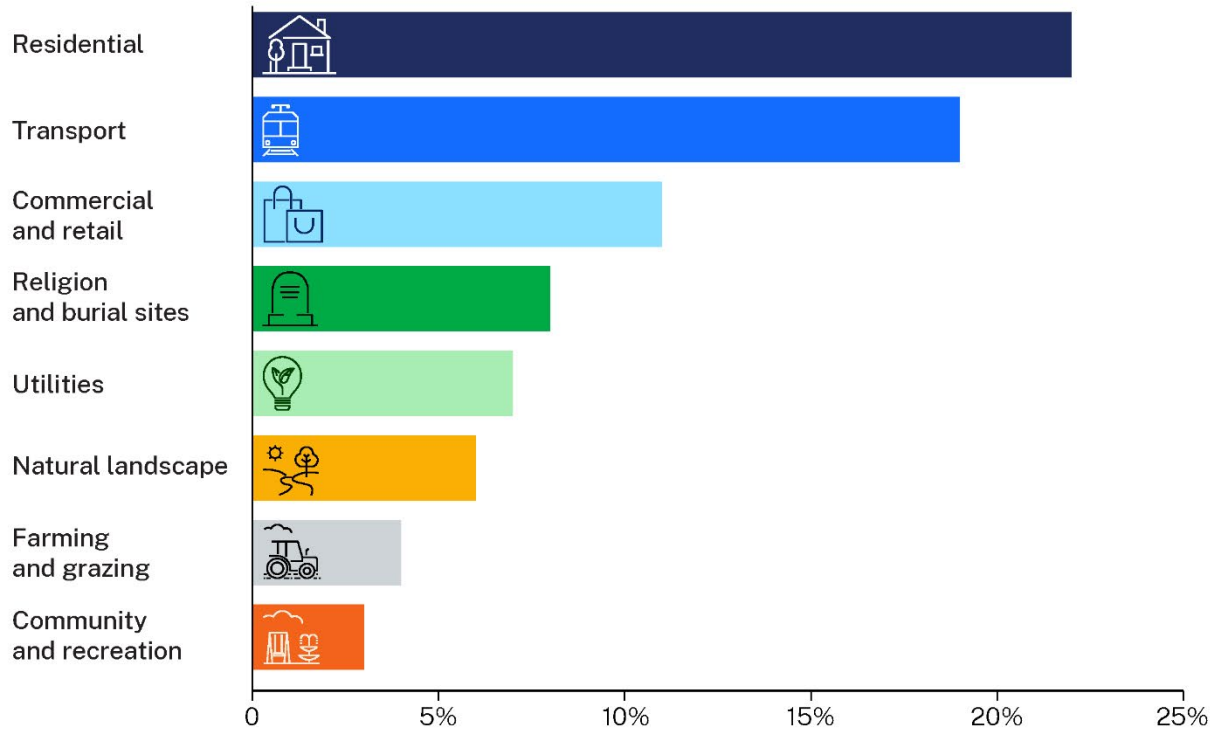


I appreciate architectural features and/or design

Source: Valuing Heritage in NSW Interim Report, CaPPRe, April 2024; Cultural and Heritage Tourism to NSW, Destination NSW, 2019; Heritage NSW data, 2024; Have Your Say Survey, Heritage NSW, 2024; Photo: Paddington Reservoir Gardens (Destination NSW)

Heritage in NSW at a glance

The State Heritage Register has 1,797 listings. The chart shows the top 8 item groups, which refers to the item's main use related to its heritage significance.



Source: State Heritage Inventory, May 2025. Approximate values based on information available

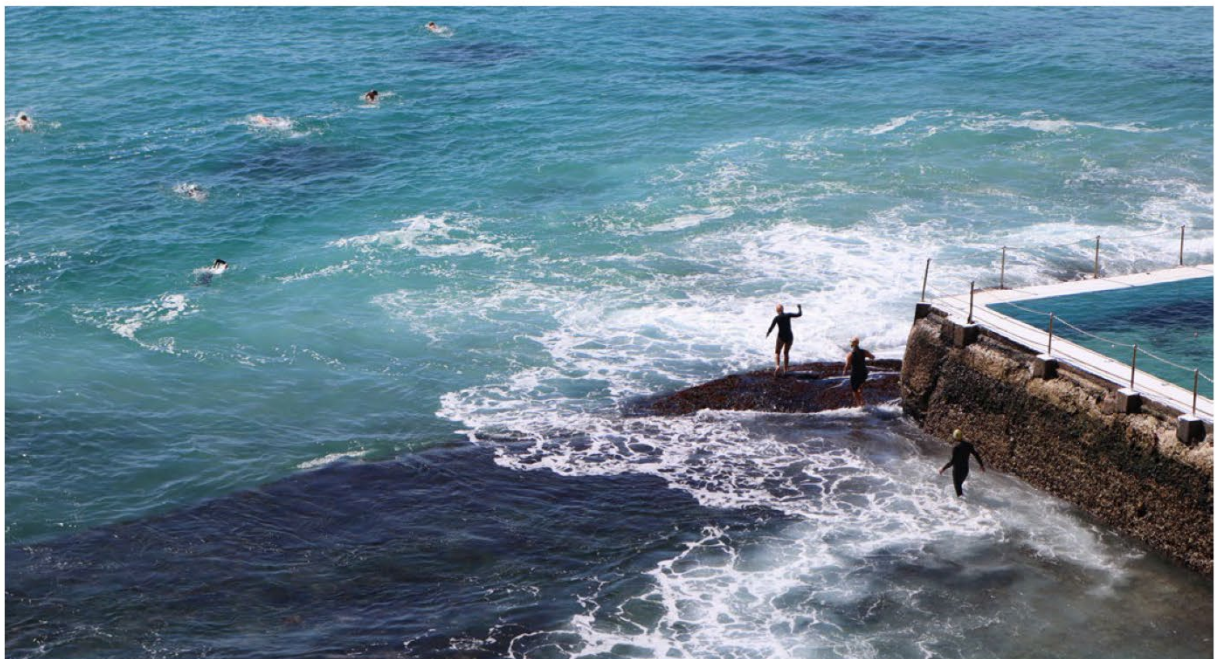


Photo: Bondi Beach (Camilla Theakstone/DPHI)

Snapshot of the State Heritage Register



Gondwana Rainforests, which are also on the World Heritage List, are an outstanding display of the geological history of the earth and its biodiversity. Rainforests in Australia contain half of all Australian plant families and about a third of Australia's mammal and bird species.



The **Olympic Cauldron**, now at Olympic Park in Sydney, is the youngest item on the State Heritage Register. The image of the lit cauldron flowing with fire and water as it rose around gold-medallist Cathy Freeman is one of the most memorable moments of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games.



Davidson Whaling Station in Eden, operating from 1828 to 1930, was the longest continuous shore-based whaling site in the world. The Yuin people, the area's original inhabitants, taught the European whalers to use orcas to herd whales into Twofold Bay, part of the reason for the station's success.



The **Cyprus-Hellene Club** in Sydney was the site of the Day of Mourning protests by Aboriginal activists on 26 January 1938 to mark 150 years of colonisation. It was the first national protest by Aboriginal people for equal rights and was a key moment in a significant and ongoing political movement.



Built in 1887, the **Broken Hill Mosque** is the oldest mosque in New South Wales. It was founded by 'Afghan' cameleers, who had migrated from Asia and the Middle East, and were instrumental in delivering food and building infrastructure across outback New South Wales.



Built in 1935, **Luna Park** amusement park in Sydney transformed a major transport interchange and industrial site into an art deco celebration of colour and fantasy and continues to be an iconic landmark on Sydney's harbour foreshore.

Introduction

Heritage is not just about the past. It is also about the future. Each decision we make about what we conserve and protect and the way we use these things will be felt by future generations. Heritage is part of our everyday lives and contributes to the creation of unique neighbourhoods and precincts, enhanced social connections within communities, and vibrant and distinctive spaces and places we visit, use and enjoy.

Heritage in New South Wales is protected through a framework of legislation and policy administered by the NSW Government and local councils. This framework has not had a significant update in over 20 years. It needs to evolve to respond to our changing community and changing understandings of heritage. It also needs to address new and evolving pressures that heritage faces.

Heritage conservation faces many challenges. How do we balance heritage protection with the need to provide new housing and development? How do we weigh heritage conservation with the need to adapt and use sites in ways that benefit contemporary society? How do we ensure the heritage we protect reflects the history and experience of the NSW community? Importantly, we also need to consider how we prioritise funding for heritage in parallel with other pressing state priorities, such as climate change, housing, education and health.

Getting this balance right is difficult and often contested. Yet by having these debates and discussions, we can make our communities and our plans stronger by making sure diverse voices and views are heard. The draft Heritage Strategy has been prepared to invite the NSW community to have a say about these issues. It proposes a series of high-level actions to set heritage conservation, protection and engagement on a new path in New South Wales – a path that is fit for today and for the future.

NSW Housing Reforms

The NSW Government has committed to a 5-year target of delivering 377,000 new dwellings across the state by 2029 as part of its commitment to the National Housing Accord. Led by the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, new planning controls and approval pathways have been introduced to support the delivery of well-designed and sustainable homes across New South Wales. State Heritage Register listed items will continue to be protected by the *Heritage Act 1977*, while individual local heritage items will continue to be protected under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*.

Why conserve heritage?

Heritage in New South Wales includes the places and objects we have inherited from the past and want to protect for future generations. Our heritage includes landscapes, buildings and structures, archaeological sites and relics, objects and shipwrecks.

But heritage is more than physical things. It is also the social values, stories and meanings associated with those places and objects that individuals and communities hold and wish to pass on to future generations. Heritage includes tens of thousands of years of Aboriginal culture and history, which is still evolving and dynamic. It also includes the cultural practices, knowledge and traditions that communities treasure and want to continue into the future.

The value of heritage extends beyond conserving the past. It contributes to our sense of identity and belonging, and to our health and wellbeing. It can enhance our neighbourhoods by supporting the development of quality homes and communities. Heritage conservation supports the NSW economy through tourism and the provision of community and commercial spaces. It contributes to environmental sustainability through embodied energy and green space. Importantly, heritage allows us to reflect on and learn from our past, from how we lived and how this changed over time, to the mistakes we made and to our successes. These reminders of where we have come from help to frame our understanding of who we are now, and they only grow more significant as time passes.

What the draft strategy will do

The strategy focuses on heritage protected under the *Heritage Act 1977*. This includes state-significant Aboriginal cultural heritage, natural heritage, places, buildings, landscapes, archaeological relics and sites, shipwrecks and objects. Determining whether heritage is state-significant is guided by the expertise of the Heritage Council of NSW and the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee.

Local heritage is the responsibility of local councils across New South Wales and is protected under the *Environmental Planning & Assessment Act 1979*. This strategy considers local heritage within the context of strengthening existing intersections with the state heritage system.

The *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* protects Aboriginal objects and declared Aboriginal Places along with natural and cultural heritage within areas reserved under the Act. Heritage protected under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act* is out of scope of the strategy except where it is also listed on the State Heritage Register under the *Heritage Act 1977*.

The draft strategy sets out a vision and direction for protecting heritage in New South Wales and establishes a broad set of actions the NSW Government proposes to carry out to achieve that vision over the next 5 years.

The strategy has links to other NSW Government programs and priorities, including the housing reforms, Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, Creative Communities policy and Vibrancy Reforms. It is designed to complement separate forthcoming reforms to Aboriginal cultural heritage laws in New South Wales (including the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*).

This strategy has been informed by the findings and recommendations of the 2021 Upper House Inquiry into the *Heritage Act 1977* (Heritage Act) and the 2023 audit of Heritage NSW's oversight and administration of state heritage assets.

Heritage NSW, in the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, will implement the strategy. Some of the actions will be carried out in partnership with other NSW Government agencies.

Your feedback on this draft strategy will help us develop a final strategy that meets the aspirations and needs of the NSW community and sets the framework for protecting heritage in the years to come.

Who we have listened to so far

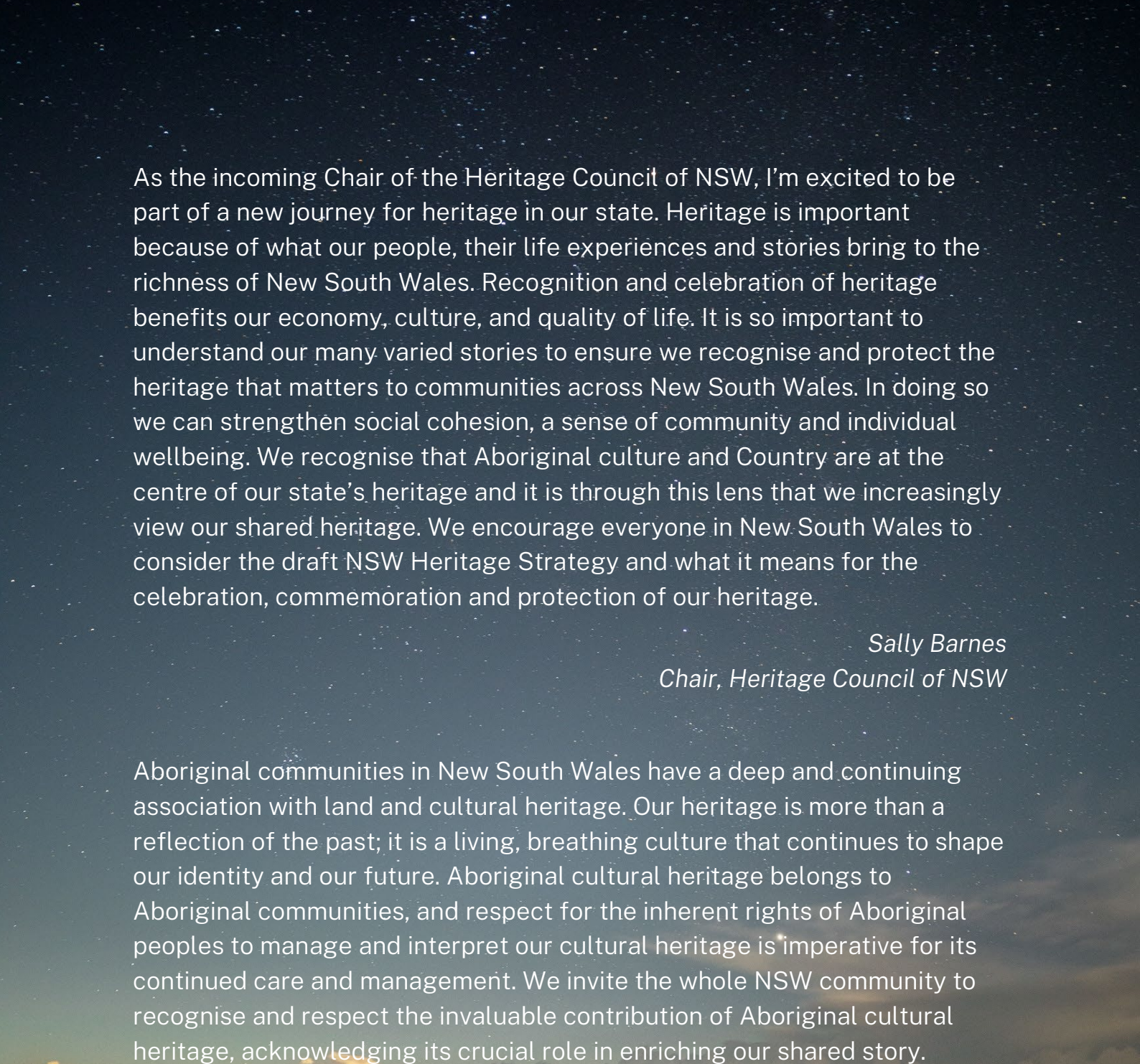
In developing this draft strategy, Heritage NSW has listened to the views of people from across the heritage sector, advocacy groups, government, and the broader community. From August 2023 to April 2024, we heard from over 1,750 people and groups through:

- a ministerial roundtable with delegates to the International Committee on Monuments and Sites General Assembly and Scientific Symposium
- over 1,400 responses to an online survey open to the public through *Have your say*
- workshops with representatives from heritage, property and planning and Aboriginal peak bodies, local government, advocacy groups, professionals, consultants and academics
- focus group research with members of the NSW community from diverse backgrounds, and owners and managers of State Heritage Register items
- in-depth interviews with members of culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- a youth roundtable
- meetings with the Heritage Council of NSW, the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee, NSW government agencies, and heritage officials from other jurisdictions across Australia and New Zealand.

Heritage NSW asked people to reflect on 3 main questions:

1. Why is heritage important to you?
2. What do you see as the main challenges for heritage in New South Wales?
3. What do you see as the most exciting opportunities for heritage in New South Wales?

The insights, feedback and suggestions gained through this extensive engagement have directly informed the strategy's principles, objectives and actions.



As the incoming Chair of the Heritage Council of NSW, I'm excited to be part of a new journey for heritage in our state. Heritage is important because of what our people, their life experiences and stories bring to the richness of New South Wales. Recognition and celebration of heritage benefits our economy, culture, and quality of life. It is so important to understand our many varied stories to ensure we recognise and protect the heritage that matters to communities across New South Wales. In doing so we can strengthen social cohesion, a sense of community and individual wellbeing. We recognise that Aboriginal culture and Country are at the centre of our state's heritage and it is through this lens that we increasingly view our shared heritage. We encourage everyone in New South Wales to consider the draft NSW Heritage Strategy and what it means for the celebration, commemoration and protection of our heritage.

*Sally Barnes
Chair, Heritage Council of NSW*



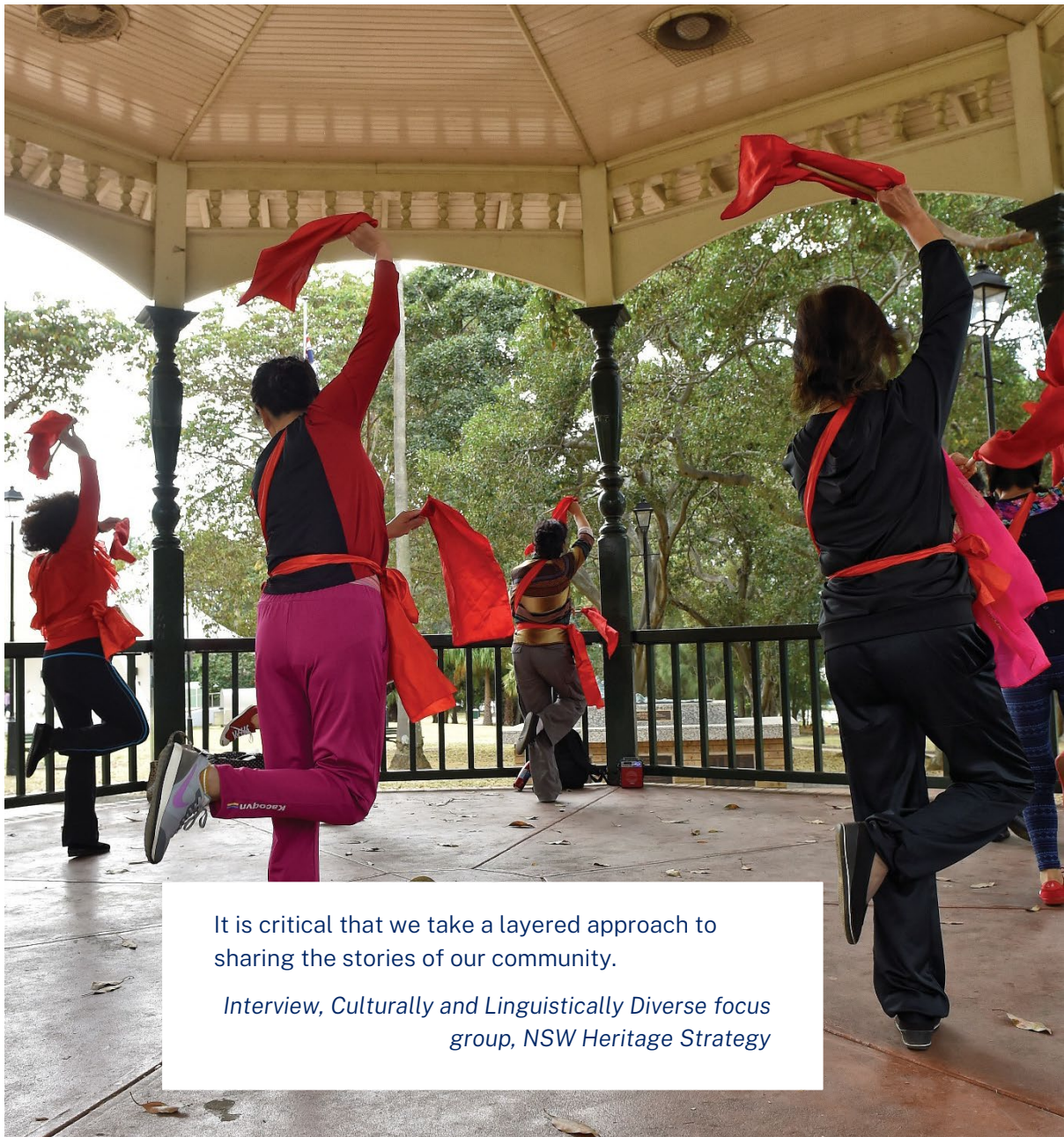
Aboriginal communities in New South Wales have a deep and continuing association with land and cultural heritage. Our heritage is more than a reflection of the past; it is a living, breathing culture that continues to shape our identity and our future. Aboriginal cultural heritage belongs to Aboriginal communities, and respect for the inherent rights of Aboriginal peoples to manage and interpret our cultural heritage is imperative for its continued care and management. We invite the whole NSW community to recognise and respect the invaluable contribution of Aboriginal cultural heritage, acknowledging its crucial role in enriching our shared story.

*Steven Meredith
Presiding Member, NSW Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee*

Strategy on a page

Vision	Heritage is valued as an integral part of the culture and wellbeing of our communities and our sense of place			
Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal cultural heritage is the foundation of all heritage in NSW • Heritage is diverse, dynamic and beneficial to our wellbeing • Community voices are critical to understanding heritage significance • Heritage is conserved for everyone • Change and innovation are essential to heritage conservation 			
Objectives	1 Embrace and reflect the diversity of our heritage	2 Empower owners to conserve heritage	3 Realise the benefits of heritage	4 Improve the State heritage system
Actions	1.1 Recognise a broader range of stories and values	2.1 Support owners and the community to care for heritage	3.1 Promote activation, adaptive reuse and sustainability	4.1 Establish a more robust State Heritage Register
	1.2 Increase the accessibility of our heritage system and places	2.2 Assist government to manage heritage	3.2 Strengthen the alignment between the heritage and planning systems	4.2 Modernise the heritage framework

Our objectives



Chinese Waist Drum Art Troupe in Burwood Park, Burwood Road, Inner West Sydney NSW (detail) (Adam Hollingworth/DCCEEW)

Objective 1: Embrace and reflect the diversity of our heritage

New South Wales is diverse. More than 275 different languages are spoken in New South Wales (NSW Government n.d.). Just under 17% of the NSW population has a disability (ABS 2018) and 36.9% of people are under the age of 30 (ABS 2021). Yet we know that many communities do not see themselves reflected in the heritage we conserve. We also know there are a range of cultural, social and physical barriers that affect access to heritage.

These barriers are also true for Aboriginal communities. Despite Aboriginal cultural heritage being the first heritage of Australia, the places, stories and experiences of Aboriginal communities are not adequately recognised. Engagement with Aboriginal people about their heritage is fundamental to recognising the history, stories and practices at the centre of our state's heritage.

If heritage is to be meaningful and a true reflection of our past, it must encompass the multitude of our state's stories and experiences. We need to seek out and improve our recognition of the diverse cultures, stories and traditions that have shaped New South Wales, including those that have their roots in other parts of the world. We need to consider new and different types of heritage that might resonate more deeply with certain communities. By reducing these barriers, we aim to enable everyone to access and connect with our state heritage items, places and practices.

Heritage delivers many benefits to communities, including by contributing to social cohesion and the physical character of places. For everyone to experience these benefits they need to feel welcome to connect with the heritage around them, and to see themselves reflected in the stories we preserve and the heritage we protect.

What we heard

- Heritage is more than buildings. Government can do more to respond to community values and understandings of heritage.
- Communities want to connect with their heritage and see themselves reflected in the heritage protected in New South Wales.
- Intangible cultural heritage, such as cultural practices and traditions, is important to NSW communities.
- Diverse and marginalised groups face barriers to participating in heritage. These communities do not always feel welcome in heritage places.
- The State Heritage Register does not reflect NSW community diversity, particularly the stories of women, migrant communities and marginalised groups.
- The register does not adequately recognise Aboriginal culture and history.

Case study: recognising the Sydney Mardi Gras Parade Route

The State Heritage Register listing of the Sydney Mardi Gras Parade Route is a creative use of the limited options available under the current system to recognise cultural practices significant to New South Wales.

The listing gave formal recognition to the cultural significance of Sydney Mardi Gras, where LGBTQIA+ protest and activism played out in public open space from 1978, provoking diverse reactions and meaningful legal and societal change. Unlike most State Heritage Register items, the listing does not seek to protect important buildings or landscapes but, rather, recognises the event itself, its history and its importance to New South Wales.

While successful in this case, the existing system is not generally suited to the recognition of this type of heritage. Developing other ways of recognising and supporting intangible cultural heritage would allow for more of the diverse social and cultural history of New South Wales to be recognised.



Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras 2019, Sydney (Jeffrey Feng)

Oxford Street and its surrounds have a deep-rooted connection to the equality movement in Australia and have long been a safe space for our communities to gather, celebrate and protest. State heritage recognition of the parade route is an international statement on the importance of creating and protecting LGBTQIA+ spaces.

– Albert Kruger, former CEO, Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras

Objective 1 actions

1.1 Recognise a broader range of stories and values to better represent the history of New South Wales

We will do this by:

- working with Aboriginal communities to find opportunities for truth-telling and healing, in accordance with the principles of *Dhawura Ngilan*
- working with diverse communities to understand and recognise the stories and places that are important to them
- initiating a Minister's Thematic Nominations program to address gaps in the State Heritage Register
- recognising and supporting a broader range of heritage, including cultural practices and traditions
- reflecting diverse histories and values in future State Heritage Register listings.

These actions will:

- support Aboriginal communities' wellbeing and connections to Country
- improve understanding and recognition of the history and heritage of diverse communities
- support social cohesion by fostering community understanding and sense of belonging to places
- encourage community connections with heritage through an emphasis on stories and intangible cultural heritage
- improve the relevance of the heritage we recognise and protect to all people and communities across New South Wales.

1.2 Increase the accessibility of our heritage system and places to ensure more people can participate in the heritage of New South Wales

We will do this by:

- working with diverse communities to identify and address cultural, social and physical barriers to engaging with heritage
- providing better guidance to heritage owners and managers on how to improve access to heritage places
- investing in digital opportunities to improve accessibility to heritage.

These actions will:

- support participation in heritage conservation and visitation by addressing systemic barriers to inclusion and physical access
- make the heritage system more equitable so that the social, economic and wellbeing benefits of heritage are more evenly spread across communities
- improve access to and knowledge of the state's heritage through a strengthened online presence.

Objective 2: Empower owners to conserve heritage

The protection of our important heritage places and objects relies on the time, effort and care of owners and managers of heritage items – from individual private owners, Aboriginal and community organisations and NSW Government agencies, to local communities and volunteers. Local governments also play a key role in managing heritage.

The NSW Government assists these groups through education, guidance, advice and funding, but further support is needed. There are opportunities for government to provide more incentives and support to owners and to better assist local government in its role. A renewed focus on supporting owners would improve heritage conservation across the state and increase opportunities to adapt, activate and engage with heritage.

The NSW Government is a significant owner and custodian of the state's heritage. Around 40% of items on the State Heritage Register are managed by NSW Government agencies. Government owners have the difficult task of balancing the needs and costs of heritage conservation with delivering essential services to the NSW community. We are still working to get this balance right.

A new approach to managing public heritage is needed to support government agencies to deliver the best outcomes for the NSW community. The use and adaptive re-use of existing buildings presents an opportunity to demonstrate NSW Government leadership in sustainability, emissions reduction and green credentials. A more thoughtful approach to the management of underutilised government assets could deliver important community housing, amenity and wellbeing gains.

What we heard

- More resources, assistance and training are needed across the heritage system in New South Wales to better support heritage owners and managers.
- Cost is a disincentive to owning and looking after heritage and contributes significantly to disrepair.
- Funding for heritage conservation was the most selected focus area for government in the NSW Heritage Strategy survey, with support for communities to protect and conserve heritage coming in third.
- The NSW Government Heritage Grants program is consistently oversubscribed with demand outstripping supply in most categories.
- Grant funding is one of the few financial incentives available to heritage owners to help with heritage conservation. It is not open to state agencies.
- The shortage of skilled heritage tradespeople is particularly acute in regional areas and contributes to the costs of owning heritage.
- The 2021 Heritage Act inquiry heard strong community expectations that government should be doing more to model best practice heritage ownership.

Case study: bringing Malachi Gilmore Hall back to life

With the help of grant funding, the Malachi Gilmore Hall in Oberon has been reinstated as a vibrant venue for the social and artistic life of the town. The success of this project demonstrates the power of supporting heritage owners to bring disused heritage places back to life.

The Malachi Gilmore Hall is a beloved Art Deco building which served the Oberon community for many years as a cinema, dance hall, meeting place and, later on, a wool store. The building is listed on the State Heritage Register but fell into disrepair in recent years and was no longer being used. With the support of 2 NSW Heritage Grants, the new owners of the hall are undertaking conservation works to secure this important heritage place into the future. They have also held a series of cultural events to revive the community's memories and stories of the hall.



Dancing at Malachi Gilmore Hall (Stuart Cohen for Heritage NSW)

...in light of the immense public benefit that heritage provides to the community, there needs to be far greater incentives to owners... the owners and custodians of the state's most significant places deserve a much better deal.

- 2021 Heritage Act inquiry submission, excerpt

Objective 2 actions

2.1 Support owners and the community to care for heritage

We will do this by:

- reshaping the heritage grants program to achieve greater impact
- hosting an annual forum for heritage professionals to connect and share information and best practice
- improving information and guidance for heritage owners and managers
- investigating ways to regenerate heritage trade skills.

These actions will:

- improve conservation of heritage across New South Wales and help realise the economic and social benefits accruing from heritage
- demonstrate a clear commitment by government to supporting the conservation efforts of private heritage owners
- improve the experiences of owners and managers of private heritage items through better support and funding.

2.2 Assist government to improve conservation of public assets

We will do this by:

- helping NSW Government agencies prioritise their heritage assets for conservation and funding to ensure limited resources are focused on delivering the best heritage outcomes
- offering tailored regulatory approaches for some maintenance and repair works
- providing specialised heritage support, advice and guidance to agencies to build capacity and promote exemplary heritage management
- investigating options to support activation and adaptive reuse of NSW Government-owned heritage, including a framework to secure ongoing use of assets that no longer meet the agency's service delivery needs.

These actions will:

- ensure the most significant state-owned heritage assets are well conserved and maintained
- ensure that limited agency resources are used to deliver the greatest public benefit in conserving the state's most important stories
- streamline approvals for some maintenance and repair works to publicly owned assets
- increase NSW Government capacity to lead by example in using, adapting and activating heritage
- provide pathways to activate disused publicly owned heritage assets for community access, benefit and enjoyment.

Objective 3: Realise the benefits of heritage

The places we live in have evolved over time to respond to the needs and circumstances of successive generations. Tensions sometimes exist between what can be seen as the competing priorities of retaining heritage and new development. Yet with good planning this tension can lead to innovative, well-designed solutions that respect the heritage and character of an area while delivering new homes and services.

Heritage conservation improves urban amenity and sense of place. As the government's housing reforms deliver more new homes, it is vital to the character of our communities that we incorporate heritage places into new developments. Changes to how heritage is considered in local and strategic planning could help us do this better.

We know heritage contributes to culture, wellbeing, sustainability, the economy and tourism. Articulating and promoting these benefits will help broaden public narratives about heritage and allow its value to be more accurately understood and considered in government and commercial decisions.

Heritage can contribute to sustainability through preserving embodied energy and providing green space, but adapting heritage places to make them more sustainable can be challenging. Fostering considered adaptation and activation will enable heritage to play a useful and enriching role in community life into the future.

What we heard

- There is a need to shift public narratives about heritage to recognise and emphasise the broader urban amenity, social, cultural and wellbeing benefits of heritage and how heritage can work with, rather than against, future growth.
- Caring for Country has strong links to the wellbeing of Aboriginal communities.
- Adaptive reuse of heritage items has economic benefits. It can trigger the renewal of surrounding areas to benefit the whole community.
- Heritage should be considered early in the planning system – at the strategic planning stage and in development proposals.
- Heritage can play a role in climate change mitigation, but more guidance is needed for making heritage places more sustainable.
- Local heritage decisions would benefit from further guidance.
- More than 74% of NSW Heritage Strategy survey respondents identified urban development/land-use pressure as a challenge for heritage.
- Heritage offers unrealised opportunities for tourism in regional areas.

Case study: Heathcote Hall adapted for a growing city

The redevelopment of Heathcote Hall in Sydney's south is an example of how heritage and development can co-exist in a growing Sydney. The Italianate villa is being restored to its former glory, while other areas of the site will provide new homes for the community. This combination of restoration and redevelopment shows the potential of heritage activation in preserving important aspects of the past while also enabling change and growth suited for our current needs.

Built in 1887 as a family home, Heathcote Hall has been listed on the State Heritage Register since 1999. The listing describes it as 'one of the oldest and greatest buildings in the Sutherland Shire', with its imposing tower providing a prominent landmark for the area. However, over the years the building had deteriorated, leaving it in poor physical condition.

In 2019, the development of 35 townhouses and 20 apartments was approved for the space surrounding the main building, which was itself also approved for redevelopment as housing. As a condition of the approval, the villa itself was restored. Heritage NSW worked with the developers to ensure new development was respectful of its historic setting. Interpretation plaques placed around the site now help to tell its story.



Heathcote Hall, Sutherland Shire (Tim Smith/DCCEEW)

It is cool to be able to reuse that stuff. See the old become new again.

- Disability focus group participant, 2024

Objective 3 actions

3.1 Promote and incentivise activation and sustainability to realise the opportunities of state heritage items

We will do this by:

- supporting heritage activation through changes to the Heritage Act
- providing incentives to support and promote the adaptation, activation and ongoing use of heritage items, including for environmental sustainability and to mitigate the impacts of climate change
- building an evidence base about the value of heritage to underpin future government investment in heritage conservation and activation.

These actions will:

- increase certainty for heritage owners that activation, reuse, climate adaptation and sustainability upgrades of heritage items are achievable and supported by the Heritage Act
- make it easier for heritage owners to realise the economic benefits of their properties while ensuring heritage is appropriately conserved
- boost regional tourism, contributing to the regeneration of regional economies
- improve public amenity and strengthen community connection, civic pride and identity
- allow heritage to be accurately valued for its social, economic and environmental benefits.

3.2 Improve the alignment between heritage and the planning system to increase community confidence in decisions affecting state and local heritage

We will do this by:

- developing clear guidance for local councils on identifying, managing and regulating local heritage
- supporting implementation of housing reforms to achieve a positive benefit for heritage
- embedding heritage upfront in local strategic planning.

These actions will:

- better support local councils to protect the character of their areas while allowing for growth and change
- improve development certainty and timeframes through stronger integration of heritage into strategic planning processes
- strengthen opportunities for heritage to contribute to local character of precincts and neighbourhoods, including new development.

Objective 4: Improve the state heritage system

The Heritage Act was created in response to community demands to protect important places from demolition. Nearly 50 years later, the Act's foundations still strongly resonate with the NSW community, but its settings need a refresh to meet the challenges we face today.

The State Heritage Register is the centrepiece of the Heritage Act. The register was introduced in 1999 to establish a comprehensive list of places and objects significant to New South Wales, but it remains a work in progress. While the register has nearly 1,800 entries, it does not reflect the diversity of the NSW population or the breadth of our history. For example, only 58 items are listed primarily for their importance to Aboriginal people. We need to take stock and consider what the register should look like into the future.

Under the Heritage Act, approvals are required for certain activities. During the second half of 2023, 169 such permit applications under the Heritage Act and 412 referrals under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1977* were made, supporting \$3.995 billion in development state-wide. While recent changes have significantly improved the timeliness of these approvals, legislative and administrative changes will help to further streamline and simplify systems for heritage owners and managers to improve certainty for development outcomes and support necessary work to adapt heritage items to improve accessibility and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

We also need to strengthen the Act's compliance and enforcement powers to ensure we can take appropriate action when heritage owners and managers aren't doing the right thing and heritage items are at risk.

What we heard

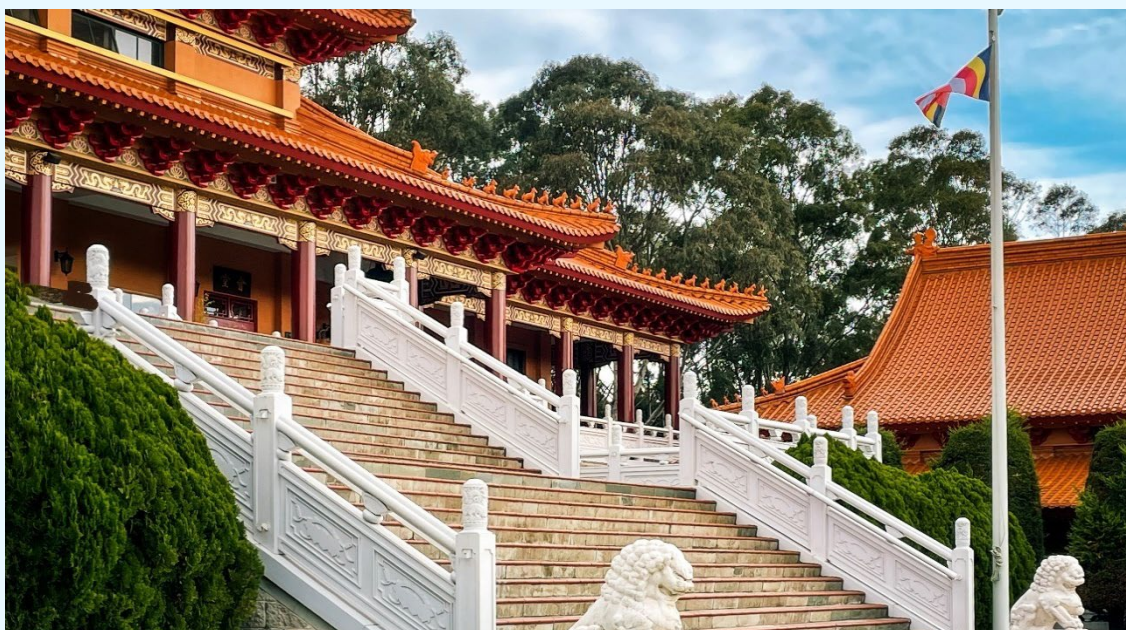
- The Heritage Act does not establish a clear purpose for the State Heritage Register or provide strategic direction for its expansion in the future.
- The State Heritage Register is 'incomplete', but also has items that may not actually be state significant.
- What is regulated and the way it is regulated doesn't always achieve the best results for heritage or owners. The costs and complexity of getting approvals can make owning heritage and making necessary upgrades expensive.
- Aboriginal people should be able to use places listed for their importance to Aboriginal communities for cultural and healing purposes.
- The Heritage Council of NSW needs the right skills and expertise to perform its legislated role as a strong protector of heritage in the state.
- More than 40% of respondents to the Heritage Strategy survey identified legislation and policy as a challenge for heritage in New South Wales. Around half thought government should focus on controls for protecting heritage from development.

Case study: supporting continuing evolution of the Nan Tien temple

Nan Tien temple near Wollongong, a striking expression of Mahayana Buddhism in Australia, has recently been listed on the State Heritage Register. This listing, and others like it, strengthen the representativeness and diversity of the register, broadening the stories we elevate and suggesting more dynamic ways of protecting evolving places.

The beginning of Nan Tien's construction in 1992 signalled a key moment in the way regional NSW cities embraced the cultures of new migrants and the growth of Buddhism. Nan Tien temple has enabled migrants to retain a connection with the cultural philosophies and traditions of their former homeland and to make them known to other Australians. It is also a cultural, education and tourist destination in New South Wales, open to the public, community organisations and visitors, regardless of religion.

Heritage NSW worked with the owners of Nan Tien temple to develop a tailored approach to regulation, which means they do not need approvals under the Heritage Act for certain activities. These 'Site Specific Exemptions' are made in recognition of the social significance of the temple to Buddhist migrants and refugees, and the need for ongoing use. They enable Nan Tien to be recognised as state significant but to continue to change and develop over time.



Nan Tien Temple, Wollongong (Daniela Constantinescu)

This [listing] gives us a sense of belonging to this community.

– The Venerable Manko, Nan Tien Temple abbess

Objective 4 actions

4.1 Establish a more robust State Heritage Register to improve the protection of state-significant heritage in New South Wales

We will do this by:

- defining a clear and relevant purpose for the State Heritage Register
- amending the Heritage Act to ensure the Heritage Council has the expertise needed to fulfil its role
- improving information on the State Heritage Register and aligning listings with the register's purpose.

These actions will:

- set a clear strategic direction for future state heritage listings
- increase the transparency, consistency and usefulness of the State Heritage Register
- improve the effectiveness of the Heritage Council.

4.2 Modernise the heritage framework to build community confidence in heritage protection in New South Wales

We will do this by:

- strengthening government's capacity to monitor and enforce compliance
- developing guidance and other resources to support climate change preparedness
- expanding the use of standard and site-specific exemptions and delegations for State Heritage Register items to:
 - support Aboriginal community use of State Heritage Register places for cultural and healing purposes
 - allow for accessibility upgrades
 - allow for sustainability upgrades and adaptation for climate change mitigation
 - provide tailored regulatory approaches for complex items like moveable heritage and cultural landscapes
 - support government agencies to conserve heritage
- clarifying and simplifying approval systems and guidance.

These actions will:

- increase community confidence in heritage regulation
- reduce regulatory burden and increase certainty for heritage owners and managers
- support Aboriginal communities' connections to culturally important places
- enable more complex heritage items, such as cultural landscapes and moveable heritage, to be listed on the State Heritage Register
- improve conservation of State Heritage Register items, relics and shipwrecks through increased compliance with Heritage Act requirements.

How we learn about heritage has changed and it will continue to change... Having regular conversations with different people about what is important to them, this will be how we re-define what heritage looks like in Australia.

- Participant, Heritage Strategy youth roundtable



Man taking a dip in Dawn Fraser baths in Elkington Park, Balmain (Destination NSW)

What comes next

The NSW Government is seeking feedback on this draft heritage strategy. The public exhibition period is open for 8 weeks via the *Have your say* website at haveyoursay.nsw.gov.au/nsw-heritage-strategy.

Everyone is invited to provide feedback via the website, by filling out the survey, contributing an idea or making a written submission.

Following public exhibition, the strategy will be revised to incorporate feedback provided.

The final strategy document will set out the timeframes and responsibilities for delivering strategy actions.

Glossary of terms

Term	Meaning
2023 Audit	State Heritage Assets: Performance Audit, Audit Office of NSW, 27 June 2023
2021 Inquiry	2021 Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues Inquiry into the <i>Heritage Act 1977</i>
DCCEEW	NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
<i>Dhawura Ngilan</i>	<i>Dhawura Ngilan</i> is a vision statement for the protection and management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, formally adopted by the Heritage Chairs and Officials of Australia and New Zealand https://www.dcceew.gov.au/parks-heritage/heritage/publications/dhawura-ngilan-vision-atsi-heritage
Heritage Act	<i>Heritage Act 1977</i>
Heritage Council	Heritage Council of NSW

References

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2018) Disability, ageing and carers, Australia: summary of findings, Australian Bureau of Statistics website, accessed 20 June 2024.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2021) New South Wales: 2021 Census all persons quickstats, Australian Bureau of Statistics website, accessed 20 June 2024.

NSW Government (n.d.) Key facts about New South Wales, NSW Government website, accessed 20 June 2024.