

**Submission
No 217**

INQUIRY INTO REVIEW OF THE HERITAGE ACT 1977

Name: Mr Warren Fisher

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The Honourable Perter Poulos MLC
Chair
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Mr Poulos

Review of the Heritage Act 1977 (NSW) – Submission by Warren Fisher

Let me begin my submission by giving you an understanding as to where I sit in respect of NSW state politics. As a former NSW Labor supporter, the 2011 election was in my view a long overdue ousting of a manifestly corrupt “insider government.” Moreover, it was a repudiation of a NSW Labor government which had abandoned its traditional policy strengths in the ad hoc pursuit of the privatisation of public assets.

Well here we are some ten years later reviewing the Heritage Act 1977 (NSW).

In the intervening decade we have seen the great public betrayal that is Barangaroo, the global embarrassment that is the Powerhouse Museum project and at the time of writing the utter planning failure and public relations disaster that is Willow Grove.

I submit to you these failures of public policy have occurred for four reasons; the deliberate and systematic weakening of the Heritage Council of NSW through a process of political appointments, the loss of expertise within government departments through a culture of outsourcing, the under-resourcing of heritage departments through what might euphemistically be called cost saving and as a result of the foregoing a tail wagging the dog approach to planning whereby government waits for commercial developers to plan the repurposing of our public assets. Pleasingly no corruption, just neglect and incompetence.

I could add a fifth reason being the disregard for indigenous voices demonstrated most emblematically by the blowing up of a 46,000-year-old cultural site (admittedly in Western Australia).

I further submit to you that public sentiment is such that any government which now seeks to weaken the powers of the Heritage Act to “streamline” the sale of public assets ***will ultimately lose power.***

There is a strong and growing community in NSW giving voice to the celebrated history of the life of Jack Mundey and the Green Bans which saved The Rocks and prevented the Royal Botanic Gardens from being turned into a carpark. I am anything but a communist sympathiser, but do you really think in 50 years we’ll be meeting at the foot of Barangaroo to celebrate the contributions to our city of Messrs O’Farrell and Packer?

The most sensible way forward in this review is to not only maintain protections to private and public assets afforded by The Act but to strengthen and enhance these protections and in so doing lay a platform for public trust. I believe this to be the overwhelming sentiment of NSW voters.

Further, if there are to be changes to The Act they should be made with the express purpose of enlisting the available expertise within the heritage community to proactively plan a future for NSW that is modern in outlook and function while being sensitive to landscape and respectful of the generations who have come before us and to those countless generations who will inherit our decisions.

Faithfully

Warren Fisher