



REVIEW OF THE SYDNEY HARBOUR FEDERATION TRUST (SHFT)

Most of our members will need no reminding of the brilliant and passionate community campaign that led to the establishment of the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust in 2001.

A reminder of the history

During the 1990s land around Sydney Harbour was to be vacated by the Defence Department and put to a variety of uses. Some was to be sold, some put to community purposes and only some was to become parkland. The sites included Middle Head, Georges Heights and Chowder Bay; Cockatoo Island; Woolwich Dock and North Head. Macquarie Lightstation, The Marine Biological Station and Submarine Base Platypus were added later. Snapper Island has not yet been handed over.

In 1996 the Headland Preservation Group (HPG) was formed, led by Linda Bergin and Don Goodsir. Other groups in similarly affected areas around the Harbour were also formed, joining in an umbrella group - the Defenders of Sydney Harbour Foreshores. Membership of the HPG reached 3,000 individuals and included Mosman Parks & Bushland as well as organisations such as the National Trust, the NCC and the RSL.

The vision was to achieve a National Park, not just for Mosman, not just for Sydney, but for all Australians.

The campaign culminated in a great triumph. The passage of the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust Act in 2001 embodied the vision and objectives originally determined by the community, namely the preservation of the Aboriginal, military and environmental heritage of the sites around Sydney Harbour, for the benefit of present and future generations.

It was originally intended that the Harbour Trust would vest after 10 years and the lands handed over to an appropriate State or local government authority. As the end of that period approached it was obvious that the work of the Trust was far from complete.

Extended to 2033

The Headland Preservation Group and The Mosman Parks & Bushland Association lobbied to have the life of the Trust extended. There was an Amendment to the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust Act which extended the life of the Trust to 2033.

In the runup to the recent Federal election, the former Member for Warringah, Tony Abbott, succeeded in obtaining an allocation for the Trust of \$22.3 million - 21.4 million for capital works (10 m for Ten Terminal, 11.4 for Platypus) and \$900,000 for a "review".

THAT REVIEW IS NOW TAKING PLACE

IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT YOU SHOW SUPPORT FOR THE CONTINUATION OF THE HARBOUR TRUST

PLEASE READ ON

2.

PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW

The review is being conducted by the Commonwealth Dept of Environment.

You may wish to refer to the consultation paper and terms of reference which you can access via <http://www.environment.gov.au/about-us/shft-independent-review>

The Sydney Harbour Federation Trust is due to be wound up in 2033

The principle questions being asked are:

1. What is its future? Should it remain a Federal agency or should some of its sites be handed to NSW, for management by the National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS)
2. The conservation and remediation of some of the sites, particularly Cockatoo Island and the buildings at North Head are far from complete and the cost will be substantial. How should they be funded?
3. The Trust derives income from leasing its buildings and from events, but it is not self-funding. What level of commercialization is acceptable?

OUTCOMES

MPBA would like to see the following outcomes

- 1. The retention of the Harbour Trust as a Federally governed agency IN PERPETUITY and the retention of all its sites within that agency.**
 - 2. The guarantee of proper funding to maintain the structure of the Trust, the welfare of its sites, the protection of its heritage and the protection of the areas against inappropriate commercialisation**
 - 3. The retention of its own Act (Sydney Harbour Federation Trust Act 2001), noting its important and succinct objectives**
1. The incredible importance of all the SHFT sites to the aesthetic, historic, Aboriginal, convict and defence heritage and social significance of Sydney Harbour as an international, national and state icon.
 2. The reasons given by the Prime Minister, John Howard, for the creation of the SHFT are still relevant – “Sydney Harbour is one of the great natural beauty spots of our nation. It is the cradle of European settlement in Australia.....and gives immense pride not only to the residents of Sydney, but to all Australians because it wins such wide acclaim around the world.”
 3. The reasons given by the former Federal member Tony Abbott in his 2nd reading speech are still relevant – It will be “one of the greatest national parks in the world. It will be a permanent legacy to the nation. We did not set up this trust to fail. I do not believe that all of the lands within this bill should ultimately be destined for the Sydney Harbour National Park”
 4. All the Trust’s sites have differing aspects of heritage that combine to tell compelling stories about Aboriginal habitation, the struggling colony of NSW, the defence of Sydney Harbour and Australia. These attributes have been spelt out in the Management Plans for each of its sites. The strength of the Trust has been, and still is, its comprehensive “in house” capabilities. It has overseen planning, public consultation, design, tendering, works oversight, project completion, leasing and maintenance, landscaping, marketing

and events. All this has happened under a small, focused Board as required by the Trust Act.

5. The National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) has expected that some of the Trust lands would be returned to the Sydney Harbour National Park. Although we have been impressed recently by the current NSW Minister for the Environment, Mat Kean, and his support for the National Park system, and by the advocacy of the Member for North Shore, Felicity Wilson, for the Sydney Harbour Bondi to Manly Walk, we are not confident that the NPWS could undertake the role that the Trust has undertaken.
 - NPWS is seriously underfunded and in recent years the number of qualified staff has been severely reduced
 - It is subject to constant changes at top levels and in the Department of the Environment
 - Under NPWS management there would be no guarantee that income derived from leasing properties on Trust lands would continue to support the upkeep of these properties. The income could be used on other NPWS holdings or even be absorbed into state revenue.
 - Weaker legislative protection

2. The guarantee of proper funding to maintain the structure of the Trust, the welfare of its sites and the protection of the areas against inappropriate commercialisation

The MPBA does not want to see inappropriate commercial development on nationally significant land. MPBA considers that there is a need for additional funding to ensure appropriate use/leasing of buildings. Without proper funding and a long-term role for the Trust, MPBA considers that the sites and buildings will fall into disrepair and that the Trust will ultimately fail.

3. The retention of its own Act (Sydney Harbour Federation Trust Act 2001), noting its important and succinct objectives.

The Trust is currently protected by its own Act of Parliament (the SHFT Act) and by the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC) as it relates to Commonwealth land. These give better protection than a NSW Act of Parliament which would be easier to change.

The key objectives of the Act are:

- (a) to ensure that management of Trust land contributes to enhancing the amenity of the Sydney Harbour region;
- (b) to protect, conserve and interpret the environmental and heritage values of Trust land;
- (c) to maximise public access to Trust land;
- (d) to establish and manage suitable Trust land as a park on behalf of the Commonwealth as the national government;

The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act 1999) is currently under review, but it plays an important role in strengthening heritage and environmental safeguards on Commonwealth land.

Kate Eccles, President
16th November, 2019