13 October 2013

The Editor
Sydney Morning Herald Online Editor
GPO Box 506
Sydney NSW 2001

By email: letters@smh.com.au

Dear Editor,

PROPOSED SALE OF NSW GOVERNMENT OWNED HERITAGE BUILDINGS IN BRIDGE STREET

Australia ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) is a non-government, not-for-profit organisation of cultural heritage professionals formed in 1976 as a national chapter of ICOMOS International. Australia ICOMOS’ mission is to lead cultural heritage conservation in Australia by raising standards, encouraging debate and generating innovative ideas.

Australia ICOMOS is concerned about the current proposal to sell State owned heritage assets on Bridge Street Sydney. Australia ICOMOS believes that this area of central Sydney (including most of Bridge Street, Macquarie Place and Bulletin Place) is of National Heritage value to Australia and that its future conservation should follow international best practice, including a transparent process that is open to community comment. The precinct was the geographic and administrative centre of the early European colony in Australia and it continues to contribute strongly to our National identity and in particular to the community of NSW, through its outstanding and distinctively Australian urban form and continuing historical government use.

The wonderful sandstone Department of Lands Building (22-33 Bridge Street, Sydney); the Department of Education Building (35-39 Bridge Street, Sydney) and the Chief Secretary's Building (121 Macquarie Street, Sydney) are essential components of this outstanding heritage precinct. The Department of Lands Building in particular is of outstanding heritage value because of its design suited to continuing Government agency use; its exceptionally intact interior planning and detailing; its integral roofscape of domes and lanterns; and its wonderful sandstone facades celebrating not only the work of our skilled tradespeople but in its sculptures in niches on the facades, those who have contributed to the development of NSW and the nation.

The community expects that all Government agencies, including the NSW Government, as the custodians of Australia’s rich and diverse heritage estate, to effectively use and maintain its heritage assets.

Australia has an outstanding international reputation in the field of heritage asset management and the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings to suit contemporary use. Australia ICOMOS urges the NSW State Government to build on this reputation by innovative, well-considered, strategic and transparent processes that ensure the positive conservation and enhancement of State owned assets in the Bridge Street/ Macquarie Place/ Bulletin Place Urban Heritage Area into the future.

Yours faithfully

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President, Australia ICOMOS

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