

## Background

The National Trust of Australia (Queensland) (NTAQ) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Department of the Senate in response to what is proposed for the planning, management, utilisation and disposal of Defence estate assets as part of the, “Inquiry into Management of Defence estate assets” (the inquiry).

Founded in 1963 as a member-based charity, NTAQ has evolved into a public company limited by guarantee. Today we have close to 20,000 members and manage a portfolio which includes 14 unique heritage properties across Queensland, ranging from the iconic Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary in the southeast to Cooktown Museum in the far north.

The NTAQ understand that the Terms of Reference for this inquiry make particular reference to:

- a. *the alignment of Defence estate planning with Australia’s defence requirements;*
- b. *the processes for planning and conducting acquisition, management, development, upgrade and disposal of Defence estate assets;*
- c. *how the requirements of the permanent forces, reserve forces and cadet units are captured and incorporated into the planning and management of the Defence estate;*
- d. *the financial assumptions underpinning estate divestment, including estimated remediation costs, net return projections, previous Defence property disposal programs and the transfer of responsibility from the Department of Defence to the Department of Finance;*
- e. ***the heritage significance of Defence estate assets and the adequacy of measures to protect that significance during and following divestment, including the impact on veteran and community connections to sites of military service;***
- f. *the Defence estate audit, including its planning, conduct and the potential of the period between its completion and public release to have degraded validity of the audit’s findings;*
- g. *consideration of an amended policy framework for the use of surplus Defence land that prioritises alternative public uses over private development; and*
- h. *any other related matters.*

## NTAQ Response

The NTAQ understand that, via our National Body (Australian Council of National Trusts - ACNT) the NTAQ have been listed as a potential partner as part of this enquiry. The NTAQ welcome the opportunity to support the work of the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee in relation to this inquiry. We note that we have not been consulted to date, and would like to take this opportunity to provide feedback specifically in relation to item “e” above (in bold).

In particular, the NTAQ wish to highlight the following, which we believe are essential considerations when looking into the future planning, management, utilisation and disposal of Defence estate assets:

- A number of the places proposed for divestment/partial divestment are listed on Australia’s Commonwealth Heritage List. In order to ensure that the heritage significance of such places continues to be recognised following divestment/partial divestment - and also acknowledging that many of these places are also significant to their respective State and local communities - the NTAQ would emphasise the need for these places to be afforded formal heritage protection via their listing on a local planning scheme or State Heritage Register.
- A number of the places proposed for divestment/partial divestment do not currently have identified heritage significance. The NTAQ would like to emphasise the need for heritage assessments to be undertaken for each of these places, in order to ensure that the potential heritage significance of such sites is identified and understood. In turn, in such instances where heritage significance is identified, the NTAQ would emphasise the need for these places to be afforded formal heritage protection, such as through listing on a State Heritage Register or planning scheme.
- We understand that limited consultation has occurred up until this point in relation to this inquiry, and for this reason, we would like to stress the need for a thorough consultation process to be implemented with a range of stakeholders, particularly local veteran communities, as well as the wider public.
- Before a decision is made to either divest or partially divest a current Defence estate asset of heritage significance, the NTAQ would strongly encourage the need for the Commonwealth:
  - to consider whether the Defence assets can be adaptively re-used and be occupied by other Commonwealth departments and/or services, before considering potential buyers;
  - to be responsible for preparing and making nominations for heritage listing for sites which are identified as being of heritage value, with this nomination process initiated before any sale contracts are begun; and
  - to be responsible for the engagement of suitably qualified and experienced heritage specialists to prepare Conservation Management Plans (CMPs) for each site identified as being of heritage significance, with the completed CMPs forming part of the Conditions of Sale.

- Where a decision is made to either divest or partially divest a current Defence estate asset of heritage significance after careful consideration and assessment, the NTAQ would like to stress the need for best-practice, positive heritage outcomes to be sought wherever possible, before the place is divested/partially divested. For example, this would include the need for:
  - well-researched and appropriate interpretation to be implemented within each of these places;
  - ongoing access to areas of the sites for the veteran community and the general public more broadly;
  - potential buyers to demonstrate that they can effectively implement best practice conservation and provide an ongoing use for a particular place; as well as
  - in instances where a potential buyer is proposing to adaptively reuse the place - that this use is compatible with the existing place, is sustainable, and ensures that the heritage significance of the place continues to be conserved.
- Recognising that the divestment process will likely be lengthy, the NTAQ emphasises the need for ongoing active maintenance and repair works to be undertaken during this time.

NTAQ look forward to partnering with the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee and working towards finding ways to ensure the potential heritage significance of Defence sites in Queensland are adequately understood, and where relevant, identified and protected, before the divestment of any Defence estate assets.