

5 November 2018

Ms Pauline McKenzie  
Executive Director  
Heritage Division  
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Parramatta NSW 2124

Email: [heritage@heritage.nsw.gov.au](mailto:heritage@heritage.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Ms McKenzie,

### **Former Ultimo Power House**

The National Trust of Australia (NSW) nominated the former Ultimo Power House, an important group of connected buildings, for listing on the NSW State Heritage Register in December, 2015. The Ultimo Power House is significant because it was:

- the first large state-owned electricity generating station in NSW.
- the original generating station for the supply of electricity to power the electric tramway network throughout Sydney.
- one of the largest and most important generating stations in NSW for many years with associations with the electrification of the suburban tramway and railway systems and with the general reticulation of electrical power in Sydney.
- the site where most major technological advancements in electrical generation, including steam turbines and large-scale, alternating-current generation, were trialled by NSW electricity authorities. The station also played a major part in the development of the Ultimo/Pymont area.
- adapted to house the Museum of Applied Arts and Technology (later, the Powerhouse Museum), the principal museum of technology, manufacturing, science and craft in NSW.

It has architectural and landmark qualities, social significance and its size, layout and built form generally provides evidence of the technology utilised within the buildings. It is also now rare as one of the only two (with White Bay) surviving examples of the mid-twentieth century phase of large, city-based power stations, with the demolition of Pymont, Balmain and Bunnerong Power Stations. White Bay's future remains uncertain but it was added to the State Heritage Register without issue in 1999.

The non-listing of Ultimo was always a procedural anomaly, as it had been adapted for use as the Powerhouse Museum in 1988 and was considered to be 'in good hands', consequently its 'State' listing was not urgent. More recent debate regarding the possible repurposing of the buildings has, however, brought this status into question and consequently, the Trust believes that it is vital that the place be given the recognition it clearly merits and the protection of the NSW Heritage Act through any future development.

The Trust finds the continuing delay in proceeding with the nomination to be inexplicable. Upon inquiry in mid-2016, the Trust was informed that the listing nomination was being investigated for its 'Industrial Heritage Significance'. Whilst this seemed reasonable at that time, it also seems reasonable that the investigation would have come to a resolution by this point in time.



The Trust notes that none of the members of the National Trust's Industrial Heritage Committee have been approached for an assessment or opinion, in any capacity. Nor, to the Trust's knowledge, have any members of the Engineering Heritage Committee of the NSW Chapter of the Institution of Engineers Australia been approached. Either Committee would clearly be in a position to provide an important opinion on this question. We would be grateful to know who the Office of Environment & Heritage have approached for advice on this matter.

If the Heritage Division considers that it has sufficient expertise in this subject area within its own staff, the Trust requests an opportunity to discuss the matter further with the relevant member/s of staff.

The Trust is well aware of the public furore regarding various proposals affecting the former Ultimo Power House. It is also noted that a recent statement from the NSW Government indicates that Ultimo be retained as part of the MAAS, housing a fashion and design museum. In any case, because of their heritage significance, the buildings require the protection of the NSW Heritage Act, prior to any future development proposals.

The Trust would be pleased to hear your response in relation to these matters.

Yours sincerely,

Debbie Mills  
Chief Executive Officer