



Senator the Hon Robert Hill

Leader of the Government in the Senate

Minister for the Environment and Heritage

Historic Harbour Marine Biological Station to Remain in Public Ownership

The preservation of a unique building in Watsons Bay with a remarkable history was ensured at a ceremony today when the house was handed over to the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust.

Federal Environment Minister Robert Hill received the keys to the property from Dr Brendan Nelson, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence.

Senator Hill said he was extremely pleased to be accepting the keys now that the Defence Housing Authority no longer required the former colonial marine biological station for housing.

"This historic station will not be sold off, but remain in public ownership and be preserved and protected in perpetuity," Senator Hill said.

"Opportunities like this, to return harbourside land in Sydney to the people are extremely rare. I congratulate the Chair of the Australian Heritage Commission, Peter King, in ensuring the transfer on behalf of the residents."

Built in 1881, the Marine Biological Station was on what was then a bare windswept peninsula at the southern end of Camp Cove on Sydney Harbour. Russian scientist and explorer Nikolai Miklouho Maclay was instrumental in its establishment, convincing the scientific community and government of the importance of studying the Australian fauna and flora.

For the past 100 years, the former station has been used to house military personnel.

Speaking at the ceremony, Chair of the Australian Heritage Commission, Peter King said it was important to protect and interpret the history and heritage of the site.

"There are many stories to uncover from this house. Nikolai Miklouho Maclay was a remarkable man and some very interesting Defence personalities have lived here too," Mr King said.

"In planning the building's future, we must involve the community and uncover these stories. We are very grateful for the efforts of the Australian Russian community in particular who have worked very hard to see this property conserved."

Senator Hill acknowledged the efforts of a number of organisations that have worked to ensure the future public ownership of the former Marine Biological Station.

"It is now the task of the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust to work with these groups and other community groups and individuals to develop a plan for the station that recognises its past and ensures a sustainable future," Senator Hill said.

"This planning will proceed alongside planning for the Harbour Trust's six other magnificent sites on Sydney Harbour.

"Plans for these sites and for the former Marine Biological Station will protect their cultural heritage, conserve the environment and provide maximum public access."

The Harbour Trust's other sites include the former Artillery School on North Head, former Defence lands at Middle Head-Georges Heights, Woolwich Dock, Cockatoo and Snapper Islands, and Macquarie Lightstation," Senator Hill said

"We want to achieve the best outcome possible for each of the sites and for Sydney as a whole," Senator Hill said.

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Contact:
Belinda Huppatz (Senator Hill's office) 0419 258 364