

Mosman Council: Formal Submission to the Senate Inquiry

To: The Committee Secretary, **Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee**

Subject: Inquiry into the Management of Defence Estate Assets

Mosman Council welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry. Mosman has a long-standing interest in the future of the Defence estate, particularly HMAS Penguin and the Middle Head peninsula.

Council's position, consistent with that of the community we represent, is clear: the sale or divestment of any part of HMAS Penguin should not proceed. It is a site of national and strategic importance and must remain in public ownership.

In a harbour city such as Sydney, where open foreshore land is limited, disposal would result in the permanent loss of public access, environmental and heritage values, and strategically significant assets. Once redeveloped, these sites cannot realistically be recovered for future Defence, community or environmental use.

HMAS Penguin is also a complex and constrained site, defined by steep topography, a peninsula location relatively isolated from public transport, and limited existing infrastructure. These characteristics make it unsuitable for conventional private redevelopment and reinforces the need for a carefully considered, long-term public interest approach.

The site contains significant environmental assets, including remnant *Angophora costata* (Sydney red gum) forest, increasingly rare in Sydney Harbour, providing important habitat, biodiversity and landscape value. It also forms part of the nationally recognised Spit to Manly walking route, one of Sydney's most valued coastal experiences, underscoring its importance for conservation, recreation and public access.

In today's uncertain geopolitical environment, strategically located harbour-adjacent Defence land warrants careful consideration. With future needs difficult to predict, retaining sites like this is a prudent safeguard. Council urges the Committee to consider whether short-term financial gain is worth permanently limiting future Defence options at such a critical location.

Where land is surplus to Defence requirements, Council strongly advocates for transfer of guardianship to an appropriate public authority such as the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust. The Trust, established in 2001 as a result of strong community advocacy and Federal Government intervention, would provide ongoing protection of environmental and heritage values, maintain public access, and enable the sensitive reuse of existing buildings for community purposes.

Council urges the Committee to recommend that HMAS Penguin be explicitly excluded from any divestment program. As a national asset of exceptional significance, it must remain in public ownership in perpetuity, safeguarding its value for current and future generations.