

Goat Island: Sydney Harbour

Proposal to dismantle and remove the 4-10 tons fixed electric tower crane cantilever rotary jib.

Background

NPWS have requested that, as the author of the 2011 CMP and having considerable knowledge of the island and its various heritage values, that I provide a review of the proposal to remove the jib of the shipyard crane as currently proposed.

I have recently visited the island and inspected the crane with the use of binoculars and have been provided with the various photographs and reports related to the condition of the crane.

I have read the proposal in detail and understand the various and inter-related issues that affect a proposal such as partial demolition of a significant structure.

By way of background, the CMP was written around 2009-10 (endorsed 2011) when the crane was still in operation. It was however clear that the operational life of the crane was limited. This was irrespective of works that may be undertaken to maintain or conserve the structure as changes then and, increasingly since that time, in OH+S and compliance related to structures such as the crane, make it effectively not possible to achieve ongoing use.

This is not a heritage consideration but is a practical and operational consideration. This would result in, if the crane were to be retained, that it was a static interpretive element.

It is important to understand the history of the crane at Goat Island and prior to that at Mort's Dock, which is helpfully set out in detail in the proposal.

The crane was erected in 1925 at Mort's Dock and ceased use there in 1958 (33 years). It was dismantled and re-erected at Goat Island around 1964 by the Maritime Services Board. The Maritime Services Board ceased occupation of the island in 1992 and the crane ceased use at that time (28 years). The crane was reactivated in 1998 (6 years later) until it was finally condemned as unsafe in 2010 (12 years). The shipyard at Goat Island, which also commenced around 1925 (in a different configuration) has now permanently closed. The crane has not functioned for the last 14 years.

The crane is clearly of heritage significance as an item in its own right.

The significance of the item to Goat Island is as part of the later port authority infrastructure which overlaid the early Harbour Trust infrastructure which, in turn, overlaid the Colonial Magazine precinct layout¹. Aside from being quite a visible element, in relation to the history of the island it has no

¹ This assessment does not address Aboriginal heritage as the crane is a discrete element that is not related to the Aboriginal history of the island.

greater or lesser value than the various wharves that were built and rebuilt during the maritime phase of use and which now have largely been removed (or have collapsed). They all formed part of the port authority overlay of the island but do not form part of the core and highly significant aspects of the island prior to the major rebuild for port use around 1920.

When NPWS commenced management of the island (part of Sydney Harbour National Park), they inherited a densely built island with significant issues around the built environment, the natural environment and the interface of the island with the harbour seen in wharfs, retaining walls etc. MSB had been winding down their operation and, as noted in the history, minimised their maintenance regimes as they no longer needed any of the infrastructure. This was followed by a period of non-use and then re-activation of some of the failing elements.

NPWS undertook a wide range of works on the island focussing on the more significant and early buildings and elements and achieved significant heritage outcomes across a range of buildings, features and landscape. As with all large government heritage sites, government do not provide unlimited funds and a priority of works was established to manage the most significant elements and landscapes and to undertake critical upgrades.

It is clear from the current submission that the crane in 1992 (when NPWS commenced management of the island) was in deteriorated condition and while it was capable of reactivation for a small number of years, the extent of deterioration and damage was such that a maintenance program would not have been sufficient to extend the life of the feature.

While the crane was capable of being dismantled in 1962 (at least in part noting that repairs and additional elements were bolted and welded to it on re-erection), the ongoing deterioration after a further 60 years means that fixings cannot be undone due to corrosion and the steel framing is no longer capable of use or in time of remaining without risk of serious failure. Simply dismantling the crane or part of it is not possible.

This was anticipated in the 2011 CMP as there were discussions taking place about how long the crane may be able to operate and be safe. The CMP recognised that the crane is significant mostly as an item in its own right with only some connection to Goat Island. In relation to the broader heritage values of the island, the crane clearly has lower significance than many other items. Consequently, the CMP policy provided for actions that were likely to be required in the future (that future is now) to manage a complex piece of failing infrastructure.

At a broader level and looking across many industrial sites across the State and country (I have been involved in assessing the significance of railways, power stations and dams, industrial sites, mining sites and a range of industry sites), some remain in use, but many are abandoned or in the process of abandonment. The significance of these places is rarely in doubt and can be quite accurately set out, but their future management is often extremely difficult particularly when decay sets in and is not reversible.

Major expenditure on the crane has not been a priority of NPWS as it is an element of lesser significance on the island and retaining it in the long-term is of such cost that it would preclude works on far more significant parts of the site. This does not mean that works to the crane were not investigated, they were. It is not set out in this brief review, but the cost of remediation, conservation, maintenance, etc., across the island is very significant. Goat Island is not self-sustaining and it is unlikely that it will ever achieve that. Consequently, most funds for conservation and maintenance will

need to be provided from government or other sources. This in turn results in careful decisions about how funds are allocated to achieve long-term high conservation outcomes.

The proposal for partial removal of the crane considers the impacts on significance of that action. They are well articulated. There is absolutely no doubt that removal of the crane either totally or in part affects the significance firstly of the crane itself and secondly the shipyard and views.

The greatest impact is to the crane itself as it will no longer be in-situ (either truncated or removed).

The adverse impact on the island setting is lesser as the crane has some but relatively limited significance to the island itself. It has been argued (not in this proposal) that the whole of the shipyard should be removed as it was and remains an intrusive element that adversely affects the significance of the exceptional elements of that precinct. That is not being argued here, but it is a view that has some validity. It also identifies that heritage values can be complex and often competing.

The submission addresses views. The view that stands out is from the top of the island looking west across the crane where it dominates the skyline. Views from beyond the island, again from the west as the crane cannot be seen from the east, allow the crane to be seen but largely against the vegetated backdrop so that it does not stand out.

I do not consider views to be a large issue in this assessment. The crane is large and consequently can be seen, if the crane were removed, it would not change the overall way in which the island is seen.

Whatever happens, the crane cannot remain as it now is and its significance either as a static relic (if it could be strengthened) or as a pedestal without a crane (I would suggest a rather unsatisfactory outcome that weakens any heritage value the remnant elements may have) is greatly if not completely reduced.

There is an alternate heritage argument to simply trying to retain a failed industrial element that often applies to industrial structures that become redundant or reach failure.

Most industrial structures, be they cranes or other items, are designed for a relatively limited life span. They are functional and are designed for relatively short periods of use. That arises as there is more than often a need to upgrade infrastructure as it ages as it no longer satisfies the requirements for use and often long-term use of industrial items wears them out, even with maintenance. In this case the nature of the construction of the crane, the exposed maritime environment combined with poor maintenance under MSB have resulted in the crane now being beyond its life span. Recording the structure and retaining some key elements for interpretation is an appropriate and valid process that allows the structure to be removed.

Conversely, rebuilding it or strengthening it to remain as a museum object, seems counter-intuitive to the solid and robust industrial nature of the element that is significant because of its use and not its longevity.

The current state of the structure is also not a product of recent failure to maintain, it is a long-term outcome of lack of use, lack of routine maintenance and the inherent materiality problems of the structure that are part of its design.

I would suggest that the most appropriate heritage outcome is to remove the whole of the crane structure and not to retain an almost meaningless truncated element that cannot convey the spatial and experiential qualities of such a structure.

In reviewing the proposal for partial removal it is important to acknowledge that the report is comprehensive, thorough and does not downplay significance or avoid inconvenient options. On reading the report I am informed and understand the issues and their complexity.

There are a range of consequential issues that arise from not taking action in the near future. In summary they are:

- there is a real risk of collapse of the structure or part of it
- that risk extends to the potential to damage elements of exceptional significance if there was some form of collapse or failure
- there is risk to anyone who may need to access the area
- whatever happens the crane cannot remain in-situ and if retained would effectively require rebuilding
- the matter has to be resolved prior to the island moving from NPWS to an Aboriginal community to manage
- if the crane is to be retained, funds will need to be redirected from the conservation of other more significant elements of the island, this is likely to result in poor heritage outcomes overall

These matters do affect decisions about the future of the item.

The application, now amended to a partial removal of the crane, requires a determination under the Heritage Act by the Heritage Council of NSW. There are three possible decisions under the Heritage Act.

- 1 It can be approved.

This may be with or without minor conditions. Typical conditions would be related to recording the structure, retaining perhaps some interesting elements or consideration of how it may be interpreted.

- 2 It can be refused.

Refusal is usually accompanied by reasons for refusal. In this situation a refusal is problematic as the structure is at high risk of collapse and questions of responsibility and liability cannot be disconnected from a decision that allows risk to continue.

- 3 It could be approved with major conditions.

A major condition may be (for example) that the jib to be removed, be rebuilt. This may be viewed as the same as a refusal as the condition is far removed from the application made.

The heritage submission provides a compelling argument for the Heritage Council to approve the proposal. The structure is at a point where it requires urgent action and further delay may result in a major impact on the heritage values of the exceptional values of the island. This must be avoided.

Other options have been extensively explored and, as set out, are not achievable.

I would further conclude that a preferred outcome would be the complete removal of the crane as partial removal weakens the integrity of the place, however, that is not the current proposal.

In summary, the submission is one of the most well set out and comprehensive assessments I have reviewed and I would suggest that the proposed actions are sound and achieve a proper and considered heritage outcome.



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