



THE PADDINGTON SOCIETY INC
FOR COMMUNITY AND HERITAGE
EST 1964

To: Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee

AUSTRALIAN SENATE INQUIRY

into MANAGEMENT OF DEFENCE ESTATE ASSETS

15 April 2026

In reference to **The Victoria Barracks** Paddington, Sydney, NSW, and Term of Reference, item e)

(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;

Who we Are

The Paddington Society is a long-standing community organisation that advocates for conservation of all features of Paddington having architectural, historic and/or social value in our globally renowned Heritage Conservation Area.

We are deeply engaged with Victoria Barracks since, in addition to the site's rich military history and its location on the prominent ridgetop site that became Oxford Street, the Barracks played a most significant role in Paddington's history. Indeed, the development of Paddington came about directly as a result of the building of the Barracks. In the early 1840s it was the stimulus for the construction of the first residences and commercial premises in our suburb.

In scale, architectural and landscape qualities, the Barracks precinct still maintains a very strong "townscape" connection with the modest low-rise but very dense residential, civic and commercial character of the surrounding precincts in both south and north Paddington.

The ongoing military presence has long been celebrated in the community via sporting matches, parades, concerts, regular weekly public access to the Army Museum and architectural tours.

Schoolboy rugby and other sporting activities and Wallabies training sessions also regularly take place on the site, and Defence families present and past enjoy additional access for recreation and refreshments, all without compromising ADF security.

We are writing to you to express our alarm at the prospect of the potential divestment and disposal of this highly significant asset and the Australian Army possibly leaving Victoria Barracks, with the prospect of inappropriate development as a possible outcome, in order to maximise site sale and private developer profit.

We note that the Australian Senate Inquiry includes potential divestment of over 60 assets.

If there are under-utilised buildings on the Victoria Barracks site, appropriate ADF facilities and personnel in other less significant sites proposed for potential divestment should be relocated onto this site, without compromising ADF security.

The Paddington Society position:

- 1. We believe that Defence has an obligation of ongoing stewardship of this important site.**

- Victoria Barracks commenced construction by the British Army in the 1840's and has been in continuous military occupation for 185 years.
- It is the most significant military site in Australia.
- It played a significant role in the establishment of Paddington as a Victorian suburb.
- It is listed on the Commonwealth Heritage List and the Register of the National Estate.
- Victoria Barracks should remain owned and occupied by the Australian Defence Force (ADF).
- This is also the National Trust (NSW) position, since continuity of use is a key part of the site's cultural significance.
- The Paddington Society supports the Trust's position.
- The grounds and buildings have been well maintained by the ADF, and the public expects their ongoing stewardship.
- Victoria Barracks should not be privatised; it should not in whole or part be in private ownership.

2. In the future, we maintain that to protect the site's significance:

- The ADF could readily increase the existing public access to Victoria Barracks.
- Any new development should be for Defence or community purposes only.
- Any new development should be restricted to 3 storeys.
- No development should project above the ridge on the main barracks building as viewed from the main Oxford Street gate.
- Any new work should be undertaken under the guidance of a comprehensive peer-reviewed Conservation Heritage Study and Management Plan.

The Paddington community we represent is passionate about the heritage value of the site and the importance of its history to the nation.

We believe the Australian Defence Force is best placed to champion its preservation.

We agree with State MP Marjorie O'Neill who wrote in February 2026 opposing the divestment:

"Victoria Barracks is the spiritual home of the Australian Army. Our history should never be balanced away on a spreadsheet."

Yours faithfully



Esther Hayter, President, The Paddington Society, 