

# 'A throwaway city of junk buildings': Leading architect slams NSW government over heritage

By [Andrew Taylor](#)

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Sydney is in danger of becoming “a throwaway city of junk buildings” built on the cheap to be knocked down every 30 years, a leading architect and City of Sydney councillor has warned.

Philip Thalys also criticised the NSW government's sell-off of public buildings, which he said constituted "a theft of public assets", and the destruction of heritage buildings and streetscapes caused by projects such as the Sydney Metro, Westconnex and roadworks.

"Public Sydney risks becoming privatised Sydney," said Cr Thalys, speaking at the National Trust Heritage Awards 2019 on Friday.

"We know that regardless of political persuasion, privatisation is deeply unpopular with the majority of citizens, and constitutes a theft of public assets that would otherwise have been available to future generations."

Cr Thalys pointed to the sale of sandstone public buildings in Bridge Street in Sydney's CBD, the disposal of Millers Point public housing, the lease of NSW Land and Property Information and "the atrocities along Anzac Parade, one of our very few commemorative avenues".

"For us, without war, fire, flood or pestilence, this recent period has been perhaps the most voracious of booms in our city's history," he said. "It's been self-inflicted."



Philip Thalys said NSW government infrastructure projects had led to the destruction of heritage including "atrocities along Anzac Parade, one of our very few commemorative avenues". *CREDIT: JANIE BARRETT*

Cr Thalys also attacked the federal government's "fire sale" of the GPO, which he called the most important 19th-century public building in Sydney and said had been "sold off for a song without consultation or even a tender".

Cr Thalys expressed concern not only about the loss of heritage, but also about the quality of building construction.

NSW Special Minister of State Don Harwin, also at the awards, did not respond at the time but later said in a statement: "The NSW government is committed to working with communities to strike the right balance between celebrating our past and building for the future."

Also present at the Awards was Labor's acting leader Penny Sharpe, who said Cr Thalys' speech was a "wake-up call" about how heritage laws had been eroded.

"In NSW, the notion that public buildings are under the custodianship of government across generations no longer applies," she said.

"Heritage laws need to be overhauled and importantly must be at the heart of a planning system that puts public interest ahead of private profit and short term fixes of state budgets."

Cr Thalys described the NSW government's controversial \$729 million redevelopment of the Sydney Football Stadium at Moore Park as "wanton demolition". ...

"Does this signal the era of disposable public buildings, built on the cheap to be knocked down every 30 years or so – a throwaway city of junk buildings?" he said. "Is this the best we can do?"

The heritage of western Sydney was also under assault, Cr Thalys said, pointing to the threat posed to Willow Grove and St Georges Terrace by the relocation of the Powerhouse Museum, the "cavalier demolition" of Parramatta Memorial Pool and the intrusion of a new football stadium, Leagues Club and hotel into Parramatta Park.

Cr Thalys also expressed concern about turmoil within the Office of Environment and Heritage and the failure to appoint a new NSW government architect following the departure of Peter Poulet last September.