I am delighted to have been recently appointed as the Minister for Natural Resources, Environment and Heritage. As someone born and raised in the Territory, I am looking forward to playing my part in conserving our unique and diverse heritage.

It was a pleasure, as one of my first duties, to review this issue of ‘Heritage News’ and to see that in the last few months, some significant milestones have been achieved in heritage management in the Territory. The most significant was the approval by Cabinet earlier this year of drafting instructions for a new Heritage Act for the Northern Territory.

Drafting of the new Act is now well underway. The new Act will herald a number of improvements to heritage management in the Territory including a new Heritage Council with expanded membership, stricter timelines for decision making, expanded appeal provisions, and the capacity for ‘serial listing’ of certain types of places.

Another significant milestone was the declaration of the Sue Wah Chin Building in Cavenagh Street, Darwin. This declaration provides long overdue recognition of the significance of this unique building, and will provide an appropriate framework for future development of the site.

The Sue Wah Chin Building is only one of a crop of interesting recent additions to the NT Heritage Register. I hope you enjoy reading about some of these places in this edition of ‘Heritage News’, along with other stories about the diverse activities that are part of heritage management in the Northern Territory.

Grants Announced

Each year the Government distributes $200,000 worth of grants under the NT Heritage Grants Program through the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and The Arts. The Program is intended to assist the owners of declared heritage places to undertake conservation work. Grants can also be provided for other purposes such as interpretive signage or research and recording.

Minister Lawrie recently announced the successful grant recipients for 2007-08, which included:

- Adelaide House Museum ($10,000)
- Darwin Harbour Underwater Survey Group ($5,000)
- Friends of the North Australia Railway ($16,000)
- Genealogical Society of the NT Inc. ($3,000)
- Historic Hermannsburg Inc. ($36,000)
- Mabunji Aboriginal Resource Association Inc. ($10,000)
- National Trust of Australia (NT) ($74,000)
- Olive Pink Botanic Garden ($16,900)
- Travel North ($7,500)
- Northern Land Council ($20,000)

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Chinese Heritage Protected

One of Darwin’s few remaining 19th century buildings – the Sue Wah Chin building – has been heritage listed.

The stone building in Cavenagh Street, Darwin, built in the 1880s, is the only building associated with Darwin’s nineteenth century ‘Chinatown’ which still survives. It is also one of only a handful of nineteenth century buildings of any sort that survive in the Darwin city centre.

The building represents a phase in the development of the Northern Territory which saw the establishment and expansion of the Chinese community as a significant component of the Darwin community. It has close associations with the well-known Chin family, who have owned the building since the 1920s.

When the former Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Marion Scrymgour announced the listing in April, Ms Scymgour said the Northern Territory Government had worked closely with the owners of the building and would continue to do so to achieve a balanced approach towards any potential development of the property.

“There is considerable scope for both development and heritage conservation on this site,” Ms Scrymgour said.

“We see this occurring right across Australia where both have gone hand in hand, with many outstanding examples of re-use of heritage buildings, and the Sue Wah Chin building can offer a similar opportunity.”

A rare archaeological site in north-east Arnhem Land has been placed on the NT Heritage Register.

The stone arrangements or ‘pictures’ depict aspects of both Macassan and Yolngu Aboriginal culture, including representations of Macassan sailing vessels and dwellings.

The pictures outline a record of trade between the Yolngu of north-east Arnhem Land and Indonesians that existed for several centuries. The seafarers, mostly from Macassar in Sulawesi, came annually for trepang (also known as beche-de-mer or dharripa), pearl and turtle shells. They sailed in their praus on the monsoon winds, and returned on the south-east trade winds. The Macassans acknowledged the Yolngu as owners of the land and marine resources. The Yolngu and Macassans developed an extensive cultural, social and economic relationship.

Wurrwurrwuy is an important tangible reminder to the Yolngu of their past connections with the Macassans. It is also the most complex and well preserved example of three known stone picture sites in the Northern Territory.

Heritage Conservation Services has been working with the local community to conserve the site. The Dhimurru Land Management Aboriginal Corporation was given $16,500 through the NT Heritage Grants Program to help with the construction of a new fence, interpretive signage and path. The work was completed late last year, and will give visitors to the site an enhanced appreciation of the stone arrangements.

Local Indigenous contractors and volunteers from the local community were responsible for most of the work.
Rocket Man

Recently there has been a very unusual addition to the NT Heritage Register - 19 rocket shelters built in the Northern Territory in the 1960s.

The shelters are located north of the Simpson Desert near the Queensland border. They were built in 1966-67 to protect people living on pastoral stations which were in the flight path of rockets, launched from Woomera in South Australia as part of the ELDO satellite launch program. The European Launcher Development Organisation (ELDO) was an international consortium comprising Great Britain and several European countries.

There was always a likelihood that a rocket launched into space might have to be destroyed in flight, and the shelters were constructed to protect people from the possible debris, which would have been considerable given that the rockets were over 30 metres tall and weighed 106 tonnes.

The heritage listing was the result of a lot of hard work by Stephen Ashford, Heritage Officer from Heritage Conservation Services, who travelled 5000km in six days by 4WD to record details of each of the 19 shelters. Stephen also negotiated with the owners of 11 different pastoral stations and secured their support for the listing.

Leading by example

The Northern Territory Government continues to lead by example in the conservation of the Territory’s heritage. One million dollars is allocated each year to the repair and maintenance of Government-owned heritage places. All work under the 2006-07 Program has now been completed.

The 2006-07 Program included work to some vital remnants of the Overland Telegraph Line. Over $280,000 in total was spent on work to the Tennant Creek and Barrow Creek Telegraph Stations. At Barrow Creek, critical work was carried out to save the Buggy Shed from collapsing.

Some crucial work was also carried out on three cypress pine telegraph poles near Pine Creek, the last remaining examples of the original timber poles that were used to construct the Line between 1870 and 1874. Steel support posts were fixed to the poles to stop them from collapsing and to help identify them so that their conservation is assured.

Several places in Alice Springs also benefited from the 2006-07 Program. A new front fence was built at The Residency, and the Old Courthouse was repainted inside and out.

The projects for 2007-08 include:

• Vestey’s Tank, Darwin (concrete testing)
• Former Naval Victualling Yards, Darwin (reroofing)
• Bonney Well Windmill (Stage Two reconstruction)
• Arltunga Historical Reserve (repair and stabilisation of stone structures)

The Government continues to make available $200,000 every year to private owners of heritage places.
Working with the community

Heritage Conservation Services (HCS) has been working with the local community in Darwin to conserve maritime heritage after local tour operator Shaun Uden had the good fortune in recent months to make two significant discoveries in Darwin Harbour.

Recognising the historical significance of the finds, he contacted Heritage Conservation Services.

Late last year, Mr Uden discovered the wreck of a RAAF C-47 Dakota aircraft and on 31 July 2007, Minister Lawrie decided to heritage list the aircraft wreck, saying that it deserved to be recognised and protected as an important part of Australia’s Military and Aviation heritage. She thanked Mr Uden for nominating the wreck site to the NT Heritage Register.

In April this year, Mr Uden found something particularly unusual in the Harbour – an ex-military amphibious vehicle.

The ‘Buffalo’ vehicle is best described as being like a landing craft with tank tracks. ‘Buffalos’ were widely used in the Pacific theatre during World War II, and could travel on both land and water. However research undertaken by Heritage Conservation Services indicates that the one discovered in Darwin Harbour almost certainly did not see active service. It was most likely ‘army surplus’ and was associated with ferrying visitors to the Mandorah Resort in the 1960s and 70s.

Maritime archaeologist David Steinberg from HCS dived on the site soon after its discovery, and said that the discovery illustrated the rich and diverse maritime heritage of Darwin Harbour.

NEW CHAIRMAN FOR HAC

A Darwin doctor is the new chairman of the Heritage Advisory Council. Dr Brian Reid has been in the Territory for 36 years, during which time he has made a valuable contribution to public health administration and medical practice in the Northern Territory.

Dr Reid has been president of the Historical Society of the Northern Territory for the past five years. He is also a founding member and current council member of the Australian and New Zealand Society of the History of Medicine, and a member of the Professional Historian’s Association.

Dr Reid grew up in Canberra before gaining his medical qualifications at the University of Sydney in 1964. He then continued his studies in the United Kingdom before moving to central Africa to practice public health.

In 1971 he moved to Darwin with his wife Dr Lyn Reid, working initially as a medical officer and then a senior administrator in the Commonwealth and Northern Territory departments of Health, before joining his wife in general practice in 1982.

Dr Reid achieved a Bachelor of Arts through Murdoch University in 1995 and a Bachelor of Arts Honours through Charles Darwin University in 1998, majoring in history.

Dr Reid says that “The Northern Territory is a very big place with a very big history but not many people, so there is a lot of work to be done in the area of heritage conservation and protection.”

Dr Reid said he was thankful for the opportunity given to him and was looking forward to working with the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts as well as other members of the Heritage Advisory Council.