



*The Voice of Heritage  
for New Zealand*



ICOMOS NEW ZEALAND  
TE MANA O NGA  
POUWHENUA O TE AO  
INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES

#### MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Loss of Heritage EQUIP funding a blow**

The Government's decision to discontinue funding for seismic strengthening of heritage buildings is a serious setback for owners, Historic Places Aotearoa president James Blackburne said today. The decision not to extend Heritage EQUIP (Earthquake Upgrade Incentive Programme) funding past the end of June 2021 slipped through in the May Budget without arousing any media comment. "This cut is a major blow to heritage preservation as the fund had been making extremely worthwhile grants towards seismic strengthening of heritage buildings as required by the Building (Earthquake Prone Buildings) Amendment Act, 2016," Mr Blackburne said.

"HPA is acutely aware that time is running out for owners to strengthen priority buildings in areas of high seismic risk. When it does run out, demolition may be the only option for some owners if funding is not available."

"We are saddened by this loss, especially in smaller centres where the cost of strengthening is high compared to a building's value and the rental income able to be generated.

"Heritage buildings keep our history alive. They tell the story of our past and give perspective for today. They provide private and public value throughout New Zealand through enhancing the character and beauty of our streets and towns and a point of difference often attracting tourism."

Heritage EQUIP was introduced in 2016 by the previous government as a one-off \$10.5M fund, then topped up by the present government. After a slow start, the programme contributed \$12.95M for 111 projects (out of 138 applications) covering 153 buildings. In 2019 individual grants were capped at \$400k. Programme administrator, the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, considered it successful. The Ministry is considering whether to reallocate remaining funds for other EQUIP projects, such as the \$1.5M awarded to Auckland's St James Theatre in 2016, which did not proceed.

HPA executive member and Whanganui district councillor Helen Craig said Heritage EQUIP was revolutionary in that it funded private owners of buildings.

"It was one of the most effective, best-run and most-responsive funding mechanism I've seen.

It has been an incredibly successful incentive for commercial building owners to find earthquake strengthening engineering solutions and complete restoration projects that otherwise would not have happened. Old empty heritage buildings have been restored to provide new desperately needed apartment living, while adding visual beauty and attraction for tourists and locals to enjoy. “We urge the Government to continue the scheme considering its critical role in ensuring public amenity is retained. In small towns like Whanganui and big cities like Wellington, the cost of earthquake-strengthening on top of conversion to apartments, for instance, can be unaffordable. “Owners will take the risk of redevelopment if they receive some incentive. By providing this scheme, the Government signals that heritage has value to future New Zealand. “Retaining heritage commercial buildings in city centres means reduced need for new infrastructure and public transport; reduced CO2 emissions, with fewer cars going from suburbs to the city; and higher rates and tax takes for councils and government.”

ICOMOS NZ Chairperson, Pamela Dziwulska, agrees with HPA – “it’s an incredibly sad loss for built heritage in Aotearoa – buildings are at the forefront of everybody’s day to day experiences of their town centres, cities, and even rural settings. Heritage buildings have an existing embodied energy that cannot be matched with modern materials (who’s going to build in new solid masonry using limestone?), and their demolition would only send that energy to the landfills, despite their having become carbon neutral by now. Adaptation, using the right expertise, makes the most sense if the goal is to be sustainable and meet climate change targets. The government put these time limits on building owners who are acting as the kaitiaki, but have now taken away one of their main sources of monetary aid in order to protect and maintain Aotearoa’s cultural heritage for future generations.”