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STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY
Dr Marisa Paterson MLA (Chair), Ms Jo Clay MLA (Deputy Chair), Mr Ed Cocks MLA

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into ACT's heritage arrangements

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Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity
ACT Legislative Assembly

Submission to the Inquiry into the ACT's Heritage Arrangements

The Australian Garden History Society (AGHS) is a national community organisation of over 40 years standing, with a mission to promote awareness and conservation of significant gardens and cultural landscapes through engagement, research, advocacy and activities. It is essentially a history and heritage organisation that concentrates on significant gardens and cultural landscapes.

The AGHS has links with many allied organisations such as Australia ICOMOS, Landscape Australia, the Australian Museum of Gardening, the National Trust of Australia, various Botanic Gardens and the Australian Garden Council.

The local ACT Monaro Riverina Branch of AGHS has close ties with the National Trust ACT, Friends of the Australian National Botanic Gardens, Friends of the National Library of Australia and various other local community organisations interested in and concerned with garden and landscape history and heritage matters.

In this submission we wish to raise several issues particularly in relation to the identification and conservation of the Territory's heritage garden sites and significant cultural landscapes.

- Heritage conservation is an evolving discipline and modern practice now validates gardens, settings and cultural landscapes as significant types of heritage in their own right, rather than as mere add-ons to architecture. Gardens and cultural landscapes, and the landscape settings of heritage places, are aspects of heritage that need to be actively documented and conserved. Current legislation and the operation of the heritage arrangements in the ACT do not adequately recognise this.
- Many cultural places in the ACT are registered with minimal reference to the importance of their gardens or their wider landscape settings. These and the overarching cultural landscapes of the ACT should be formally identified and protected as heritage features that contribute to the widespread understanding that Canberra is a Garden City established in a deliberately chosen landscape setting of river valley and hills.
- The dual nature of the heritage jurisdictions within the borders of the ACT (Territory and Commonwealth) does not help in the management of cultural and designed landscapes, especially in the central national area around Lake Burley Griffin. A closer cooperation between heritage managers of the two jurisdictions would be beneficial in achieving optimal conservation outcomes for heritage.

- We note the various submissions already published on the Legislative Assembly website for this inquiry, especially from former Chairs and members of the ACT Heritage Council, and concur with recommendations that current legislative and governance operations be reviewed and revised, and that administrative responsibility and operations between the ACT Heritage Council and the Heritage Unit be better defined and managed. Adequate funding is another matter the inquiry should address, while a long-promised Territory Heritage Strategy that includes recognition of gardens, landscape setting and cultural landscapes would foster a proactive rather than a reactive approach to the heritage matters that particularly interest AGHS.
- Canberra has a population with an unusually high level of education and high interest in its local environment, including heritage matters. One aspect of the current heritage arrangements in the Territory that this inquiry could consider is a greater involvement of the many Canberra based community groups with a direct involvement and commitment to Territory heritage matters. Because there are currently no easy channels for regular consultation and involvement, the ACT Government is at present unable to benefit from the expertise of local community societies such as ours.
- Notwithstanding admirable community liaison work by the Heritage Festival Co-ordinator, closer links between the ACT Heritage Unit and local non-government heritage community are really formally activated only through activities during the Heritage Festival, and the Heritage Council has not taken full advantage of the Festival to engage with the many community groups that mount events: Heritage Unit or Council members do not necessarily attend Heritage Festival events to mix with heritage minded local groups, and it is only very recently that Heritage Council members themselves contributed events to the Festival.
- The Heritage Grants program provides highly valued but limited funds for community heritage projects, but the competitive process of application is complicated, off putting and tends to distance rather than unite community and government.
- Improved mechanisms that would actively involve Canberra's wider heritage community in the Territory heritage arrangements could be formulated as part of the current review. Some suggestions:
 - A new ACT Heritage Council may be better constructed by including representatives from the several ACT community heritage organisations that are major contributors to the public face of heritage through the Heritage Festival. Reconstructing the ACT Heritage Council in this way could lead to mutually beneficial sharing of knowledge and understanding between the ACT Heritage Unit, Heritage Council and local history and heritage community groups.
 - A physical location of a shared community "Heritage/History hub" with communal history/heritage society facilities has been advanced to government over the years and warrants further exploration as part of this inquiry. Such a move could provide greater and

easier public access to the extensive society-held heritage resources, promote and engender a more widely held sympathetic attitude to heritage identification and management in the larger community, with increased understanding and cooperation between community and government. The ACT Heritage Library and ACT Archives could be part of such an arrangement that would serve to contribute to greater effectiveness and adequacy of heritage arrangements and operations in the ACT.

- An important resource for community organisations (and researchers) is the on-line Heritage Database, but it requires urgent attention. At present the database is not intuitive to search, and then often delivers out of date information, with inadequate site plans and no photos. Integration with material held at the ACT Heritage Library would assist public understanding of, and support for, Territory heritage sites, including gardens and cultural landscapes. CMPs and histories for registered places should be available in digital format via links to the ACT Heritage Library website. There could also be links to digital copies of the signage available at the places that are interpreted as part of the Canberra Tracks initiative.
- A greater engagement with the Canberra community at large through the existing networks of local history and heritage societies should increase public interest and informed involvement in official Territory identification, conservation and celebration of heritage. This would support the aims of the legislation.
- As the ACT continues its rapid evolution, the new Heritage Arrangements will be working closely with the building/development/real estate sector. To foster a better understanding in this sector of the value of heritage, the new Heritage Arrangements might consider developing a targeted education program. This would properly include the recognition that landscape and gardens not only have intrinsic heritage value but are also part of an essential response to climate change and urban wellbeing.

Yours sincerely,

Bronwyn Blake
Chair Australian Garden History Society ACT Monaro Riverina Branch

30 March 2022