



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

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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  
GPO Box 1020  
Canberra ACT 2601  
LCommitteeECCB@parliament.act.gov.au

### **Inquiry Into the ACT's Heritage Arrangements**

I am a built heritage consultant with a degree in architecture. I was born in and went to school and university in Canberra before moving to Sydney where I have worked since 1981 (including with the NSW Heritage Office in the mid-1980s). I have extensive heritage consultancy experience with projects in the ACT, including several recent projects that I believe are relevant to the *Terms of Reference* of this Inquiry. I have also provided comment to Australia ICOMOS, who I understand is making a submission to this inquiry.

I have read the report that triggered this Inquiry and which resulted in the dismissal of the ACT Heritage Council. It is clear to me that the relationship and communication between the Heritage Council and the ACT Heritage Unit was a significant issue.

In relation to my recent experience, in one case I was engaged to provide advice to the ACT Government and in doing so recommended that the ACT Heritage Council assess a particular place — the ACT Heritage Unit effectively refused to carry this forward saying that someone would first need to make a nomination.

In the second example, the Chair of ACT Heritage Council provided or signed off on advice that I believe may not have reflected consideration by the Heritage Council. While in some situation this may be appropriate, this is of concern here because this advice was contrary to that of the heritage expert engaged by the ACT Government to advise on the matter and therefore, in my opinion, should have been reviewed by the full Heritage Council. Also, the Chair's advice did not, in my view, fully address the relevant heritage values, (including community social values), or the broader heritage role and specific operational policy of the ACT Government agency within whose operations the listed place was being addressed.

I believe from the recent examples that I have experienced, that the ACT Heritage Unit has become a narrow 'gatekeeper'. It is also overly focussed on already listed places and approvals rather than identifying, supporting and promoting heritage conservation in the ACT more generally. I believe that its lack of staff resources and relevant skills did not help this situation.

While I do not believe that there has been a deliberate process implemented, I believe that the overall establishment of ACT Government departments from Federal departments at the time of Statehood has resulted inadvertently in a 'top down' approach to heritage management. In other states it has been 'bottom up' via the community to local and then state governments. And this sense of engaging with and promoting heritage values in the community appears to be missing. I believe this is reflected in a preoccupation with only listed places — including in relation to Government agencies who have broad heritage responsibilities within which the listed places sit.

I believe that it is essential that the review reinforces the role of the Heritage Council as the primary mechanism to advise the Minister on heritage matters in the ACT and addresses in particular the role, staff skills and resources of the ACT Heritage Unit which I believe has an essential role to support the Heritage Council to better connect in a broader to the ACT community and the broader heritage of the ACT.

I have the following recommendations (with the alpha identification of relevant Terms of References included in brackets):

1. The Heritage Act 2004 should be reviewed to provide an increased clarity on the role and responsibility of the Heritage Council as the primary mechanism to advise the Minister on heritage matters in the ACT and with more financial support to it, and with the Heritage Council having more regular meetings (as per other States). (Terms of Reference (b), (d) and (e));
2. The Heritage Act 2004 should be reviewed to identify opportunities to provide a stronger connection with the ACT community in relation to the identification and communication of heritage values and beyond already listed places. (Terms of Reference (a) and (d)); and
3. The role and function of the ACT Heritage Unit should focus on two aspects: to support and provide recommendations for the consideration of the ACT Heritage Council (and not directly the Department within which it sits), and to support the ACT community in its identification, appreciation and support of heritage values. Resources should be increased for the ACT Heritage Unit so that its staff skills cover all potential attributes of heritage values – including built heritage items. (Terms of Reference (b), (c) and (e));
4. Where possible, increase the provision of heritage skills directly within the ACT Government agencies, which would assist an over-stretched ACT Heritage Unit. Increased skills within agencies would assist the provision of exemptions from approval under the Heritage Act 2004, would provide heritage advice directly to agencies, generally reducing the load on the Heritage Unit and would assist the broadening a current focus only on the listed places to one of a broader landscape and of a management context, including, for example, Plans of Management within National Parks and reserves. (Terms of Reference (e ) and (f)).

Yours sincerely,

Geoff Ashley