



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND BIODIVERSITY
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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into ACT's heritage arrangements

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Submission to the Inquiry into ACT's Heritage Arrangements

This submission is made on behalf of Manning Clark House Incorporated (MCHI), a not-for-profit organisation that oversees the management and activities of Manning Clark House, 11 Tasmania Circle, Forrest, ACT. MCHI is registered as a cultural organisation under Division 30, Subdivision 30-F of the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997* (the Income Tax Assessment Act). Operating in the former home of Manning and Dymphna Clark, MCHI seeks to promote, encourage and nurture the production of creative and scholarly discussion, and to protect and conserve the cultural and architectural heritage of the house and grounds, as recognized by inclusion on the National Trust's Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture, on the ACT Heritage Register and the receipt of the 2022 Sir Roy Grounds Award for Enduring Architecture.

The house (designed by Robin Boyd in 1952) and grounds (established by the Clark family in 1953) offer a remarkably intact reflection of a distinct phase of Canberra's post-World War II development. Most particularly, the house and grounds (at Block 4, Section 44, Forrest) preserve a phase of land allocation, building and land use associated with settlement in one of the most distinctive of Canberra's suburban precincts.

Noting that this inquiry invites submissions addressing 'how the ACT's heritage arrangements might be improved to guarantee the ACT Heritage Council achieves its statutory functions', this submission specifically addresses the role of the Council in 'identifying, assessing, conserving and promoting heritage places and objects in the ACT'. I should also note that, while I am writing this submission on behalf of MCHI, and in my capacity as chair of its heritage and conservation subcommittee, I was also a member of the Heritage Council until my resignation on 17 November 2022. This submission, then, inevitably also draws on my own association with the work of the Council over recent years.

Integral to the value and role of MCH is its capacity to convey many aspects of its precinct. The large block sizes, established tree and garden patterns, and the open-park land and street scapes of the area, especially surrounding Collins Park, draw directly on the layering of the original Burley Griffin plan, the priorities of the Federal Capital Commission, the National Capital Planning and Development Commission and the post-war Department of Interior. The house itself captures a relatively modest but characteristic experiment in modernism on the cusp of Canberra's great development under the National Capital Development Commission. As recognized in MCHI's recent collaborations with the ACT Historic Places unit within the ACT Cultural Facilities Corporation, these wider values are integral to the importance of the history and heritage of Canberra.

This precinct has come under increasing development pressure over recent years. While zoned RZ1, development approvals in the immediate area of MCH are allowing departures

from guidelines emphasising low density, residential environment and minimal change to existing patterns of housing. This pressure was evident in proposals to redevelop Block 5, and Block 9, Section 44, both adjoining MCH (the later currently a vacant site, the dwelling having been demolished several months ago). There are many other instances of such specific redevelopment ventures in the area around MCH; together they are profoundly altering the street scape and character of the area.

While there seems to be a public perception that the ACT Heritage Council has the capacity and responsibility to decide on such development proposals, in practice – and in my experience – the Council can effectively only review nominations that are made to it by members of the community seeking to determine the heritage status of particular objects, sites or places. While the Council is advised of development applications (in a most cursory way, again in my experience) it has no power, and certainly not the resources, to comment let alone decide on those applications unless they are directly related to a nomination. The Council has very little capacity to engage in the broader consideration of issues of precinct values and significance. Yet it is in such areas that the expertise and judgement – to the extent they are appropriately recognised by the Heritage Unit and ACT planning agencies – of the Council can be most appropriately utilised.

Drawing as it does on an established, active and purely voluntary community of support, MCHI is not seeking to preserve a sense of individual resident amenity. We seek to operate a public cultural organisation in an essentially residential area but in ways that have minimal impact on the values of that area. We accept that there needs to be sensitive multi-purpose use and diversity in residential forms in an aging and spacious suburban area. But that development must continue to respect established and (in this instance) historically significant neighbourhood and landscape character.

On this basis, we suggest that:

- The role and resourcing of the Heritage Council be expanded to allow for a more proactive (rather than reactive) engagement with such issues of precinct evaluation, taking a balanced account of heritage and development values and opportunities;
- The community be effectively advised that such a function is integral to Council's work, and that the community be fully informed on the most appropriate ways and timing to make representations to the Council on matters that are not confined to specific nominations;
- That development applications that touch on significant issues of heritage related neighbourhood and landscape character be brought before the Council with sufficient time for them to be appropriately considered, including for the Council to seek further information on proposed development before approval is given;
- That development applications should in themselves address potential impacts of broader precinct values and amenity, and include undertakings on how they will be addressed as a responsibility of the developer potentially extending beyond the bounding of the specific site for development.

With thanks for your consideration of these suggestions.



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