



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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

31st of March, 2023

Dear Committee Secretary,

Majura House is widely considered the oldest working farm and occupied homestead in the Territory. The original homestead is a sandstone structure with a slab annex and a shingle roof, which was built in the 1840s for Alfred and Mary Ann Mayo, an overseer for Robert Campbell of Duntroon. The property remained in that family until the 1970s when it was bought by Tony Sullivan and Pam Hicks, who extended the dwelling in the same style.

It was then purchased by Nick Weber and me in 1999. We have established a respected pastured free range egg business – Majura Valley Free Range Eggs- and mixed farming focussing on the 'Majura Valley' products.

The Majura House Precinct has gone largely unrecognised for the value of what it contains, what it represents, and what it has the potential to become.

The Precinct was identified more than forty years ago as having heritage value and was nominated to the Register of the National Estate in 1983 (being listed in 1986 – but with no protective effect since 2007). Despite professionals repeatedly signalling its heritage value in the 1990s and 2000s, there needed to be more clarity about its value and its nomination status, seemingly scrambled in the transition to self-government and numerous subsequent administrative and legislative changes.

In August 2020, ACT Heritage asked if a Unit member could visit the property to progress the nomination to the Heritage Register further for active assessment by the Heritage Council.

With inadequate resourcing of the ACT Heritage Unit and complications of Covid-19 lockdowns, the ACT Heritage Unit visited Majura House twice, and we remained in regular dialogue with the Unit. However, in July 2022, the Registrations Taskforce (RTF) of the Heritage Council considered the application but could not form an opinion at the time. The main barriers were the exact features identified as having heritage significance and the integrity of those features. As such, RTF requested that the Heritage Unit Registrations team draft both a decision to register the property provisionally and a decision not to provisionally register (known as a Statement of Reasons), which will be considered side-by-side at a future meeting. Shortly after, the Heritage Council was dissolved.

With the assistance of Mark Butz and the ACT Heritage Unit, we have collected and collated significant evidence to support the heritage claim. This report has been prepared for 'Majura House' in response to protracted delays in gaining recognition of the property's heritage values and achieving some security.

While we commend the Heritage Unit for its engagement and research, the process has been cumbersome, with difficulty navigating the administration and structure of the ACT Heritage Council. We intend to move quickly and progress the long-standing nomination to provisional registration. However, the system is slow. Even with a wealth of research and references to draw from, including ACT Government archives, the National Trust, Australian Library, Trove, and the Canberra District Historical Society, a clear and comprehensive declaration of the heritage significance of Majura House has yet to be accomplished.

We recognise that the background information that will accompany the nomination needs to be completed and that statements of significance and value are determined separately by the Council.

The report written by Mark Butz on the heritage values of Majura House documents the history to a level that enables an informed assessment of heritage significance, including the draft assessment. There are still things to discover, and we learn more daily as we find new resources and meet distant relatives, now customers at our farm gate shop. Nevertheless, this report provides a comprehensive understanding of the heritage significance of Majura House and the Majura Valley and its importance to the region.

We look forward to continuing our research with the ACT Heritage unit and progressing our submission to the new ACT Heritage Council.

Kind regards,

Anne McGrath | | sales@mveggs.com

www.mveggs.com | Block 715/716 | Majura House, 728 Majura Road, Majura ACT 2609