

2012

**ACT GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION, TRAINING AND YOUTH AFFAIRS – REPORT 8**

Future Use of the Fitters' Workshop, Kingston

TABLING STATEMENT

**Presented by
Joy Burch MLA
Minister for the Arts**

Mr Speaker, I am pleased today to be tabling the ACT Government's response to Report Number 8 of the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs on the Future Use of the Fitters' Workshop.

The Report, tabled out of session on 16 April 2012, made five recommendations in relation to the future use of the Fitters' Workshop; principally that it be used as a multi-purpose space, and that Megalo Print Studio and Gallery be given an alternative site for a purpose built facility on the Kingston Foreshore.

I would like to thank the Committee for their work.

There has been significant public interest in this issue both from the arts community and the media. There were 56 submissions to the Inquiry and a number of public hearings. The information in the report is a clear reflection of the different views and positions in the community, but it is little more than that.

On that basis, having carefully considered the Committee's report, the Government reaffirms its decision to refurbish the Fitters' Workshop for Megalo Print Studio, consistent with our commitment in the 2011-12 ACT Budget.

That is, the Government does not agree with the Committee's recommendations.

The Committee's reasoning and referencing of facts to support its conclusions was less than persuasive.

The arguments put forward by the Opposition and Greens to justify this inquiry were not verified or corroborated by the inquiry process, yet the majority of the Committee still propose that the ACT Government break its promise to Megalo, go back on a Budget commitment, and further delay the refurbishment of the Fitters' Workshop.

Mr Speaker, that is not how the Government treats community arts organisations.

There were suggestions in this inquiry that the unusual acoustics of the Fitters' Workshop may lend themselves to a broader range of music styles than had already been performed there – but the acoustic testing commissioned by the Committee found that the building is only suitable for a very limited range of music, particularly Gregorian chants and Enya.

We also heard claims that the Government decision-making process in committing the Fitters' Workshop for Megalo had been flawed, yet we saw nothing in the Committee's report to support this.

Mr Speaker, in the absence of new, evidence-based information, the ACT Government can see no reason to break its promise, and to exacerbate the damage already done to Megalo Print Studio's reputation.

I note there were dissenting comments from Mary Porter MLA in relation to the politicisation of the issues and the role of the media in the debate.

Ms Porter notes that her examination of the matter before the Committee led her to believe that the process leading to the decision by the ACT Government was done in the best interest of the arts community.

Ms Porter also raised concerns regarding Megalo's position as a result of the delays on this matter.

I agree. Acceptance of the Committee recommendations would only cause further delays.

The decision to locate Megalo Print Studio and Gallery to the Fitters' Workshop was made by the ACT Government with the best interest of the arts community in mind.

This decision was supported with funding for the refurbishment of the building in the 2011-12 Budget, a Budget agreed to by the Assembly.

During the course of the inquiry there was commentary about the impact refurbishments would have on the heritage values of the Fitters' Workshop.

The Fitters' Workshop is heritage-listed, and as such any works to the internal or external parts of the building would need to be consistent with its heritage listing.

Just as the conversion of the former Powerhouse building to accommodate the Canberra Glassworks has in fact enhanced the heritage features of the building, so too will the refurbishment to accommodate Megalo.

I note that proponents of the mixed-use option have given no consideration to the reality that to make the Fitters' Workshop usable for performances, exhibitions and

other activities, substantial additional funding would be needed to meet standards such as accessibility, fire and emergency, and occupational health and safety.

And what impact would these necessary works have on the building's acoustics?

The Committee's Report also outlines the timelines discussed by the Land Development Agency during public hearings of the Inquiry.

Notwithstanding that the Land Development Agency representative who appeared before the Committee prefaced his comments with the disclaimer that his timelines were "ballpark" only and that the Land Development Agency did not have carriage of the project, the Committee chose to accept these timeframes over those provided consistently by the Community Services Directorate.

That of course is a moot point, given the delays caused by this inquiry.

Mr Speaker, there has been such a delay with construction on the Fitters' Workshop that Megalo will need to call Watson home for at least another year.

I urge the Assembly not to exacerbate the division in the arts community that this issue has caused.

Mr Speaker, this government made a decision to accommodate Megalo at the Fitters' Workshop. It reaffirms that decision today.

People have had their say. Their views have been carefully considered. It is now time to get on with the job.

It is time to end the disruption to Megalo Print Studio and help the Government get on with delivering for Canberra's arts community.

2012

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

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ACT Government Response

Introduction

The ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs (the Committee) provided the Assembly with its report on 16 April 2012.

The ACT Government wishes to thank the Committee for its work in relation to this Inquiry. The Government also wishes to acknowledge the individuals and organisations that provided Submissions to the Committee and thanks them for their contributions.

The decision to locate Megalo Print Studio and Gallery (Megalo) to the Fitters' Workshop was made by the ACT Government with the best interest of the arts community in mind. This decision has been subsequently supported with funding for the refurbishment of the building in the 2011-12 Budget. This Budget was approved and agreed in whole by the Assembly..

The information contained in the Report provides a useful summary of the key issues surrounding the Fitters' Workshop and the Kingston Arts Precinct. It should be noted that there are dissenting comments from Mary Porter AM MLA stating she does not support the majority of the Report by the Committee.

In the course of the inquiry there was some misleading commentary about the impact the proposed refurbishments would have on the heritage values of the Fitters' Workshop. The Fitters' Workshop is heritage-listed, and as such any works to the internal or external parts of the building would need to be consistent with its heritage listing. The plans for the refurbishment of the Fitters' Workshop to accommodate Megalo were consistent with heritage guidelines and would in no way compromise its heritage values. Just as the conversion of the former Powerhouse building to accommodate the Canberra Glassworks has in fact enhanced the heritage features of the building, so too would the refurbishment proposed to accommodate Megalo.

There was also some commentary suggesting that the Government's decision-making process in allocating the Fitters' Workshop for use by Megalo was in some way deficient or flawed. However, it is worth noting that the Committee's report has made no adverse finding or commentary about the decision-making process.

Furthermore, proponents of the mixed-use option have given no consideration to the reality that for the Government to make the Fitters' Workshop a usable building for performances, exhibitions and other activities would require substantial additional funding to comply with standards such as accessibility, fire and emergency, and occupational health and safety.

The addition of heating and cooling systems, insulation, seating, fire exits; and other amenities are practical realities for any dedicated functions venue, yet there

was little consideration by the committee about what impact these necessary works would have on the building's acoustics.

The Report outlines the timelines discussed by the Land Development Agency during public hearings of the Inquiry. Notwithstanding that the LDA representative who appeared before the Committee prefaced his comments with the disclaimer that his timelines were "ballpark" timeframes only and that LDA did not have carriage of the project, the Committee chose to accept these timeframes over those provided consistently by the Community Services Directorate. The actual timeframes for the construction work on the Fitters' Workshop are being managed by the Community Services Directorate. It is expected that from commencement, construction will take 12 months, following which, Megalo will be able to re-locate.

The Kingston Arts Precinct Strategy (KAPS) released in October 2011, outlines a vision and key principles for Kingston. The vision outlined in this Strategy agreed by the ACT Government is: *dynamic, inspirational energetic: where artists, cultural organisations and creative businesses make, teach, exhibit, perform and sell their work.*

In order for this vision to be realised the commitment to move Megalo to the Fitters' Workshop is required to be fulfilled.

ACT Government Response to Committee Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Fitters' Workshop be used as a multi-use arts and performance venue.

ACT Government response:

Not Agree

Since 2009, the ACT Government has been committed to working with Megalo to transform the Fitters' Workshop into a leading print studio and gallery. Significant time and energy has been devoted to the project by Megalo, project architects and ACT Government directorates.

The ACT Government continues the commitment to the redevelopment of the Fitters' Workshop for Megalo. The ACT Budget committed \$2.5 million in 2011-12 and \$1.4 million in 2012-13 to refurbish the Fitters' Workshop for Megalo to occupy the building. \$2.35 million of the commitment for the 2011-12 year has been re-profiled to 2012-13 due to the delays as a result of the Inquiry process.

The Development Application for the refurbishment has been approved (subject to minor conditions related to contamination management and the removal of underground storage tanks).

The discussion regarding the acoustics of the Fitters' Workshop led the Committee to commission two acoustic reports to inform the Inquiry. The first report by SLR indicates "the space appears to be limited to a narrow range of musical performances due to these unusual characteristics". The second report from KVDL states "the room would be good for slower forms of music – Gregorian Chant or Enya for example".

The Territory has recently completed capital upgrades to the Albert Hall in order to restore this performance venue. The Albert Hall is a major venue for music presentation in Canberra and has been the principle venue for the Canberra International Music Festival for many years.

The ACT Government position remains that the best use of the Fitters' Workshop is by Megalo Print Studio and Gallery. There has been no substantiated claim that there is a greater need for a multi-use space at the Fitters' Workshop such as that proposed by the Committee.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends the Government suspend its decision to make the Fitters' Workshop, Kingston a print studio to allow the current master planning process underway for the Kingston Arts Precinct to be re-opened incorporating the Fitters' Workshop as a multi-use arts and performance venue.

ACT Government response:Not Agree

The Land Development Agency commissioned the development of a master plan for section 49 Kingston. The development of the draft master plan has included extensive community consultation. The final master plan for the area will be finalised by the ACT Government noting that the Fitters' Workshop will be utilised by Megalo Print Studio and Gallery.

Recommendation 3

The Government respond to Recommendation 1 within 30 days giving a timetable and terms of reference for the consultation recommended by the Committee.

ACT Government response:Not Agree

It was not possible to respond to this recommendation within 30 days due to the need for government decision making processes to be undertaken. A timetable and terms of reference for consultation is not necessary due to the Government decision to confirm commitment to Megalo Print Studio and Gallery.

The Report provides no new information which warrants the revisiting of the decision to locate Megalo Print Studio and Gallery in the Fitters' Workshop.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends the current decision to convert the Fitters' Workshop for Megalo Print Studio be re-considered and that immediate steps be taken to identify an alternative site for a purpose-built building at the Kingston Arts Precinct.

ACT Government response:Not Agree

A commitment has been made to Megalo Print Studio and Gallery that the Fitters' Workshop will be refurbished for their use. There has been substantial work done in good faith over a number of years towards this decision. Funding has been expended on the design and documentation for the re-use of the Fitters' Workshop for Megalo. A substantial commitment in the ACT Budget has been made for construction at the Fitters' Workshop.

It is the intention of the ACT Government that this work commence as soon as possible with the aim of having Megalo located at Kingston in the not too distant future.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends the funding made available for the conversion of the Fitters' Workshop be retained for funding the construction of the purpose-built building for Megalo at the Kingston Arts Precinct be retained and applied for that purpose.

ACT Government response:

Not Agree

The 2011-12 ACT Budget identified funding for the refurbishment of the Fitters' Workshop for use by Megalo. Design and documentation is complete for the project and the programming of construction is ready to commence. Megalo has undertaken significant business planning for location to the Fitters' Workshop and is ready for finalisation of plans based on concrete construction timetables.

The location of Megalo within the Fitters' Workshop, a key heritage building, in the Kingston Arts Precinct is a key step in the realisation of activation of that precinct. There has been significant support for Megalo from the community. The realisation of ACT Government policy released in 2003 for a visual arts hub in the Kingston Foreshore is an important step in moving forward to achieving what is set out in the Kingston Arts Precinct Strategy.