



**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

## Exhibit

Inquiry into ACT's heritage arrangements

**Exhibit Number: 018**

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# Opening statement

Howard Maclean, Convenor, Greater Canberra Inc  
Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity,  
Inquiry into the ACT's heritage arrangements, 16 May 2023

How we plan our city is how we plan our society. Land use decisions are the most important ones that this Legislative Assembly is charged with making. Every aspect of our society - how and where we spend our time, who we meet, our culture, our economy, and our emissions are all shaped by how we build our city.

Decisions we make about heritage preservation have incredible consequences that reverberate through every other aspect of our city. These decisions are too important to be left to a small unelected group.

Under the current Heritage Act framework, change to registered places is extremely difficult, verging on impossible. If we register a place then, we are freezing its current form for all time. It is a statement that we believe that what exists is more important than anything else that could possibly exist on the land instead. We choose posterity of the past over the prosperity of the future

Canberra is 110 years old this year. In the history of this city, the 21st century will one day be reckoned as the very beginning. The decisions we make now, under the existing heritage framework, are intended to be perpetual - to shape our city for many centuries and even millennia to come.

We owe it to our successors to get it right. We also owe to them the ability to shape the city to meet the needs and aspirations of their Canberra, and the ability to express themselves architecturally.

Our current Heritage Act denies them this ability. Our current threshold for registering heritage places is too low, and the rate we are doing so is unsustainably high.

These costs are not just abstract. Meeting our city's housing needs, emission reduction goals, and future infrastructure challenges will require change to our built form. Currently, large portions of inner city Canberra, particularly the Garden City precincts cannot contribute to this. The cost is measured in higher rents, longer commute times, higher emissions, higher infrastructure costs and lower incomes.

For me this is personal. Outside my home in Kingston, there is a plaque commemorating the Printers Quarters, a set of 12 semi-detached homes built in 1926 for some of Canberra's early workers. Had the Printer's Quarters been preserved, I and hundreds of other families would not be able to call Kingston home, because building our homes would have been illegal.

110 years ago, our city did not exist. Since then, one of its few defining characteristics has been change. Change of plans, of planners and of its people. We must embrace this in our approach to heritage.

Our heritage matters. But we can strike a better balance between it and the many other pressing needs on land use. We can create a system that is more democratically responsive and accountable. And we can create a Heritage system which is better funded to actually preserve and celebrate heritage, rather than simply preventing buildings from changing.

How we can do so is outlined in our submission, which we are happy to discuss further.