



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

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

Inquiry into ACT's heritage arrangements

**Submission Number: 024**

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# Submission to the Inquiry into ACT's Heritage Arrangements

## Fire Brigade Historical Society of the ACT

28 March 2023

### 1. Background

The Fire Brigade Historical Society of the ACT ('the Society') was established in 1978 by members and retired members of the ACT Fire Brigade. The Society's collection of objects, oral histories, archival material, and vehicles preserve the ACT's firefighting history and comprise a nationally significant collection firefighting heritage. The Society shares the collection and stories at the Canberra Fire Museum.

The Canberra Fire Museum has occupied the heritage-registered (20015) Forrest Fire Station since 2000 (by agreement with ACT Fire & Rescue). The Forrest Fire Station Precinct, including fire station and nine residences for firefighters were opened in 1939. One of the residences is retained for use by ACT Fire & Rescue, the other eight are in privately owned / occupied.

Volunteers with the Society are included as ACT Fire & Rescue volunteers and a representative of the Society reports at the regular Emergency Services Agency Minister Meeting with Volunteers. Volunteers, including both retired fire fighters and museums studies students and graduates, maintain the Forrest Fire Station and the Society's collection, working at the Museum at least three days a week, including opening every Saturday to the public.

### 2. Experience of ACT Heritage Council and ACT Heritage Unit

#### 2.1 *Effectiveness of the structure, administration, and operation of the ACT Heritage Council*

##### 2.1.1. Approval processing

The Society have submitted documentation requesting approvals to the ACT Heritage Council over the years. Recently, we have found the approval times to be lengthy and this has caused delays in preservation work bring undertaken.

##### 2.1.2 Heritage Nominations

At the encouragement of the ACT Heritage Unit, the Society submitted a nomination for 22 Fire Appliances to be included on the ACT Heritage Register on 16 October 2019 and

received a letter of receipt and notification that the nomination had been accepted for consideration by ACT Heritage on 24 October 2019. We have not received any further correspondence to date.

#### 2.1.3 Enforcement of heritage legislation

We have noticed significant incremental changes to the privately held buildings within the heritage-registered area which would appear, on the face of it, to compromise the heritage values of the Forrest Fire Station Precinct.

### 2.2 *Adequacy of resourcing for the ACT Heritage Unit*

#### 2.2.1 Programs and engagement

The Society has participated in most ACT Heritage Festivals in recent years and contributed to the development of Canberra Tracks signage for the Forrest Fire Station. Communication was clear and timely, and [REDACTED] has been a superb leader and advocate for these highly visible programs. The Society have always felt individually supported by Linda and her team and been proud and grateful to be included.

#### 2.2.2 ACT Heritage Grants

The Society has successfully applied for two ACT Heritage Grants. We would particularly like to note our deep appreciation for Grant Officer [REDACTED] care, commitment, and dedication over the years. The Heritage Unit have been generous and sensitive in their appreciation of the challenges of managing a volunteer-run community museum.

In our experience, this program has a significant impact on the preservation and interpretation of the ACT's heritage. While the Society have always felt energetically supported, given the number of stakeholders across the Program, we speculate that the workload for the Heritage Unit must be extremely heavy.

#### 2.2.3 Limitations on ACT Heritage Grants

In 2021, the Society applied for an ACT Heritage Grant to address urgent, repeated, and consistent water ingress issues at the Forrest Fire Station. This application was unsuccessful because the building occupier, ACT Fire & Rescue, although supportive, could not divert funds from the core business of providing emergency services and was thus unable to contribute financially to the degree required under the Guidelines.

I note that in our Society archive there is a letter from ACT Heritage dated 13 July 2004 to advise us that our application under that year's ACT Heritage Grants round to address 'Urgent and essential repairs to the roof of Forrest Fire Station' was unsuccessful.

The rationale that Government agencies occupying heritage buildings, whose core business is not heritage preservation, should bear the responsibility and cost of preserving heritage

buildings is not realistic. The ACT Government should recognise that preserving a heritage building is significantly more costly and complex than conventional maintenance.

In our experience, existing ACT Grant Guidelines, eligibility restrictions, and the quantum of funding available is inconsistent with strategic preservation of the ACT's built heritage.

#### 2.2.4 ACT Heritage Grants Emergency Fund

Following our unsuccessful ACT Heritage Grant application to address water ingress issues at the Forrest Fire Station, the Society successfully applied under the ACT Heritage Grant Emergency Fund, the Guidelines for which did not require the contribution from ACT Fire & Rescue. Although identical, a whole new application was required. This was submitted on 25 July 2021. We were grateful to be successful and received the Deed of Grant on 7 April 2022.

However, due to the requirements to obtain two expert reports and Heritage Council approval, these works have not yet commenced. We will be unlikely to be able to undertake the full scope of works within the original grant budget because costs have significantly increased since our original application was submitted in 2021. While we wait, water continues to flow into the heritage building at times of heavy rain.

### 2.3 Experts

Our observation is that the number of suppliers of expert knowledge (heritage architects and consultants) available for completing approval requirements under the Heritage Legislation is limited. They are expensive – well beyond the reach of community organisations' budgets. Grants are therefore required to complete heritage conservation works in order to pay consultancy fees. The requirement to engage this expertise means that heritage deteriorates unless grants are available.

## 3. How the ACT's heritage arrangements might be improved to guarantee the ACT Heritage Council achieves its statutory functions

### 3.1 Processes

- Create a fast-track process for approvals that are required to complete work that is funded by ACT Heritage Grants.
- Simplify the process and volume of paperwork required to apply for ACT Heritage Grants.
- Create subcommittees of the Council for different types of application so that complex matters do not delay the processing of routine or less complex approvals.
- Create clear, brief, template documentation for approvals so the volume of papers are limited.
- Reconsider the nature and structure of approvals required, perhaps through offering templates, increasing Heritage Unit assistance, and reducing the requirement to rely on engaging expensive experts or put in place mechanisms to increase competition in this market.

### 3.2 Resourcing

- Significantly increase funding available and reduce eligibility barriers for access to the successful ACT Heritage Grants program.
- Significantly increase administration human resourcing to support the Heritage Council and in the ACT Heritage Unit to allow both to *proactively* manage the ACT's heritage.

### 3.3 Enforcement

- Significantly increased expert staffing and resources for investigation and prosecution to enforce the Heritage legislation.

### 3.4 Heritage Register Nominations

- The ACT Heritage Unit should be adequately staffed and resourced to identify heritage at risk and work with stakeholders to prepare nominations.
- When nominations are accepted for consideration, there should be human resources allocated to support maximum consideration times.

## Submission prepared by

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