



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 Heritage Inquiry



Thank you for the invitation to make a submission to the Inquiry into ACT's Heritage Arrangements on behalf of the historic Tuggeranong Schoolhouse Museum, in the suburb of Chisholm.

The Museum is unique in the Canberra region as it is the best preserved 1880 schoolhouse and residence open to the general public, and it offers an excellent opportunity to understand the history of the region, its settlement, and remarkable development. The people who were once associated with the schoolhouse provide their own special contribution to these changes which include the passage from Aboriginal grounds, (stone artefacts have been found on site), then rural settlement, to the creation of the national capital and beyond. I have been privileged to manage the schoolhouse, to undertake extensive social and material research, and open it on a regular basis to visitors.

The Schoolroom and adjoining residence are the property of the ACT Government, being administered by the ACT Property Group which has hundreds of local buildings within its portfolio. A few, like the schoolhouse, are a significant departure from its regular business.

The care of historic buildings means that the Group must respond to heritage issues and standards, the handling of expert heritage and conservation reports, and implementation, as well as building conservation issues well outside its core expertise. Consultants and volunteers make an important contribution.

In 2009-10 the ACT Government undertook an extensive renovation of the building, and I was then invited to provide my collection of appropriate furniture so I could conduct the site as a museum of education and social history. I have a teaching and museum background and I have run the place as a volunteer without any financial support for the past twelve years. I draw no money from the operation; it is simply my contribution to the heritage of the region.

A revamped ACT Heritage Council, working with the ACT Heritage Unit needs to be able to ensure that local government departments such as the ACT Property Group, which owns several historic sites, can provide enough flexibility and support for volunteers and groups that they can ensure the preservation of more historical assets.

I therefore hope that the inquiry will consider that the Tuggeranong Schoolhouse must remain a museum and that (a) 'the effectiveness and adequacy of the operation under the Heritage Act 2004' will be enhanced and extended. Hopefully then the Heritage Council and Heritage Unit will support and protect the site, particularly from urban infill and any inappropriate remodification or unsympathetic use as has happened to it in the past.

Point (c) is also important in that the future of the Tuggeranong Schoolhouse, which is Heritage Listed, would be ensured if 'the ACT Heritage arrangements were improved to guarantee that the ACT Heritage Council achieves its statutory functions'.

I welcome the opportunity to make this submission in light of my impending retirement from my voluntary position in 2023, and my expectation that a replacement is available. I am anxious to see the museum be recognised as a local treasure and that an incoming manager receive appropriate support.

I look forward to reading the Inquiry's results and working with the new Council. You may access my website; www.historywithadifference.com.au for more information and you may also contact me on my (mobile)

In the future I would like to see greater liaison and cooperation between the administration of the site, (ACT Property Group), the Heritage Council and the new manager.

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry,

Kind Regards,

Elizabeth Burness

Tuggeranong Schoolhouse Museum

Appendix A

A Brief History of the Site

- 1878 a slab schoolhouse erected by local parents. Michael Kennedy and his wife – schoolteachers.
- 1880 current brick schoolhouse opened and throughout its history is administered by the NSW Education Department. The outside brick privy also dates from 1880. Schoolroom operates as a post office – a community hub.
- 1898 Kennedy retires and Francis McGee and his wife take over. They also run the property as a successful farm.
- McGee and his family of 7 children in residence for 30 years, without modern conveniences such as electricity and town water.
- In 1899 the weatherboard kitchen was added to the main building.
- The schoolroom was used as an inoculation centre during the Spanish Flu epidemic, 1919, – a community hub.
- James McGee, son of Francis, starts his spectacular career as a world- renowned scientist.
- He will become an important scientist for the British in WWII and be involved in the development of television.
- McGee retires in 1927, much respected by the local community, and receives an illuminated testimonial. A copy of it hangs in the schoolroom.
- The weatherboard garage was built in 1928.
- William Duffy and family live there until 1933 when Francis Luff and family take over. From 1929 – 1939 schoolroom used as a polling station – community hub.
- In the late 1930s Claude Brown and family live there until the end of 1939 when the school closes because of too few students.
- The schoolhouse becomes accommodation for government employees the longest serving being Leslie Morton and family. He also ran the property as a successful farm.
- They lived there from 1948 until 1977 and Les built the shearing shed and hen house in the 1950s and they remain on site.
- From 1977 a succession of tenants lived on site with the Nott family staying there for about 20 years.
- In 2009 – 10 the ACT Government extensively renovated the buildings, but they were empty.
- In 2011 I was invited to house my antique collection in the buildings and run it as a museum.
- I opened the site regularly every month and by appointment welcoming hundreds of schoolchildren and the elderly as well as the public.
- In 2013 a major comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan was commissioned by the ACT Property Group.
- On site I have found three stone aboriginal artefacts as well as other surface archaeology.