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COMMENT ON CANBERRA: A CAPITAL PLACE, REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AUTHORITY

The National Trust ACT welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Report of the Independent Review of the National Capital Authority, Canberra: A Capital Place by Dr Allan Hawke (Hawke Report).

The National Trust ACT, with a membership of over 1,500, is part of the National Trust movement in Australia representing 80,000 members. Our charter states:

- Our vision is to be an independent and expert community leader in the conservation of our cultural and natural heritage.
- Our purpose is to foster public knowledge about, and promote the conservation of places and objects that are significant to our heritage.
- Our organisation is a not-for-profit organisation of people interested in understanding and conserving heritage places and objects of local, national and international significance in the ACT region.

In the interest of conserving and promoting the heritage of the National Capital we provide the following comments on the Hawke Report:

We agree with the issues raised throughout the report which regard the current problems with planning and land management arrangements in Canberra. Issues relating to heritage places in the ACT such as the lack of transparency in planning processes, general confusion over terminology in relevant legislation, the distribution of management powers and obligations between the ACT and Commonwealth Governments, lack of funding and resources and the confusion surrounding Territory Land within Designated Areas are all problems that the

National Trust has dealt with on a number of occasions. This can be seen specifically in our comments in 2008 relating to the Hawke Review of the EPBC Act, the Review of the ACT Heritage Act 2004 and our recent comments on the NCOSS Review to the NCA.

We support the recommendations which attempt to address the above issues, especially Recommendations 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 19 & 21 and would like to see them endorsed and acted upon by the minister. Some suggestions regarding these recommendations however include:

- That the member of the NCA board appointed to represent the interests of the Canberra Community is a member of the community not simply a politician.
- There is the potential for the creation of a National Capital Advisory Committee which includes experts from various fields to assist the NCA board with their decisions. This could represent and utilize the skills of special interest groups not only from Canberra but throughout Australia; the National Trust could be one such group.
- We would also like to see the instigation of a formal appeals process available for planning decisions made by the NCA to assist with making the processes more transparent, recent issues surrounding the proposed War Memorials for Rond Terrace highlight the need for this process and to involve the community in decisions that affect both the Canberra population and Australians in general.

Our main concern however, still regards the 'heritage gap', while recommendations are suggested in Chapter 10 we feel the confusion surrounding heritage, planning and land management is still far from being clarified. The general suggestions made in the review in regards to changing the EPBC Act processes may seem suitable to some heritage sites but for others this is not the preferred option. The Albert Hall Precinct is a prime example of this; an ACT Heritage Registered site on Territory Land, within a Designated Area. To declare this site as being on National Land will effectively mean the Canberra Community or Government will not have a say in its overall management. When it comes to heritage sites in Designated Areas their heritage status needs to be considered on a case-by-case basis ie: whether the site has state, commonwealth or national significance, to ensure the correct protection is afforded and the correct heritage significance is acknowledged.

The need to fix the 'heritage gap' has also become urgent at this time as most of the heritage places in Designated Areas are listed on the Register of the National Estate which, as of February 2012, will no longer hold any formal heritage list status. As such these sites, under National Capital Authority planning control will have no legislative heritage protection from the Commonwealth. We suggest the provision of a mechanism to transfer a number of places into an appropriate heritage register, whether that is state or Commonwealth.

We hope these suggestions are taken into consideration upon review of the Hawke Report and assist in making the NCA more effective and efficient, especially when it comes to conserving our important heritage assets.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Lance', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Bethany Lance
Research Officer
National Trust (ACT)
18th November 2011