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COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT ACT HERITAGE STRATEGY

The ACT National Trust welcomes the initiative of the Government to develop a Heritage Strategy for the ACT. The Trust supports this initiative as a first step in the right direction towards better management and conservation of our diverse heritage. We also welcome the opportunity to provide comments on the recently released draft document.

The comments below, formulated by the Trust's Heritage Committee, are aimed at a holistic process for a wide-reaching strategy.

OVERVIEW

Heritage is an important aspect of everyone's life. It records the events and achievements that shape our lives and our nation. It frames our culture and is a keystone for personal and national values that instill pride and community cohesion. Research demonstrates that caring for places of cultural heritage significance generates significant environmental, economic and social benefits. Benefits mean that heritage contributes to wider agendas such as health outcomes, education, the environment and urban planning.

An effective heritage strategy will require a shared understanding of what constitutes ACT's heritage and a set of policies and program of actions that will allow not only its preservation, but also recognize our heritage as a dynamic entity and plan for its future. The strategy needs to recognize the strengths and weaknesses inherent in the current programs and mechanisms we have in place throughout the Territory and provide insightful strategies for their enhancement and mitigation. The Strategy must be forward looking, and while being directed at cultural, natural, tangible and intangible heritage, be conversant with future conservation concerns such as population increases, climate change and the ever increasing velocity of the digital age.

Most importantly, the strategy must be a final product coming from well-informed input from both government and non-government organisations. The ACT Heritage Strategy therefore must be formed by the people (present) and for the people (present and future).

ELEMENTS OF THE STRATEGY

A vision

A strategy for ACT's heritage should clearly define what is intended to be done in the 5 years to manage ACT heritage. A clear vision needs to be defined as a basis for the strategy then followed by what actions are needed to achieve it.

Objectives

- A statement of objectives. The statement should be clear and concise referring to a set of objectives recognising the ACT's diverse heritage and a strong commitment by government to conserve and preserve all aspects making up the heritage of the Territory. The statement should emphasise that heritage management will comply with the Burra Charter and the Natural Heritage Charter.
- A clear guidance on how the Strategy is to operate. This would include, corporate budgeting and the financial reporting processes (eg annual reports).
- An appropriate budget allocation is required to manage the properties and assets to protect their heritage values.

Organisation and Process

- Understanding significance. There needs to be a review of how places of local significance fit within the ACT. The ACT is different in that it manages places of state/territory level as well as local significance yet this is not addressed in the heritage assessment policy.
- Establishing best practice. There must be a concerted effort to ensure that heritage values are clearly defined and supported by public consultation before any planning and development occurs. This will then inform the opportunities and constraints that will guide development and reduce time and cost and frustration that is happening too often at present.
- The heritage of the ACT should be managed by a separate government agency, independent and not subsumed into a monolithic department. It should be free of political influences, with the necessary statutory powers to provide unhindered management of ACT's heritage. Management staff should be made up of people with a strong background of heritage management and be realistically funded and resourced.
- The strategy should outline the process for consultation and/or liaison with other organizations. The strategy must have a clear process for consultation and liaison with the community on heritage issues. The process should include regular liaison with membership based organization, meetings/events, and advice to community on heritage matters including Indigenous stakeholders, communication via social media.
- Partnerships. The strategy should include an ongoing process of establishing and working in partnership with non-government and not for profit organisations. This is an essential part of a successful heritage process which in the past has not always been instigated. An example is: Previous rejections of National Trust grant applications made on behalf of and in partnership with other not for profit organisations who needed assistance. Such

rejections have been made on the basis that it was work that should be done by Government yet the projects have not been carried out.

- The strategy must outline the process of liaison within Territory Government & Commonwealth.

Means

- Heritage Code. This is recommended to guide planning decisions and try and make it easier for proposed development application to understand and appreciate heritage issues. It would work like other planning codes that exist at present.
- Funding. If the Government is to support heritage then more resources are required to enable the Heritage Unit and Council to implement the heritage strategy. This needs to extend to compliance and enforcement which is best managed by those who have expertise in heritage.
- Heritage Register. There needs to be a review of the balance of the register to assess if it adequately addresses all aspects of our heritage. The strategy should include all aspects and not restrict it to some aspects as is mentioned in the discussion documents.
- Improve the consultation with the community. This relates to the above point, but also needs to occur for listings/nominations to the register and also conservation plans. At present there is not any community input to Conservation and Management Plan endorsement which is different to the EPBC Act that operates nationally.
- A direct involvement in community education. Examples would be a continued and wider sponsorship involvement with the annual National History Challenge; provision for extra-curricular activities by schools in heritage related activities; and the continued support of the ACT Heritage Festival.
- The strategy should outline a process for the resolution of conflict resulting from concerns related to Territory/Commonwealth management of heritage assets. Conflict avoidance in heritage management should come before conflict resolution following planning proposals.
- Review of the definition of social significance and what constitutes a community in the criteria. The ACT definition is different to other states and this needs debate and redefinition.
- The Heritage Grants program needs to be reviewed and expanded to provide funding for peak bodies. The money allocation is not much more than what it was 25 years ago which means that it has effectively been devalued.
- There are a small number of key non-government bodies working to promote the importance of history, heritage and conservation to the community and bringing people together, creating community identity and a sense of pride:

Each of these plays a range of important roles including policy work, education, advocacy and maintaining robust bodies of records and evidence. All of these community bodies

operate on a voluntary, not-for profit basis and only receive occasional project funding from the ACT Heritage Grants Program. Their main sources of income are membership fees and proceeds from fundraising activities. All of these organisations are experiencing organisational financial stress and need increased support and funding by the Government.

In the case of our organisation, the National Trust is key stakeholder not only on Policy but also in processing of Development Applications and Planning that can be complex and require extensive review and analysis. Over the last year the Trust has provided input on 31 proposals including many of a major and complex nature such as City to the Lake, Redevelopment of Northbourne Avenue, Albert Hall etc.

The Government must recognise that community consultation/participation is resource intensive and consumes considerable time and effort for our limited group of volunteers who undertake this task on a part time basis. It also diverts our capacity from our other activities.

Unlike our peers in the Arts and Sport and Recreation, History, Heritage and Conservation bodies do not receive financial assistance to assist their operational costs. The Heritage Grants Program should be revised to include equivalent financial assistance to eligible key history, heritage and conservation organisations. Investing in these organisations assists the development and progression of projects therefore, governments and proponents of major projects should provide additional resources.

- Outline a process for the resolution of conflict resulting from concerns related to State/Commonwealth management of heritage assets. Conflict avoidance in heritage management should come before conflict resolution following planning proposals.

Heritage Tourism

Canberra is the heart of the nation and this is a competitive promotional and economic advantage for the ACT. History and heritage is a major driver of ACT tourism, which as yet has not been fully exploited.

Each year the Trust alone conducts a range of community, local, regional and international events and tours. In 2013, we conducted the National Capital Centenary Rally that included over 300 vehicles. Heritage tourism needs to be continually renewed and in order to prosper its businesses, community organisations and individuals need to be encouraged and assisted to innovate, learn and adapt.

Canberra should be promoted as **“Australia’s Heritage City”**

NT (ACT) would like to work with the Government in a Feasibility Study and collegiate development of a history and heritage marketing plan.

Performance Measurement

To be effective in achieving the Vision, the Heritage Strategy needs to be implemented and then measured and reviewed on a cyclical basis to enable policies and the program of actions and resourcing to be re-assessed and recalibrated where necessary. Good data and information is essential.

We are aware that regular economic impact studies are made of ACT sport and recreation. A similar holistic study of the impact and value of history, heritage and conservation activity to the community in terms of social, community, and economic inputs and outcomes is needed to provide the data necessary for the development of cogent industry strategy and business cases to support planning decisions and claims for investment. It will also enable the development of Key Performance Indicators and generate a heritage industry database that can be used for further related research and industry development activity. Studies must be undertaken every 4 years.

Implementation Plan

The development of the Strategy must include a program for the implementation actions that are prioritized and timetable of associated milestones.

The ACT National Trust looks forward to the opportunity of discussing the contents of this letter with the Minister and/or his department.

Yours sincerely



Scott McAlister
President

