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PATRON: The Hon Margaret Reid AO

## LAKE BURLEY GRIFFIN AND ADJACENT LANDS ASSESSMENT OF A PLACE FOR COMMONWEALTH HERITAGE LIST

Dear Sir/Madam

The National Trust of Australia (ACT) considers that Lake Burley Griffin and Adjacent Lands meets all the relevant criteria for inclusion on the Commonwealth Heritage List.

Australia became a nation on 1 January 1901 when the six colonies federated, and the Commonwealth of Australia was proclaimed. In 1908 the Commonwealth Parliament passed the Seat of Government Act 1908, designating the Yass-Queanbeyan area for Australia's Capital Territory. In 1911 the new Federal Capital Territory came under Commonwealth control. In 1913 the name of the new capital was declared to be Canberra and is fundamental to Australia's cultural history.

The Lake and Adjacent Lands are the canvas on which Australia's National Capital has been set. This area is a key element in Griffin's plan for a city, in which the most important institutions and national buildings are placed. The design of this area demonstrates a high degree of creative and technical achievement at a particular period in our history.

These unique heritage assets have aesthetic characteristics and are of great social and cultural value to the nation and Canberra. Walter Burley Griffin said '*I have planned a city that is not like any other in the world.... I have planned an ideal city – a city that meets my ideal of the city of the future*'.

The centrepiece of his design showed a chain of lakes along the Molonglo Valley. The lake is located in the approximate geographic centre of the city and is the centrepiece of the capital. The axes of his design lined up with natural geographical landmarks and numerous important institutions, such as the Parliament House, Australian War Memorial, Commonwealth Park and High Court, have been built on its shores and each exhibits particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community.

The area has great importance to Australia from a cultural perspective as it accommodates major Australian cultural places, including the National Gallery, National Portrait Gallery, National Museum, National Library, and the Museum of Australian Democracy.

The Lake acts as the central stage of Griffin's 'amphitheatre' of hills, designed to display national monuments reflected in its ornamental waters. Its central location offered Griffin the opportunity to create one of the world's great central parks – 'playground of the city' as Griffin described it. Griffin's plan saw large stretches of natural parkland alternated with judiciously sited urban waterfront developments.

When he inaugurated the lake on 17 October 1964 Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies said:

'This lake - the creation of this lake - is the result of a pretty long struggle.... I fought an uphill battle for a long time. But after the war when I had an opportunity in my own right, I began to come back to this project because I have always believed, and never more than today, that you can't have a great city unless you have water in it.... Water, water - all the great cities of the world.....

This is the heart of the city. And I hope it'll be a heart that will be quietly beating. Not noisy, not uproarious - a quietly beating, restful heart for the rest of our lives. Now, of course, it's been beautifully done. Do let me say that to you, if it needs to be said. 'Cause a lake is more than a sheet of water. You can have a sheet of water if you spent enough money on it anywhere, I suppose, around about, even in the middle of Australia. But it's what's around the sheet of water that helps to set the beauty of the lake. And all the work that's been done on the foreshores, in the surrounds of this lake, all the additions of beauty that have been made will, I think, put us under permanent debt to those who have been responsible for their design and for their execution....

But from now on, here it is, the centre of recreation, a lake that will give completeness, for example, to all the scholastic facilities that exist and will exist in this city. A lake that will complete the amenities of life.....even for the academic staffs of the university, who will be able to go out on the lake in future and forget all about politics...and have a good time. Really, there's something here for all of us - all of us. Politicians, as Douglas Anthony has just said, will be able to look at the lake with a new significance in future. All of us will be the better for having this lovely centre in this lovely city....'

Every year many people are attracted to Canberra because of the national institutions and their surrounds, which includes the lake. The Adjacent Lands, popular with tourists and recreational users, are used for a wide variety of other activities, such as rowing, fishing, and sailing. Canberra now has 6.13 million visitors per year, ninety per cent of whom come from within Australia. This includes over 114,000 students from 2,000 schools that visit Canberra as part of their civics studies. This tourism contributes \$2.5 billion to the ACT economy.

Both locals and visitors are very positive about their experience of the lake and its surrounds. In 2009 the National Trust of Australia (ACT) commissioned a study of the social value of Lake Burley Griffin and its surrounds. The study sought to establish how Canberra people use and value the lake and which views around the lake are significant.

Completed questionnaires were received from 758 people, an impressive response rate indicating the importance of Lake Burley Griffin to the people of Canberra. Overall people were very positive about their experience of the lake and its surrounds.

Over 80 per cent of respondents had visited almost all places around the lake. The survey identified the top 15 views which people rated important to their enjoyment of places around the lake. Eight of these views were associated with national icons such as Parliament House and Government House, indicating that the people are very aware of their place being the national capital. Seeing views and experiencing nature are the most important reasons for visiting places.

### **The Views**

'Views' was the most frequently given reason for visiting places around the lake. In order, Commonwealth Park, the National Carillon, Kings Park, Black Mountain Peninsula, Yarralumla Bay and Commonwealth and Reconciliation Places, were the places most valued for their views.

### **Exercise**

Exercise was the next most frequent reason for visiting places around the lake and it was a reason applied to almost all places. Relaxation was an important reason for visiting Weston Park, Commonwealth Park and Black Mountain Peninsula. A very strong relationship was found between 'views' and 'relaxation' as reasons for visiting places, confirming the importance of nature in providing restorative experiences and a sense of tranquillity and well-being.

### **Wildlife**

Ninety-seven per cent of respondents rated seeing wildlife as important or very important and nearly 80 per cent had seen wildlife six or more times last year. 409 respondents made some general comments about wildlife.

Views and nature were the main reasons for liking places. People liked picnic areas to be places with views and elements of nature, and not buildings. They also liked sport/exercise facilities around the lake to be associated with views and nature and not with buildings. Seeing views was also the main reason for visiting places, particularly outdoor places.

The Lake and Adjacent Lands have a special association with the lives and works of Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin. They are recognised and respected by architectural historians and fortunate property owners in the USA, and celebrated in several parts of Australia, specifically Canberra, Castlecrag, Griffith etc.

In 2009 an independent heritage assessment of the area for the NCA by Heritage Consultants, Godden, Mackay, Logan Pty Ltd (GML) found the *'area possesses a broad array of natural and cultural heritage values which meet the thresholds for National Heritage Listing under the criteria relating to creative, technical and aesthetic heritage values. The study area meets the threshold for Commonwealth Heritage Listing under all criteria'*.

The National Trust of Australia (ACT) endorses these findings and commends inclusion of the area in the Commonwealth Heritage List.

Yours faithfully



Gary Kent  
President