



**Australian Government**

**Department of Climate Change, Energy,  
the Environment and Water**

# **Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories**

***Inquiry into ways to foster and  
promote the significance of  
Australia's National Capital***

4 May 2023

---

## Background

The work of Heritage Division in the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (the department) is to protect and manage Australia's Commonwealth, National and World Heritage and underwater cultural heritage assets. Heritage Division administers the heritage provisions within the Australian Government's environment legislation, the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

Under the EPBC Act, the Australian Government is responsible for places included in the World, National and Commonwealth Heritage lists. The heritage values of the environment on Commonwealth land are also protected under the EPBC Act.

Any actions which may have a significant impact on places on one of these statutory lists, or which are on Commonwealth land or taken by a Commonwealth agency, are subject to assessment and approval under the EPBC Act.

The department is providing this submission in support of greater recognition of heritage places in the management of the National Capital.

The department considers the prevalence of places within Australia's National Capital with recognised heritage values are an excellent platform for promoting the National Capital and our national story, and recommends that the listed values form an integral part of promoting and telling a dynamic, representative story to foster a source of pride and international recognition.

Moreover, the region has been home to the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples for over twenty thousand years, and is surrounded by vast areas of natural beauty and ecological significance.

The department makes the following responses against Terms of Reference 1, 2 and 3.

### **1. Requirements for the National Institutions to convey a dynamic, representative national story**

A number of Canberra's national institutions are included in Australia's Commonwealth and National Heritage Lists. These places have been through a rigorous assessment process by the Australian Heritage Council and have been determined to have heritage values by the Australian Government Minister for the Environment. Places on the Commonwealth Heritage List possess heritage value and are owned or managed by the Commonwealth. Places on the National Heritage List have been determined to have significance that meets the high threshold of outstanding heritage value to the nation.

There are 84 places in the ACT included in the Commonwealth Heritage List. Of those, the following are considered national institutions:

- Australian National Botanic Gardens (the subject of a separate attachment from the Director of National Parks)
- Australian War Memorial
- High Court of Australia

- High Court of Australia and National Gallery Precinct
- National Library of Australia and Surrounds
- National Archives (listed as East Block Government Offices)
- National Gallery of Australia, and the Sculpture Garden National Gallery
- The Royal Australian Mint.

Additionally, five places in the ACT are included in the National Heritage List. Four of these are cultural institutions:

- The Australian Academy of Science Building (the Shine Dome)
- Australian War Memorial and the Memorial Parade
- High Court – National Gallery Precinct
- Old Parliament House and Curtilage.

More information on the heritage values of each individual site can be found on the Australian Heritage Database, on the department's website, at [Australian Heritage Database - DCCEEW](#).

In determining what constitutes a national institution, Heritage Division has referred to the Committee's 2019 Inquiry Report – *Telling Australia's story - and why it's important: Report on the inquiry into Canberra's national institutions*. In that report the Committee considered that the term 'national institutions' should extend beyond the cultural and collecting institutions, to encompass other institutions of a national character located in Canberra and overseen by a Commonwealth Government agency, which also contribute to Canberra's role in preserving, expressing and promoting Australia's national identity. It includes those places whose primary role is to preserve and promote Australia's history, culture, arts, science and democracy. Given this extension of definition, there are a number of additional places included in the Australian Government's statutory heritage lists which can provide insight into Australia's national story. These include places such as the Mount Stromlo observatory and buildings and precincts within the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), the Australian National University and defence sites.

The places mentioned above are recognised under legislated criteria, for values ranging from their rarity to aesthetic or social value. Their importance is intrinsic in the buildings themselves, the collections they hold, and the stories they tell in Australia's evolving history. In the community, their importance is reflected in their ongoing use, their patronage and visitation, as well as protection and advocacy activities.

National institutions should portray a dynamic national story, and this is sometimes reflected in the values for which they are listed. National institutions included in the Commonwealth and National Heritage lists are often recognised for their continued role in the community, as well as their role in conserving and promoting culture.

By way of example, the Royal Australian Mint is included in the Commonwealth Heritage List for its important role in the history of Australia. The Mint tells the story of the movement away from British Imperial currency. However, the listed values of the Mint recognise its evolving nature in response to a changing environment and demonstrate the continuing significance it has in the community.

Similarly, the National Gallery of Australia is included in the Commonwealth Heritage List across a range of values including for its contribution to the history of Canberra, its design and its association with significant people. In addition, the National Gallery listing specifically recognises its ongoing exhibitions and engagement with the public, reflecting its dynamic and adaptable nature.

In telling a representative national story, it is important that the values recognised in statutory listings are portrayed and represented in promotional and educational material as part of the significance of the place. Interpretation activities which convey a dynamic, representative national story are encouraged, and can be undertaken in ways that are engaging and innovative, while remaining sensitive to the heritage values of the place.

In addition to the values of our national institutions inscribed in the Commonwealth and National Heritage lists, there may be other aspects of the story of a place at the local territory level that could be told together. This layered history can be engaging and unifying. Heritage Division is supportive of interpretation activities which promote the heritage values of a place to the public, in order to transmit the knowledge and education of our shared history across generations.

In telling a representative national story, it is important that the values recognised in statutory listings are portrayed and represented in promotional and educational material as part of the significance of the place. Interpretation activities which convey a dynamic, representative national story are encouraged, and can be undertaken in ways that are engaging, inclusive and innovative, while remaining sensitive to the heritage values of the place.

In addition to the values of our national institutions inscribed in the Commonwealth and National Heritage lists, each place has a multi-layered story, including at the local territory level, that could be told. This layered history can be engaging and unifying. Heritage Division is supportive of interpretation activities which promote all the heritage values of our places to the public, in particular our rich First Nations history, language, heritage and culture.

## **2. Maintaining the currency and vibrancy of Australia's national capital as a source of pride and international recognition.**

In addition to the heritage listings of individual buildings, the views, vistas and settings within the National Capital are recognised on the Commonwealth and National Heritage lists. These listings reflect the uniqueness of Walter Burley Griffin's planned design and layout of the capital, including important lines of symmetry and axis.

In telling the story of the National Capital, there are unique values associated with the 20<sup>th</sup> Century design of the city, the relationship of the city and Parliament to the lake and hills, and its representation of international concepts in town planning. The placement of institutions within the Parliamentary Triangle and views within the Parliament House Vista are also nationally significant.

Canberra's connections to its American architect, the design of the city set within the landscape, and the fact it remains intact and legible as one of the world's great planned cities, are all important elements worthy of promotion and pride. The component parts of the design, including the placement of national institutions, the Parliament House Vista, the Australian War Memorial and ANZAC Parade, and Lake Burley Griffin are all instrumental in understanding the vision and continued importance of elements of the original plan for Canberra.

The National Capital is nevertheless a living, vibrant and dynamic city. The Commonwealth's heritage protections seek to recognise and support the continued growth and development of Canberra, while maintaining those aspects that make it special.

### **3. Raising the profile of Australia's national capital and its symbolic importance in reflecting the character, values and identity of Australia.**

The ACT has a combination of listed national and ancillary institutions and places, together with a planned layout of national importance. It is uniquely placed to bring these elements together to tell the story of the character, values and identity of Australia.

Since Canberra's establishment, it has also grown in importance as a place for First Nations and other Australians to gather to demonstrate and protest, and to celebrate and support our First Nations heritage. Canberra is important as the place where significant progress has been made towards First Nations recognition, rights and reconciliation and where progress continues to be made.

By promoting the National Capital's valuable assets, and ensuring national institutions convey a national story that is dynamic and representative, the Australian public may become better engaged with Canberra and what it can offer.

Drawing on the heritage listed values of the important places within Canberra can help to achieve this, as well as innovative and engaging interpretation activities within the national institutions themselves, and promotional activities more broadly.

#### **Conclusion**

In relation to the matters addressed by this Inquiry, the department considers that places on Australia's Heritage Lists play a significant role in contributing to a dynamic and representative national story, including a number of Canberra's national institutions recognised in Australia's Commonwealth and National Heritage lists. Places in the National Heritage List are of outstanding heritage value to the nation. There are a number of benefits in leveraging these values when promoting the National Capital.

Raising the profile of the National Capital and its symbolic importance would contribute to a better understanding of Australia's collective heritage values.

#### **Contact details**

Heritage Division  
Email: [heritage@dcceew.gov.au](mailto:heritage@dcceew.gov.au)  
GPO Box 3090, Canberra 2601