

**SUPPLEMENTARY SUBMISSION BY FRIENDS OF THE ALBERT HALL INC
TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AND
EXTERNAL TERRITORIES INQUIRY INTO THE IMMIGRATION BRIDGE
AUSTRALIA PROPOSAL**

14 April 2008

Executive Summary

We address requests by the Joint Committee for further information.

1. Further information about The Friends' position on the proposed bridge

Page 18 - Senator Humphries asked for further information on the views of Friends of the Albert Hall Inc. in regard to 'whether the bridge itself is a good concept or not?'

The Submission of Friends of the Albert Hall Inc. states that we oppose this specific bridge proposal, not the idea of an immigration memorial in general, nor one in the form of a bridge in some other location (see letter of 21 May 2008 at point 10; and opening statement 1 April 2009).

Our opposition to this particular bridge proposal is primarily based on its impact on the identified values of the Albert Hall Heritage Precinct.

2. Heritage values

Page 23 - Ms Ellis asked how the Immigration Bridge would 'impact on Albert Hall?'

This bridge concept would adversely impact on the identified heritage values of the Albert Hall Heritage Precinct. Its impact on the heritage values in the wider DA53 precinct should also be independently assessed. We note that the heritage study of the DA53 precinct commissioned by the NCA in 2007 in response to public demand, has never been made available to the public.

Page 18 - Senator Humphries suggested Friends of the Albert Hall Inc. should make a supplementary submission to 'flesh out' issues relating to the impact of the proposed bridge on heritage values.

The identified heritage values of the Albert Hall Heritage Precinct are set out in the *Albert Hall Conservation Management and Landscape Plan 2007* approved by the ACT Heritage Council, and in the ACT Heritage Register (see Attachment A, an extract of the assessment against the relevant criteria). These identified heritage values are also drawn upon in the ACT Government's subsequent nomination of the Albert Hall Heritage Precinct to the National Heritage List.

The *Albert Hall Conservation Management and Landscape Plan 2007* defines the heritage curtilage of the Albert Hall and also indicates the need to consider the wider heritage impact area in order to preserve significant visual elements, as is required, for example, with Parliament House. Diagrams of the Albert Hall Heritage Precinct and its Heritage Impact area from the *Albert Hall Conservation Management and Landscape Plan 2007* (Figures 1 & 2, Section 1) are at Attachment B to this supplementary submission.

The evaluation against the relevant criteria includes specific reference to the significance of the original vistas towards and from the Albert Hall, eg Criterion B 'Its prominent placement on a major Canberra avenue, its intended vistas and placement in relation to the parliament, and its association with the civic design principles on which the national capital was planned, all speak of its intended role in a community charged with founding the capital city of a young nation.'

The development of any bridge over Lake Burley Griffin in the vicinity of the Albert Hall Heritage Precinct, especially within its Heritage Impact area, must take into account:

- Preservation of the vista sightlines across the Lake as described in the *Albert Hall Conservation Management and Landscape Plan 2007*
- Heritage conservation implications of the construction of a southern footing on the lakeshore, whether this is placed within Lennox Gardens as shown in some documents, or closer to Commonwealth Bridge as shown in others.
- Heritage conservation implications of operations associated with a southern footing in this area, eg parking & vehicular traffic
- Conservation of the intended landscape setting of the Albert Hall to maintain in particular its local Canberra heritage and functional values.

3. Process

Page 22 - Senator Humphries asked 'Perhaps when you provide that supplementary information about the heritage values you could address what process the NCA should have used and what extra information the NCA should have put on the table?'

a. On what process the NCA should have used, we offer the following view.

The NCA Board's 2003 decision giving approval 'in principle' to the bridge was premature and pre-emptive. It was made in advance of relevant studies and or any public consultation. The Board's decision has effectively tied the NCA's hands and would appear to make it difficult for the NCA to back away from its 'in principle' approval even should there be overwhelming public opposition to the bridge and studies proving the bridge is a poor planning outcome with a seriously detrimental impact on heritage values.

Given the scale of this project, its national profile and its potential impacts, the NCA should have opened up the process to public scrutiny and discussion at an earlier stage. This would have involved an initial public consultation process about the nature of the bridge concept and suitable sites available for an immigration memorial (in 2002 at least three sites were under consideration).

The next stage would normally comprise economic, social, environmental and heritage impact studies by the consortium promoting an immigration memorial in conjunction with broader NCA planning studies.

The NCA should also have required alternative concepts for an immigration memorial to support a preferred detailed design concept. In the case of any bridge proposal, this would sensibly include an account of likely required on-shore facilities both at its base and into the wider precinct.

The process suggested would have identified the range of relevant issues earlier. It would also have allowed for a publicly transparent process and community

engagement both in selecting suitable sites and an appropriate national memorial to commemorate immigration. In addition, the process would ensure appropriate collaboration between the consortium promoting an immigration memorial and NCA prior to lodgment of a works approval application.

In the event of widespread community support for the option of a bridge, any further development would require all relevant studies (heritage, environmental, traffic etc) to have been conducted and the Canberra National Memorials Committee approached for their approval in advance of the publication of DAs for both areas where the bridge would land and in advance of public consultation on those DAs.

No approval should have been granted by the NCA, whether in principle or otherwise, in advance of these processes being completed.

b. On what extra information the NCA should have put on the table, we offer the following view.

Additional information the NCA should have made available to the community at the time of publication of DA53 in 2007 includes the following:

- Advice of NCA action in relation to the bridge, including the NCA's approval 'in principle' to the bridge and an explanation of its consequences
- Advice of the 2006 public commitment by the ACT Government to cede to the Commonwealth (NCA) 2000 square metres for the base of the bridge
- Griffin Legacy Amendment 61 West Basin
- A detailed concept design (at the time a concept design had been produced by the IBA for marketing purposes and this at least should have been included in DA53)
- Advice of other facilities that may be required at the base of a bridge and further into the precinct connected to a bridge
- Advice that the IBA was a key stakeholder already consulted about DA53 (along with advice about all key stakeholders consulted prior to publication of DA53) and a chronology of negotiations with IBA
- Heritage, environmental and traffic studies dealing with the proposed bridge and its impact on and in the precinct

In addition, NCA's statement on 2 April 2007 agreeing 'that the balance of the land north of Albert Hall be reconsidered as a public lakeside park (open space) subject to the agreement of the ACT Government' should also have advised that the 'open space' would be required to accommodate the bridge base and other related bridge facilities.

4. Withdrawal of DA53

Page 23 - Ms Ellis asked 'The other difficulty of course is that 53 is still hanging around. We do not know what is going to happen with 53. We do not know whether that is going to have an impact. I am not sure whether you can advise where we are up to with any more detailed planning of the Albert Hall precinct itself in terms of its future. Are you aware of where that has got to so far?'

Draft Amendment 53 is described on the NCA website as 'on hold'.

We affirm our view that DA53 should be withdrawn immediately and renew our request that the Committee recommend this. We note the Joint Committee's Report on its Inquiry into the Role of the NCA (16 July 2008, page 63) 'proposes that Draft Amendment 53, Albert Hall Precinct, not proceed and that proposed changes to traffic conditions south of the Lake on Commonwealth Avenue bridge also not proceed.' Despite the Joint Committee's proposal, DA53 has not been withdrawn.

We point out also our other outstanding requests to the NCA which, if they were fulfilled, would assist in demystifying the future of this important precinct:

- Our FOI request of April 2008 has not been actioned
- The promised series of public workshops flagged in the NCA's media release of 2 April 2007 have not yet been held, and
- A heritage study commissioned in mid-2007 by the NCA has not yet been published.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ALBERT HALL HERITAGE PRECINCT

(Extract from the *Albert Hall Conservation and Landscape Management Plan 2007*):

ACT CRITERION B it exhibits outstanding design or aesthetic qualities valued by the community or a cultural group:

Albert Hall is recognised as a prime example of the public architecture of the foundational Federal Capital era, 1911 to 1939. As with Old Parliament House, Albert Hall expresses the aim for a distinctive architectural character for Canberra equal to its role as the national capital. This aesthetic significance is embodied in the architecture, the landscape and vistas, and the interior design of the place.

This distinctive architectural and landscape character can be seen in other extant buildings of the founding period [eg Beauchamp House, Hotel Canberra, and Hotel Acton, now Acton House], but because of its unique public purpose, Albert Hall is considered the civic and cultural equivalent of Old Parliament House. Its prominent placement on a major Canberra avenue, its intended vistas and placement in relation to the parliament, and its association with the civic design principles on which the national capital was planned, all speak of its intended role in a community charged with founding the capital city of a young nation. Albert Hall has an iconic aesthetic significance highly valued by Canberra's resident community and by those among the community of visitors who have the opportunity to learn of its history and purpose. The architecture, landscape and civic planning of the Albert Hall precinct is nationally significant as the embodiment of community and national aspirations for the national capital.

ACT CRITERION C: it is important as evidence of a distinctive way of life, taste, tradition, religion, land use, custom, process, design or function that is no longer practised, is in danger of being lost or is of exceptional interest:

The Albert Hall within its Heritage Precinct is the embodiment of the importance of kindling and nurturing civic and cultural engagement in the founding years of the federal capital. The Precinct was the hearth for the civic and cultural life of the city and its region, with the sense expressed at the opening of the Hall by Stanley Melbourne Bruce of radiating these essential values throughout the nation.

Its extant architectural, landscape and interior design elements provide unusually rich evidence of that purpose and how it was realised. Its setting in the Precinct provides the complementary evidence of a landscape design aesthetic deploying elements of plant type, planting layout and vista to express that purpose.

As a gracious assembly hall in a designed garden city landscape setting, Albert Hall played a unique role in shaping the life of the young city, evident in the civic and cultural occasions held there. It was the base for the Society for Arts and Literature, formed by Robert Garran, Harold White and Robert Broinowski, and for Lewis Nott's breakaway Canberra Repertory Society. For Canberra's first forty years, Albert Hall was the only venue dedicated to the performing arts, and influenced the shaping of musical, operatic and dramatic societies. As well, for many Canberrans, the association of the Hall with dances, socials, exhibitions and shows imbues the place

with special community affection, which in turn, reflects a time when these events were central to community life.

ACT CRITERION D: it is highly valued by the community or a cultural group for reasons of strong or special religious, spiritual, cultural, educational or social associations:

Albert Hall was the 'cultural hearth' of the early Federal Capital, and remains highly valued for that quality, even though major cultural events now have their own dedicated buildings such as the Canberra Theatre, Llewellyn Hall, the National Gallery of Australia etc. The naming of Albert Hall, an intentional association with London's renowned venue, asserted the importance of the arts in national life, attaching a responsibility to the new city to realise this vision. The Albert Hall Heritage Precinct expresses a spiritual ideal recognised by many as a treasured legacy difficult to define but readily recognised when expression is found.

Albert Hall has important associations with national cultural institutions and national and international artists, and with education through the lectures and events held there and through its association with the founding of the Australian National University. It is still much loved for these associations, as is evident in the strong community demand for its protection and sustainable future despite the neglect and mismanagement that have interrupted its long tradition of civic, cultural, educational and social uses.

DIAGRAMS SHOWING ALBERT HALL HERITAGE PRECINCT AND HERITAGE IMPACT AREA

(Extract from the Albert Hall Conservation Management and Landscape Plan 2007)



FIGURE 2 SECTION 1: Area B: the Albert Hall Heritage Precinct [outlined in white] shown overlaid over a Google earth image. The CM&LP heritage precinct aligns with Commonwealth Avenue to the east, Flynn Drive to the west and the northern and southern boundaries capture the plantings to north of the Hall and the former bowling green and rose gardens south of the Hall. The area comprises part of Sections 39 and 40 Yarralumla.



FIGURE 1 SECTION 1: Area A: the Albert Hall Heritage Impact area [outlined in white]