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Mr Quinton Clements
Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
[sent by email to: jscncet@aph.gov.au]

Dear Mr Clements

Review of the National Capital Authority

Please find attached a submission from Australia ICOMOS to the Committee's inquiry into the National Capital Authority.

Australia ICOMOS would be happy to supply any further information that may be of assistance to the Committee. I would also welcome the opportunity to discuss this submission before the Committee, should this opportunity arise.

Yours sincerely

Kristal Buckley
President

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AND EXTERNAL TERRITORIES - INQUIRY INTO THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AUTHORITY

SUBMISSION BY AUSTRALIA ICOMOS

Terms of Reference

On 26 March 2003 the Committee resolved to conduct an inquiry and report on the role of the National Capital Authority. In particular the Committee will consider:

- the role of the National Capital Authority as outlined in the *Australian Capital Territory (Planning and Land Management) Act 1988*;
- the Authority's overall management of the National Capital Plan;
- management issues relating to designated land under the National Capital Plan; and
- the relationship between the Authority and Territory planning authorities.

KEY POINTS OF THE AUSTRALIA ICOMOS SUBMISSION

- The National Capital Authority owns, manages and is the planning authority for a range of significant heritage places. Australia has strong expertise in heritage matters, and a strong background of planning authorities dealing effectively with heritage. The NCA should have the goal of being an exemplary managing and planning authority, including in its dealings with heritage.
- Australia ICOMOS believes that the National Capital Authority generally fulfils its role as outlined under the *Australian Capital Territory (Planning and Land Management) Act 1988* but there are suggested areas for further organisational development that will benefit the Authority's status and significance as a key planning body in the National Capital.
- Decisions regarding the nationally and internationally significant heritage places and landscapes under the control of the National Capital Authority should to be made according to *The Burra Charter 1999: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance*. This charter has been endorsed by Australian heritage authorities as the national standard for cultural heritage management. Accordingly, Australia ICOMOS recommends the NCA should adopt the Charter if it has not already done so.
- The National Capital Authority should continue its program to develop Conservation Management Plans (CMPs) for heritage places under its control, including all significant heritage places and landscapes under the Authority's control.
- The National Capital Authority's broader planning processes should include a proactive and consultative approach for the identification of heritage places and management issues. This includes a close working relationship with Australian Capital Territory heritage and planning authorities.

Submission by Australia ICOMOS

- The National Capital Authority should achieve a high standard of practice in heritage management issues by ensuring it has appropriately qualified permanent staff, by undertaking ongoing training programs for staff on heritage matters, and contracting expert heritage advice as needed.

Background to Australia ICOMOS

ICOMOS is a non-government professional organisation that promotes expertise in the conservation of cultural heritage. It was formed in 1965, and has a responsibility to advise UNESCO in the assessment of sites proposed for the World Heritage List.

Australia ICOMOS, formed in 1976, is one of some 100 national committees. Membership of Australia ICOMOS consists of some 400 members of different disciplinary backgrounds in archaeology, architecture, conservation, history, planning etc, and is managed by an Executive Committee of 15 people, elected from the membership. A number of members represent Australia ICOMOS on a various ICOMOS International Scientific Committees, as well as on expert committees and boards in Australia.

DETAILED DISCUSSION

As the National Capital Authority (NCA) is responsible for managing significant heritage in Canberra, Australia ICOMOS has provided comments against each specific term of reference from the perspective of achieving a high standard of heritage management practice for the NCA. These comments are made with a view to encouraging the Authority's continued development as a significant and effective planning organisation in the National Capital.

The role of the National Capital Authority as outlined in the *Australian Capital Territory (Planning and Land Management) Act 1988*

Section 6 of the *Australian Capital Territory (Planning and Land Management) Act 1988* outlines the functions of the NCA. Australia ICOMOS believes that the NCA fulfils its role effectively however, there are possible areas for further development and improvements. These specifically relate to cultural heritage management issues for structures and lands under the control of the NCA.

For example Section 6 (d) states that a function of the NCA is "the carrying out of works that it considers desirable to maintain or enhance the character of the National Capital".

Australia ICOMOS recommends that care needs to be exercised that works undertaken under these auspices (and indeed all sections of the Act) have a positive impact on heritage, and do not have a negative impact. An excellent reference document to assist planners and decision makers is the *The Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance*. This charter has been endorsed by Australian heritage authorities as the national standard for cultural heritage management. Accordingly, the NCA should adopt the Charter if it has not already done so.

The essential planning tool for heritage places is the Conservation Management Plan. The NCA has demonstrated a commitment to developing Conservation Management Plans for sites under its control. However, Australia ICOMOS would encourage the continued development of Conservation Management Plans for all heritage places under its control, including the Parliamentary Triangle itself. These plans should be developed in consultation with the Australian Heritage Commission and with the assistance of appropriately qualified staff and heritage consultants.

Australia ICOMOS understands that consultation with the Australian Heritage Commission is required under s.30 of the *Australian Heritage Commission Act 1975*, regarding impacts to places in the Register of the National Estate. The new Commonwealth heritage legislation will help ensure a high standard of practice for all Commonwealth agencies responsible for managing significant heritage places.

The Authority's overall management of the National Capital Plan

The Australian Community values the National Capital and many of its iconic places such as Parliament House, Old Parliament House, the National Gallery of Australia and the Parliamentary Triangle. These places, identified in the National Capital Plan, have significant national and potentially international heritage values. Many places have been acknowledged in the Australian Heritage Commission's Register of the National Estate.

Australia ICOMOS recognises that the NCA addresses and responds to heritage matters as they arise, that there is some in-house expertise and its engages other expertise as required. Australia ICOMOS encourages the Authority to work towards best practice in heritage management according to processes outlined in *The Burra Charter* when managing the National Capital Plan.

There may be opportunities to strengthen the Authority's position in this important area by enhancing systems and resources to deal with heritage issues. This could include the engagement of additional permanent staff member(s) with heritage management and planning experience. Further options include the provision of ongoing heritage management training for key staff. In addition, a person with suitable heritage expertise should be appointed to the Authority.

Given the outstanding qualities and heritage values of the National Capital, the NCA could consider investigating the possible nomination of the Central National Area, as identified in the National Capital Plan, for inclusion on the World Heritage List. Further study into this issue would be required including a full assessment of the significant heritage values and management requirements. Such work should be undertaken in close consultation with Australia ICOMOS and the Australian Heritage Commission.

Management issues relating to designated land under the National Capital Plan

The NCA and its predecessors have undertaken significant planning work for the National Capital, beginning with Walter Burley Griffin's plan for Canberra. There are opportunities to develop co-operative arrangements with appropriate government agencies to identify, document and protect the heritage values of the Griffin plan and later layers of innovative planning in central Canberra, such as the National Capital Open Space System. The NCA should lead such an exercise.

There is a perception that the NCA is reactive to heritage identification matters, rather than being pro-active. This situation could be improved by actively identifying and acknowledging, and implementing appropriate management plans for the significant heritage places under its management and planning control. Such pro-active stances are the norm for local governments and other planning authorities around Australia. Australia ICOMOS believes that there are opportunities for the NCA to provide leadership in this area.

Australia ICOMOS is aware that there have been some recent controversial decisions that have had a significant impact on heritage values on lands under the control of the NCA.

Submission by Australia ICOMOS

These include the redevelopment of Old Parliament House Gardens and permitting the GMC/Canberra 400 V8 car race in the Parliamentary Triangle.

Australia ICOMOS also notes that a more timely response to heritage listed places seems needed. For example the NCA has been slow to respond to the Parliament House Vista listing on the Register of the National Estate. This has been listed since 1987 but the NCA is only now moving towards developing a Conservation Management Plan for it.

Australia ICOMOS therefore encourages NCA to adopt a pro-active and consultative approach towards heritage management within broader planning issues, as the Authority would benefit from a stronger and more effective position as a key planning authority in Canberra. Community support for the NCA would improve and stronger relationships could be developed with Territory government agencies and other Commonwealth agencies with heritage management responsibilities.

The relationship between the Authority and Territory planning authorities

The NCA and ACT Government Authorities must work closely together, particularly on issues relating to heritage management. The Canberra and wider Australian community has a strong association with the heritage places in the ACT regardless of who is ultimately responsible for managing the place. However, conflicting decisions made at the Commonwealth and Territory Government levels potentially hinders and alienates community support and at worst can place significant heritage places at risk of serious compromise.

Clearly there are interests at both levels that overlap, and these should be acknowledged and accommodated. Decisions made regarding heritage places based on divisions of responsibilities deriving from Commonwealth and Territory heritage listings are not constructive. A collaborative approach must be adopted. There may be a better mechanism for dialogue on heritage matters and the NCA should engage more formally with the local community on matters regarding heritage places. This could include regular consultations with the range of community and professional groups with an interest in heritage.

In any case, the outcome of the relationship between authorities must deliver consistent and high standards of heritage identification, protection and conservation.