



MEDIA RELEASE:

NATIONAL TRUST CALLS FOR ACT ELECTION HERITAGE BOOST

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PATRON: The Hon Margaret Reid AO

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The ACT National Trust (the Trust) has called on candidates contesting the upcoming ACT election to commit to policies that will safeguard and promote the Territory's cultural, natural and Aboriginal heritage.

Trust President, Gary Kent, said that heritage issues were usually the 'poor cousin' at election time and this had grave consequences for the long-term conservation and viability of the Territory's priceless heritage assets.

Mr Kent said that completion of an ACT Government Heritage Strategy was well overdue and must be a priority of the incoming ACT Government.

"More resourcing must also be provided to ACT Heritage to clear the enormous backlog of unassessed nominations for the ACT Heritage Register."

Mr Kent said that heritage organisations received very little government support compared with their counterparts in the arts, sporting and recreational sectors.

"This imbalance must be addressed to ensure that the expertise and hard work of the many volunteers in the heritage sector is appropriately recognised in the assessment and management of heritage places and items in the nation's capital.

Mr Kent said that the National Trust was strongly opposed to the proposed West Basin project, which the Trust believed would severely compromise the beauty and heritage values of Lake Burley Griffin.

"We ask all election candidates to commit if elected to doing everything within their power to ensure that this ugly and unnecessary development does not proceed", he said.

Mr Kent said other key priorities in the Trust's election 'wish-list' include:

- a comprehensive ACT Government audit of Aboriginal heritage
- adequate public funding to preserve and protect Aboriginal heritage places and cultural items
- greater resourcing for and independence of the ACT Heritage Council
- enhanced heritage assessment and consultation processes prior to the release of public land
- creation of a new ACT Heritage Register category of Local Heritage Significance
- an early review of the ACT Heritage Act
- ACT Government support for the Heritage Listing of Canberra
- Government support for a heritage/history hub for local heritage and kindred organisations.

Full details are provided in the attached *2020 ACT Election Policy Statement*.

**For further information please contact Gary Kent on:
0419 854 211 or president@nationaltrustact.org.au**

NATIONAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA (ACT)

2020 ACT Election Policy Statement

The National Trust of Australia (ACT) is a non-government, not for profit, community organisation incorporated as a public company limited by guarantee. We currently have around 1,700 members in the ACT and surrounding region. The Trust is financed by membership subscriptions, donations, fund raising activities, sponsorship, and government grants for specific projects.

The Trust has an extensive program of tours and events catering for a wide spectrum of interests. These range from local heritage tours, walks and talks, to regional, interstate and even overseas tours.

Our Purpose

The Trust's purpose is to promote the conservation of, and foster public knowledge about, places, objects and issues that are significant to the heritage of the ACT.

Our Vision

The Trust's vision is to be an independent and expert community advocate for conservation of our cultural, natural, and Aboriginal heritage, based on a committed and active membership and a strong financial base.

Election priorities 2020

Consistent with our purpose and vision, **the National Trust calls on all political parties and candidates** contesting the 2020 ACT Assembly elections **to commit, if elected, to introducing and supporting** measures to safeguard and promote the Territory's cultural, natural and Aboriginal heritage. These measures are grouped as follows:

- *Safeguard Aboriginal Heritage*
- *Commit to Heritage Consultation and Assessment*
- *Recognise Heritage as fundamental to Planning*
- *Invest in Heritage Places*
- *Boost Heritage Education and Promotion*

Safeguard Aboriginal heritage

While non-Aboriginal people have called Canberra home only for the last 200 years, Aboriginal people have lived in Australia for over 60,000 years. The heritage of the traditional custodians of our land must be preserved. Because of its fragility and location, it is vulnerable to accidental and deliberate loss and destruction. Accordingly, we urge:

- a comprehensive ACT Government audit of Aboriginal heritage in the Territory
- adequate public funding to ensure preservation and protection of identified Aboriginal heritage places and cultural items.

Commit to Heritage Consultation and Assessment

Our heritage is best protected if the ACT has robust heritage assessment and consultation processes, with adequate resourcing of key stakeholders. The Trust believes that the existing ACT heritage assessment process is slow, cumbersome and underfunded. Accordingly, we urge:

- reforms to ACT heritage consultation and assessment processes to:
 - encourage heritage nominations from the community
 - boost resourcing for ACT Heritage to ensure it is adequately equipped to fulfil its responsibilities
 - clear the large backlog of unassessed heritage nominations
 - assist stakeholder organisations in submitting nominations
 - strengthen the resourcing and independence of the ACT Heritage Council
- introduction of enhanced heritage assessment and consultation processes prior to the release of public land to:
 - better identify potential heritage issues associated with the Indicative Land Release and Urban Renewal Programs, and development precincts
 - achieve a more collaborative and consistent approach to consultation with expert and community panels on management of heritage buildings and precincts
- creation of a new category of Local Heritage Significance as a valid criterion for inclusion on the ACT Heritage Register
- ongoing financial and other support to stakeholder heritage groups to ensure that community expertise and opinions are available and appropriately recognised in the assessment process
 - community consultation/participation is resource intensive and consumes considerable time for volunteers who undertake this task on a part time basis
 - the Heritage Grants Program should be revised to include financial assistance to eligible key history and heritage organisations. Investing in these organisations assists the development and progression of projects; therefore, governments and proponents of major projects should provide additional resources.
 - Unlike our peers in the Arts and Sport and Recreation, History and Heritage bodies do not receive financial assistance to assist their operational costs.

Recognise Heritage as fundamental to Planning

The Trust recognises that an appropriate balance must be struck between the growth and development of Canberra as a constantly evolving city, and the conservation and protection of our heritage. However, these two objectives should exist harmoniously together, and heritage considerations should be a core part of our planning. Accordingly, we urge:

- The ACT Government to adopt a heritage strategy, to enable all heritage stakeholders to work together consistently
- A review of the ACT Heritage Act early in the term of the new Assembly, and the introduction of a legislated requirement for review every five years

- Reform of planning processes to ensure that heritage considerations are given greater prominence in the decision-making process, with timelier and less cumbersome appeal processes
- An ACT Government-led study on economic, cultural and tourism benefits of the heritage sector
- Developers to be required to assess and publicise the environmental impact of changes to heritage assets and associated development
- Improve transparency of heritage assets and requirements in the Territory Plan.

Invest in Heritage Places

Our heritage places require ongoing investment and management to ensure they survive for the enjoyment of not only our but future generations. They include heritage buildings, natural environment, and views and vistas that truly promote Canberra as the Bush Capital. Accordingly, we urge:

- ACT Government support for the Heritage Listing of Canberra as proposed in the 2011 nominations
- Rejection of the proposed infill and redevelopment of West Basin
- Establish priorities for funding of heritage buildings
- Increased conservation support for privately owned heritage places, such as the Sydney and Melbourne Buildings
- Sufficient funding so that all heritage places have conservation management plans
- Encouragement for adaptive reuse of heritage places
- Incorporation of heritage sites in estate management plans
- Measures to ensure that heritage values of our older suburbs do not fall victim to urban renewal
- Careful monitoring of the welcome heritage protection laws recently introduced by the ACT Government.

Boost Heritage Education and Promotion

The ACT has a unique heritage that should be promoted to residents and interstate and overseas tourists. The ACT Government can do more to promote our heritage to help ensure that it is embraced and celebrated by the community, near and far.

Accordingly, we urge:

- increased ACT Government promotion of ACT's heritage places, for example, through the Canberra Tracks program, with additional places and histories relevant to those locations
- Action to encourage and assist Canberrans to identify and nominate heritage places
- Creation of a heritage tourism plan
- Government support for the development of a heritage and history hub for local heritage and kindred organisations.