

Australian Capital Territory

Heritage (Decision about Provisional Registration of the Canberra Olympic Pool, City) Notice 2014

Notifiable Instrument NI2014–590

made under the

Heritage Act 2004, s34 Notice of decision about provisional registration

1 Name of instrument

This instrument is the *Heritage (Decision about Provisional Registration of the Canberra Olympic Pool, City) Notice 2014*.

2 Commencement

This instrument commences on the day after notification.

3 Notice of Decision

Pursuant to Section 32 of the *Heritage Act 2004* the ACT Heritage Council has decided not to provisionally register the Canberra Olympic Pool, City to the ACT Heritage Register.

Anna Gurnhill
A/g Secretary (as delegate for)
ACT Heritage Council
13 November 2014



ACT Heritage Council

STATEMENT OF REASONS

DECISION NOT TO PROVISIONALLY REGISTER

CANBERRA OLYMPIC POOL

(Blocks 7 and [part] 8, Section 37, CITY)

IN THE ACT HERITAGE REGISTER

In accordance with Section 32 of the *Heritage Act 2004*, the ACT Heritage Council has decided not to provisionally register the Canberra Olympic Pool, City. This Statement of Reasons provides an assessment of the Canberra Olympic Pool, City and finds that the place does not meet any of the criteria under s.10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

Background

The Canberra Olympic Pool was built in 1955 by the Commonwealth Department of Works, ACT Branch. It was built with an Olympic sized swimming pool, a children's wading pool and a diving pool and tower within a Post-War International style building complex and modern family-orientated landscaping.

It won the 1955 Royal Australian Institute of Architects NSW Chapter Sir John Sulman Award for meritorious architecture.

The place has had several additions and alterations over the years including an outdoor kiosk in the 1960s, a temporary dome over the main pool in 1991 followed by a permanent dome in 2008, beach volleyball courts, various internal changes, upgrades to filtration systems, surrounding buildings and significant changes in the main building.

The Canberra Olympic Pool was nominated under the *Land Planning Act 1991* but prior to the formal establishment of the Register.

The ACT Heritage Council (the Council) considered the nomination at its meeting on 13 November, 2014.

Assessment

The Council's assessment against the criteria specified in s.10 of the *Heritage Act 2004* is as follows.

In assessing the nomination for the Canberra Olympic Pool, City, the Council considered:

- the original nomination and documentary evidence supplied by the nominator;
- information provided by a site inspection on 8 September 2014 by ACT Heritage; and
- the report by ACT Heritage titled, *Background Information Canberra Olympic Pool, November 2014*, containing photographs and information on history, description, condition and integrity.

Pursuant to s.10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*, a place or object has heritage significance if it satisfies one or more of the following criteria. Future research may alter the findings of this assessment.

(a) importance to the course or pattern of the ACT's cultural or natural history;

Canberra Olympic Pool, City, does not meet this criterion.

The Canberra Olympic Pool is a tangible reminder of the Australian pool culture that developed during the 1950s and 60s. It has made an influential contribution to the development and dissemination of the pool complex and the recreational culture that accompanied it in Australia. It

was one of the first of the new type of public swimming pool complex that became known to the wider public and architects by winning the Sulman Award and hosting regional swimming championships. This was quickly followed by an increased interest in swimming spurred on by Australian success at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics which led to many local councils developing public pools, the design of which were influenced by Canberra Olympic Pool. However, it may be argued that the Australian pool cultural has moved from public pools to the backyard and that the Canberra Olympic Pool's ability to demonstrate the culture has been degraded by the enclosing dome, which has blocked the open family-orientated planning.

(b) has uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of the ACT's cultural or natural history;

Canberra Olympic Pool, City, does not meet this criterion.

The complex maintains its original function as a public swimming pool, of which there are several in the ACT, and there is no evidence to indicate that it is an uncommon or rare aspect of the ACT's cultural history. Whilst the Council recognises that the pool is an example of an early public swimming complex in a landscape setting in the ACT, there is insufficient evidence before the Council to indicate that it is rare or endangered. Other examples exist in the ACT, such as the Dickson Aquatic Centre which was constructed in the 1960s. It is also noted that in the broader Australian context there are other swimming complexes contemporary with the Canberra Olympic Pool with which it is appropriate to compare.

(c) potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the ACT's cultural or natural history;

Canberra Olympic Pool, City, does not meet this criterion.

Canberra Olympic Pool was a seminal example of the post-war public swimming complex that has helped inform the design of later swimming complexes across NSW. However, this contribution is towards the field of architecture and landscape design and has not been demonstrated to provide information that will contribute significantly to a wider understanding of the cultural history of the ACT.

(d) importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or objects;

Canberra Olympic Pool, City, does not meet this criterion.

Canberra Olympic Pool was a seminal example of Australian post-war swimming complexes which has since been significantly altered from its original form. The Australian post-war swimming complex is a distinctive type of place that has been an important cultural icon with its own distinctive 'pool culture'. The post-war swimming complex is characterised by open landscaping allowing for a family-friendly space with a focus on recreation rather than its predecessors' focus on competitive swimming. These places would often have several different pools for different purposes and architect designed modernist buildings. In 1955 it was recognised for its high quality design and architecture by winning the Sulman Award. It hosted regional swimming championships and, together with the award, received good exposure in the press. While the Canberra Olympic Pool was the best known post-war swimming complex that influenced later designs, it has lost its ability to demonstrate this and a significant level of integrity.

Additionally, the Council has considered the contribution of the architecture of the place, but found that it was not a significant example. The Council acknowledges that Canberra Olympic Pool demonstrates some characteristics of the Post War International Style, such as horizontal proportions and fenestration of the buildings, the flat roof with curved projecting skylights, balustrades and flagpoles, however, stronger examples of the style have been identified and listed on the ACT Heritage Register, such as the residence at 10 Gawler Crescent, Deakin and the Campbell Housing Apartments.

(e) importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by the ACT community or a cultural group in the ACT;

Canberra Olympic Pool, City, does not meet this criterion.

Whilst the Council acknowledges that the facilities are appreciated by several clubs and individuals and that Canberra Olympic Pool is recognised by the Australian Institute of Architects for its architectural merits and that the landscape setting of the pool is one of the few remaining in Canberra, there is insufficient evidence before the Council to indicate that its design or aesthetic qualities are outstanding and that these qualities are valued by a cultural group or the wider ACT community.

The Council notes that the 'ACT community' encompasses the broad community of the ACT, across the full geographical context, and a broad spectrum of society; while 'a cultural group' has a narrower focus, taken to be a 'group of people within a society with a shared ethnic or cultural background' or 'a group of people connected through the same way of living, which has been transmitted from one generation to another'.

(f) importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement for a particular period;

Canberra Olympic Pool, City, does not meet this criterion.

The diving tower is an early adaptation of cantilevered reinforced concrete technology applied to a diving structure and may be considered to demonstrate a degree of technical achievement, however there is no evidence to demonstrate that this is of a high degree, to be considered important to the period in which it was constructed. Regardless, the tower is only one aspect of the site, albeit a key one. Whilst the Council acknowledges that the diving structure demonstrates a degree of technical achievement for its time, there is insufficient evidence before the Council to demonstrate that the entire swimming complex is of a high degree of technical or creative achievement.

Buildings in the complex are a simple design, of Post-War International style of architecture, with little technical or creative innovation evident. The filtration room is an interesting design that uses large areas of glazing to reveal the brightly coloured pipes and equipment, but this is not considered to demonstrate a high degree of technical or creative achievement. The filtration equipment itself has been replaced with different technology in the past and in its current incarnation does not demonstrate a high degree of technical achievement.

(g) has a strong or special association with the ACT community, or a cultural group in the ACT for social, cultural or spiritual reasons;

Canberra Olympic Pool, City, does not meet this criterion.

The pool has maintained high levels of patronage since it opened in 1955, is home to several aquatic clubs, and received public support in the 1980s to be retained as a community facility. Whilst the Council acknowledges that the pool has been highly valued in the past and may currently be valued by the community, there is no evidence that this current value is for anything more than its amenity rather than any cultural heritage. There is insufficient evidence before the Council to demonstrate that Canberra Olympic Pool is highly valued by the current community or a cultural group for reasons of strong or special, religious, spiritual, cultural, educational and social associations.

(h) has a special association with the life or work of a person, or people, important to the history of the ACT.

Canberra Olympic Pool, City, does not meet this criterion.

Canberra Olympic Pool has been patronised by many ACT residents, including politicians and athletes, but these associations have yet to be demonstrated as being beyond the amenity value of the place or any more than for any other similarly placed facility. Additionally, the architects from the Commonwealth Department of Works, R. M. Ure and Ian Slater, while important figures in the history of the ACT, have not been shown to have any special association with place above any other place they have worked on. There is insufficient evidence to indicate that the pool complex has a special association with the life or work of a person, or people, important to the history of the ACT.

Conclusion

This Statement of Reasons provides an assessment of Canberra Olympic Pool, City, and finds that the place does not meet any of the criteria specified in s.10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

Canberra Olympic Pool was a seminal example of the post-war public swimming pool complex that proliferated across Australia during the late 1950s to late 1960s. The open landscaping with modern architecture and bright colours transformed public swimming venues from places of competitive exercise to places of family-orientated recreation. In the past there has been strong community support for the place, but there is no evidence that this is currently so. The place has had its heritage values significantly degraded by the later addition of the enclosing dome which does not allow the landscape to be read as the original family-orientated facility that it once was. As such, the Council considers that the Canberra Olympic Pool to be a previously valued exemplar of public pool complexes, now significantly degraded in its physical representation and community values that it does not warrant inclusion on the ACT Heritage Register.

