



# **Heritage Council Registrations and Reviews Committee**

## **Former ABC Studios, Ripponlea**

8 Gordon Street, Elsternwick, Glen Eira City Council

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### **DETERMINATION OF THE HERITAGE COUNCIL**

After considering the Executive Director's recommendation, pursuant to Section 49(1)(b) of the *Heritage Act 2017*, the Heritage Council Registrations and Reviews Committee has determined that the Former ABC Studios, Ripponlea, is not of cultural heritage significance to the State of Victoria and is not to be included in the Victorian Heritage Register. This decision was reached having considered the Executive Director's statement of recommendation and further information provided by the Executive Director to the Heritage Council pursuant to Section 47 of the *Heritage Act 2017*. The Heritage Council's reasons for determining that the place is not of cultural heritage significance at the State level are outlined below.

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**Prof Andrew May (Chair)**  
**Mr Rueben Berg**  
**Ms Maggi Solly**

**Decision Date – 27 August 2019**

## INTRODUCTION

### THE PLACE

- 01.** The Former ABC Studios, Ripponlea, is a complex of buildings constructed mostly in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, which formerly housed studios, offices, workshops and other spaces associated with television broadcasting and which also features a broadcast tower and other broadcasting structures, now out of use ('the Place').
- 02.** The following background information is taken from page 3 of the Executive Director's recommendation for the Place ('the Recommendation'):

#### *"WHAT IS AT THE PLACE?"*

*The Former ABC Studios, Ripponlea are located on a parcel of land bounded by the Sandringham railway line to the west, Rippon Lea Estate to the north and Gordon Street to the east. A recently constructed unit block is located to the south. Entrance is via two driveways from Gordon Street. A carpark with mature trees and other plantings is located at the front of the main building. The brick building in the southern corner was the first building constructed on the site. The main building faces Gordon Street with a curtain wall of aluminium frames and red infill panels to the front façade. An addition in a similar style is located at the north end of this building and a four storey addition is located in the north-western corner of the place. The broadcast tower is located above the scenery workshop, adjacent to the railway line. Internally the entrance opens into a reception area with corridors leading to a staff canteen, dressing rooms and studios. The two main studios (studios 31 and 32) are centrally located in the building. They are double height with walls lined with hessian and timber battening. Numerous panels with numbered electrical outlets hang from the ceiling, but all lighting and other equipment has been removed. The rear of each studio opens into the scenery walkway where props were moved from the workshop to the studios. This in turn opens into the scenery workshop which has a saw tooth roof. The upper floors contained production rooms, offices and the costume department. Some fixtures survive but all equipment and furnishings have been removed.*

#### *WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF THE PLACE?*

*The Former ABC Studios, Ripponlea are located on land which was formerly [sic] part of Rippon Lea Estate. In 1954, the land was acquired from the Estate by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) for the intention of constructing a television studio which was to open in time for the broadcasting of the 1956 Olympic Games. The first regular television transmission in Australia began on 16 September 1956 by TCN9, Sydney. The first ABC broadcast in Australia took place on 5 November 1956 in Sydney, followed by the first ABC broadcast in Victoria on 19 November 1956. At the time of the Olympic Games, the Ripponlea site was still under construction broadcasts were made from temporary locations around Melbourne and from an outside broadcast (OB) van. The second stage of the ABC studios was formally opened on 21 May 1958 and comprised two studios (including Studio 31 where most well-known programs were produced), production areas, a scenery workshop and offices. Stages Three and Four were constructed in 1961 and 1968 respectively and comprised additional office space. Major changes to allow for colour TV were made to the Ripponlea site in 1975 and there was also expansion to multiple sites across Melbourne at this time. In the 1990s a new ABC facility was constructed at Southbank. This initially housed ABC Radio and the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra but was later expanded to include Radio Australia and ABC TV, thereby consolidating Melbourne-based staff and operations on a single site.*

*This occurred on 4 May 2017 when the new ABC premises were officially opened at Southbank.”*

### **RECOMMENDATION OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

- 03.** On 9 May 2019, the Executive Director recommended that the Place not be included in the Victorian Heritage Register ('the Register') under section 37(1)(b) of the *Heritage Act 2017* ('the Act'). The Recommendation was advertised for 60 days.

### **SECTION 44 SUBMISSION IN RESPONSE TO THE RECOMMENDATION**

- 04.** One submission was received in response to the Recommendation pursuant to section 44 of the Act, from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation ('the ABC'). The ABC's submission supported the Recommendation.

### **REFERAL PURSUANT TO SECTION 15(3)**

- 05.** At a meeting of the Heritage Council ('the Council') on 1 August 2019, it was determined, in accordance with section 15(3) of the Act, that the Recommendation and the submission received be referred to the Registrations and Reviews Committee to make a determination pursuant to section 49 of the Act, as delegated in the *Instrument of Delegation*.

### **MEETING OF THE REGISTRATIONS AND REVIEWS COMMITTEE**

- 06.** A meeting of the Registrations and Reviews Committee ('the Committee') was held on 9 August 2019.

### **REQUEST FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

- 07.** The Committee requested that the Executive Director provide further information in relation to the Recommendation, pursuant to section 47(1). The Executive Director duly provided such information as requested, pursuant to section 47(2) ['the further information'].

## **ISSUES**

- 08.** The section below outlines the Committee's consideration of the Recommendation and the further information provided and outlines the Committee's consideration in relation to the Executive Director's assessment against Criterion A and Criterion G in particular.

### **SUMMARY OF ISSUES**

#### **Criterion A**

- 09.** The Executive Director's key reasoning under Criterion A was that, as almost all of the fabric associated with filming and producing television programs has been removed from the interiors of the Place, its association with the development of television in Victoria is now difficult to understand. The Recommendation also reasoned that the connection between Victorians and the ABC is better characterised as a connection with the ABC as the national broadcaster and with its programs (as experienced in homes) rather than as a connection between Victorians and the Place itself.
- 010.** The Committee notes that the further information provided stated that even had more fabric associated with broadcasting survived at the Place, it would not

necessarily relate back to broadcasting's formative decade of the 1950s, as technology was often upgraded. The Executive Director stated that, had some equipment, technology, costumes, sets, workshop equipment and furniture survived in situ, the Place may hypothetically have had the potential to meet Criterion A. The Committee found the further information to be helpful to its consideration.

- 011.** In relation to evidence of an association, the Committee is of the view that the association between the Place and the history of broadcasting may be evident in documentary resources and/or oral history. The Committee also notes that there is physical fabric in the form of the tower and the studio layout as a physical remnant to which some historical associations can arguably attach. The Committee wishes to note its view that with further investigation there may be other potential interpretations of the nature of the connection between Victorians and the Place. If programs produced at a television studio can be demonstrated to have historic value, then in the Committee's view it may also arguably follow that a site where the programs were developed, produced and broadcast over a significant period of time may conceivably be worthy of inclusion in the Register, given a certain level of documentary and/or oral history evidence
- 012.** The further information provided as to the Executive Director's methodology and reasoning on this point was of assistance to the Committee. The Executive Director reasoned that there is documentary evidence for most places that can be linked to their history. The Executive Director argued that the intention of the Criteria and Threshold Guidelines ('the Guidelines') is not to allow for the inclusion of places in the Register on the basis of documentary evidence alone and that if a place no longer survives or has lost its ability to demonstrate its foundational or subsequent uses, then the documentary evidence should become the archival record of the place, not the primary reason to include it in the Register. The Executive Director noted that the preamble to the Guidelines states that they are 'applicable to the bulk of places and objects [but] ... there will be instances where the guidelines are not easily applied'. The Executive Director stated that this allows for some reasoned flexibility and that this is warranted in relation to Criterion A and in relation to the Place.
- 013.** It is the Committee's view that in future assessments more extensive investigation may be warranted into the connection between Victorians and places such as the Place and the ability of such places, even those diminished in intactness and integrity, to demonstrate the history of important phases of Victoria's history through the use of documentary evidence.
- 014.** The Committee agrees, nonetheless, with the recommendation of the Executive Director that the Place does not meet the threshold for inclusion in the Register under Criterion A.

#### **Criterion B**

- 015.** The Committee agrees with the recommendation of the Executive Director and finds that the Place does not meet the threshold for inclusion in the Register under Criterion B.

#### **Criterion C**

- 016.** The Committee agrees with the recommendation of the Executive Director and finds that the Place does not meet the threshold for inclusion in the Register under Criterion C.

#### Criterion D

**017.**The Committee agrees with the recommendation of the Executive Director and finds that the Place does not meet the threshold for inclusion in the Register under Criterion D.

#### Criterion E

**018.**The Committee agrees with the recommendation of the Executive Director and finds that the Place does not meet the threshold for inclusion in the Register under Criterion E.

#### Criterion F

**019.**The Committee agrees with the recommendation of the Executive Director and finds that the Place does not meet the threshold for inclusion in the Register under Criterion F.

#### Criterion G

**020.**The Executive Director's key reasoning under Criterion G was that, unlike other places on the Register such as Festival Hall and the Melbourne Cricket Ground where the primary experience occurs at the place, the social significance of the ABC is more strongly associated with the ABC as an institution rather than with the Place as a physical place. The Recommendation also stated that associations between various groups and the Place ceased with its closure in 2017 and that there is no present-day strong attachment between the place and the groups.

**021.**The Committee acknowledges the apparent lack of evidence of a present-day physical interaction with the Place by Victorian communities. Establishing a link between a community/communities and an inoperative place of production is difficult, but the Committee believes in certain cases, like the present case, more robust methodologies may occasionally be warranted. The Committee is of the view that more proactive methodologies should be employed to establish a more comprehensive evidentiary basis as to the communities that are associated with a place and/or the relevant institution/body/corporation associated with a place.

**022.**Despite the recent changes to the methodology of assessing Criterion G, a certain vagueness persists around the precise nature of communities of association and around the nature of deep and abiding connections with places. The Committee is of the view that communities can exist in traditional as well as non-traditional forms, and in physical as well as virtual forms. These types of conceptions of community may be especially useful for places such as the Place.

**023.**The Recommendation's comparative analysis compared the Place with a variety of places including other television studios and with registered places Festival Hall and the Melbourne Cricket Ground. The Executive Director explained that these two comparisons were made because they were places of entertainment and are in the Register under Criterion G. The Executive Director reasoned that entertainment made at the Place was primarily enjoyed away from the Place and any social attachment is not embedded in its fabric. The Committee nevertheless records its view that comparing places such as the Place to entertainment venues may not always be a helpful comparison, and that it may sometimes be more useful to compare a production and broadcasting place to other sites of production (e.g. factories) where manufactured products are also consumed offsite.

**024.**Notwithstanding the comments above, the Committee agrees with the Executive Director that the Place does not meet the threshold for inclusion in the Register under Criterion G.

## Criterion H

**025.** The Committee agrees with the recommendation of the Executive Director and finds that the Place does not meet the threshold for inclusion in the Register under Criterion H.

## CONCLUSION

**026.** After considering the Executive Director's recommendation, pursuant to Section 49(1)(b) of the *Heritage Act 2017*, the Committee has determined that, based on the evidence before it, the Former ABC Studios, Ripponlea is not of cultural heritage significance to the State of Victoria and is not to be included in the Victorian Heritage Register.

## ATTACHMENT 1

### HERITAGE COUNCIL CRITERIA FOR ASSESSMENT OF PLACES OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

CRITERION A	Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history
CRITERION B	Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.
CRITERION C	Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Victoria's cultural history.
CRITERION D	Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places or environments.
CRITERION E	Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.
CRITERION F	Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.
CRITERION G	Strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. This includes the significance of a place to Indigenous peoples as part of their continuing and developing cultural traditions.
CRITERION H	Special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Victoria's history.

These were adopted by the Heritage Council at its meeting on 7 August 2008, and replace the previous criteria adopted by the Heritage Council on 6 March 1997.