19 October 2015

Mr Malcolm Snow
Chief Executive
National Capital Authority
GPO Box 373,
CANBERRA ACT 2601

By email: worksapproval@natcap.gov.au

Dear Mr Snow,

Proposed development of the West Basin Waterfront City to the Lake (Stage 1A)

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this proposal. I provide this letter as a submission on behalf of Australia ICOMOS.

ICOMOS – the International Council for Monuments and Sites – is a non-government professional organisation that promotes expertise in the conservation of cultural heritage. ICOMOS is also an Advisory Body to the World Heritage Committee under the World Heritage Convention. Australia ICOMOS, formed in 1976, is one of over 100 national committees throughout the world. Australia ICOMOS has over 600 members in a range of heritage professions. We have expert members on a large number of ICOMOS International Scientific Committees, as well as on expert committees and boards in Australia. We have a particular interest in Australia’s World Heritage properties.

West Basin currently is a significant open space lakeshore landscape, located in the centre of Canberra on the banks of Lake Burley Griffin and within the Commonwealth Heritage nominated area Lake Burley Griffin and Adjacent Lands. This area is also part of a National Heritage nomination, and the subject of a heritage management plan commissioned by the NCA. It is used for parking, and community activities. It has a bike hire and paddle boat hire facilities very popular with visitors. It also has a new but temporary youth gathering place, called Westside Acton. Importantly from Commonwealth Avenue, that edges the basin, there is an impressive vista across the lake waters and the National Museum of Australia to the mountains beyond.

Australia ICOMOS recognises that the provision of public infrastructure and leisure amenities is critical to the ongoing needs of Canberra as the national capital and that the proposed redevelopment of West Basin as a cultural and entertainment precinct providing a mix of uses – including retail, recreation, accommodation and public open space – is part of a major urban renewal initiative, the City to the Lake project, and it arguably delivers aspects of Walter Griffin’s vision for an active lakefront.

However we raise the following concerns:

• The City to the Lake project is to be delivered incrementally which means that works approval for Stage 1A will be considered in isolation of future stages of adjacent residential development involving buildings of multiple stories. In particular, the overall impact of the West Basin development will not be considered.

• The general public and visitors to Canberra will be looking into buildings from Commonwealth Avenue and not vistas across the lake and to the mountains. The vistas across the basin have been safeguarded until now with the low profile of the National Museum of Australia.
Canberra was planned as a low level city by Griffin. This inner city development is in conflict with that concept.

West Basin is within nationally significant land and although not a developed park, it is still important space with great public use potential.

With these issues in mind, we recommend a cautious approach to development, based on a respect for the existing fabric, use, associations and meanings.

In addition, good heritage planning and development that respects heritage values requires the retention of an appropriate setting. This includes retention of the visual and sensory setting, as well as the retention of spiritual and other cultural relationships that contribute to the cultural significance of the place. Therefore notwithstanding the design plans and heritage impacts of works for Stage 1A, these cannot be appropriately considered without details of further stages, and the overall development should be subject to expert heritage impact assessment. New construction, demolition, intrusions or other changes which would adversely affect the setting or relationships are not appropriate.

We commend to the National Capital Authority The Burra Charter, the Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance, 2013 which, together with the associated series of Practice Notes, provides a best practice standard for managing cultural heritage places in Australia, and, by association, guidance pertinent to the management of related cultural landscapes and places.

Thank you again for your consideration of the views of Australia ICOMOS in this important issue.

Yours faithfully

[Signature]

MS ELIZABETH VINES OAM, FRAIA, MICOMOS
President, Australia ICOMOS