

Heritage (Decision about Provisional Registration of NRMA House, Braddon) Notice 2015

Notifiable Instrument NI2015–255

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 NRMA House, Braddon) Notice 2015*.

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 NRMA House, Braddon to the ACT Heritage Register.

Pamela Hubert
A/g Secretary (as delegate for)
ACT Heritage Council
4 June 2015



ACT Heritage Council

**STATEMENT OF REASONS
DECISION NOT TO PROVISIONALLY REGISTER
NRMA HOUSE
Blocks 7, 8 and 9 Section 18, Braddon
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 NRMA House, Braddon. This Statement of Reasons provides an assessment of NRMA House, Braddon and finds that the place does not meet any of the criteria under s.10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

Background

NRMA House was nominated to the ACT Heritage Register (the Register) in August 2007 by the then Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA, today Australian Institute of Architects – the Institute).

NRMA House was designed by the architectural firm of Stephenson and Turner in 1968 and construction was completed by A V Jennings Industries in 1970. The building was designed in the Late Twentieth Century International style using precast reinforced concrete elements, including load-bearing facade units with integrated sun and water control.

An external inspection of the building was conducted by ACT Heritage on 13 September 2013.

The ACT Heritage Council (the Council) discussed the nomination of NRMA House at its meeting on 4 June 2015.

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 NRMA House, Braddon, the Council considered:

- the original nomination and documentary evidence supplied by the nominator;
- information provided by a site inspection on 13 September 2013 by ACT Heritage;
- the report by ACT Heritage titled, *Background Information NRMA House*, June 2015, containing photographs and information on history, description, condition and integrity;
- opinions from various engineering and architectural experts; and
- experience and knowledge gained by the Council through the listing and management of one existing Late Twentieth-Century International style building within the ACT (the ANZ Bank Building), comparable to NRMA House.

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;

NRMA House, Braddon, does not meet this criterion.

NRMA House has achieved a distinctive design through its use of a structural system of load bearing precast concrete wall panels supporting long span precast pre-stressed floor beams. However, the use of precast structural systems was and remains a relatively common form of construction in the

ACT and there is no evidence to suggest that the building style has been important in influencing the course or pattern of the ACT's cultural history.

The NRMA and the function it performs or services it provides, as represented in the building, continue today and, although somewhat changed, are in no danger of being lost. Office functions continue in the building; the roadside assistance program organisation and communications system has been modernised; the NRMA shopfront has expanded into several smaller shopfronts throughout the ACT; and vehicle inspections have been outsourced. While these functions are important and valued by the community or sections of it, they are not important to the course or pattern of the ACT's cultural history.

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

NRMA House, Braddon, does not meet this criterion.

NRMA House is not considered to be a rare or endangered aspect, architecturally or historically, of the ACT's cultural history. Head offices of national organisations are commonplace in the ACT. Some examples of head offices in the ACT include the Australian Automobile Association, the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, Australian Council of National Trusts, Engineers Australia, Relationships Australia, and many others.

The Late Twentieth Century International style is a common building style of which there are several extant examples located in the City, including the ANZ Bank Building (included in the ACT Heritage Register) which is included on the ACT Heritage Register.

With regard to its structural system, the extent of examples of buildings using pre-cast elements in the ACT has not been studied and it is not possible to draw a firm conclusion. However, other examples are known, and the use of pre-cast elements continues to the present day.

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

NRMA House, Braddon, does not meet this criterion.

There is insufficient evidence that NRMA House has the potential to yield information that will contribute to understanding of the cultural history of the ACT. While it may provide an example of a certain architectural style and structural techniques, these are adequately represented by documentary evidence and the physical material of the building is unlikely to contribute to a wider understanding of cultural history.

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

NRMA House, Braddon, does not meet this criterion.

NRMA House shows an early adoption of a structural system of load bearing precast concrete wall panels supporting long span precast pre-stressed floor beams in a design that allowed for quick erection and open internal floor spaces. It is a good example of its period using precast concrete in an office building and precast floor beams and wall panels with integrated sun and water control in a high quality finish. The combination of engineering techniques demonstrates the principal characteristics (i.e. integration of design and engineering solutions combining precast and prestressed elements to create elegant and flexible designs at a low cost, yet high finish) of precast concrete buildings, however it is not of such a high quality as to be considered an important example that would meet the high thresholds necessary for inclusion in the register under this criterion.

The building may be compared with the Edmund Barton Offices (1969-74; included in the Commonwealth Heritage Register) which is important for its technical and design achievement, and

creative excellence. The structural system, using precast post-tensioned 'T' floor beams supported by precast post-tensioned 'I' spandrel beams was innovative at the time of construction, and the use of post-tensioned precast concrete 'T' beams are not commonly used in Australia any more as ongoing technical advances in concrete technologies now favour the use of slab-beams.

NRMA House is a modest example of the Late Twentieth Century International style. It displays only one key indicator of the style, the plain, smooth wall surface on the end tower elements, and one other indicator – external sun control devices in the form of the pre-cast wall panels. There are better examples of this style in the ACT such as the ANZ Bank Building (1963; included in the ACT Heritage Register) and the Edmund Barton Offices (1969-74; included in the Commonwealth Heritage Register). These other examples display have a stronger application of the style. In this context, NRMA House is not a notable example of the style.

The building is positioned in the southwest of the three blocks combined with the streets to the west and south with their large setbacks as determined by the NCDC, it is separate from all nearby structures by a gap of nearly 40 metres. This results in NRMA House standing apart from nearby buildings, with a small garden court facing Northbourne Avenue designed in the formal modernist style of the time with a mix of evergreen and deciduous exotic trees, lawn and a feature wall, as well as allowing for a large number of parking spaces behind the building. This siting, which makes NRMA House a feature on the corner of a major thoroughfare, is related to a common feature, though not a formal indicator, of the Late Twentieth Century International style, which considered spatial qualities of a place in relation to the urban setting as important.

This siting is also a reasonably common quality of developments of the period and later along Northbourne Avenue as a result of the NCDC's Northbourne Avenue strategy that encouraged quality large buildings of a national character. Examples include the former Canberra Rex Hotel (1960), former NCDC Offices (1969), Macarthur House (1969), Construction House (1972) and the former Gowrie Hostel (1965). There is nothing to indicate the siting of NRMA House is notable given this range of other examples.

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

NRMA House, Braddon, does not meet this criterion.

There is insufficient evidence that NRMA House exhibits particular aesthetic characteristics valued by the ACT community or a cultural group in the ACT. However, it is noted that its plain white quartz finish and simple but elegant sculptural form makes a positive contribution to the streetscape and that the Institute value the place through its listing on the Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture. The Council acknowledge that NRMA House is valued by the Institute and other architects for reasons relating to its design and aesthetic qualities. The Council-endorsed *Heritage Assessment Policy*, interprets a cultural group as 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'. The Council therefore do not consider the Institute, or the ACT architectural community, to be a cultural group for the purposes of the criterion.

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

NRMA House, Braddon, does not meet this criterion.

NRMA House shows an early adoption of a structural system of load bearing precast concrete wall panels supporting long span precast pre-stressed floor beams in a design that allowed for quick erection and open internal floor spaces. Whilst the integration of different features into the wall panels and the combination of structural systems allowing for column-free internal spaces is a clever

design, similar systems existed throughout Australia. The Council therefore does not consider that it demonstrates a high degree of creative or technical achievement for its period.

Various combinations of similar systems have been in use throughout Australia from the mid-1960s that use precast pre-stressed concrete beams, reinforced concrete load bearing facades, and integrated sun control. In the case of determining the significance of creative or technical achievements in the building industry it is appropriate to make comparisons against other achievements in the same field in a national context. Such examples, contemporary and earlier, that have used similar technology as NRMA House can be seen in the State Government Offices, Melbourne (1967); St Andrew's Cathedral School, Sydney (1967); Victorian State Laboratories, Melbourne (1968); Victoria Insurance Building, Melbourne (1969 also by Stephenson and Turner); the Bowling Club on the corner of York and Clarence Street, Sydney (1970); and the former NCDC Offices at Northbourne Avenue, Canberra (1971).

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

NRMA House, Braddon, does not meet this criterion.

There is no evidence that NRMA House has a strong or special association with the ACT community, or a cultural group in the ACT for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. The Institute value the place as evidenced through their listing of it on the Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture. The Council acknowledge that NRMA House is valued by the Institute and other ACT architects for reasons relating to its design and aesthetic qualities. The Council-endorsed *Heritage Assessment Policy*, interprets a cultural group as 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'. The Council therefore do not consider the Institute, or the ACT architectural community, to be a cultural group for the purposes of the criterion.

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

NRMA House, Braddon, does not meet this criterion.

Whilst the NRMA is an important organisation in the nation's history, its association with NRMA House is not considered to be special. The building is used as the organisation's ACT office and in the past has acted as the NRMA shopfront, radio control centre and vehicle inspection centre. Although the organisation has continued using the building there is no evidence before the Council that the association is special above any building the NRMA has occupied, such as the first ACT regional office on Mort Street in Braddon (1951 – non extant), the later full branch office on Lonsdale Street in Braddon (1963 – possibly non extant or heavily modified), or the Woden (1978 – today Bonner House) or Belconnen (1982 as a shopfront inside the mall) branches. The Council also notes that NRMA House does not feature as more than a single mention in Rosemary Broomham's 1995 history of the organisation, *On the Road: the NRMA's first seventy five years*.

The Council also notes that several other organisations have leased space in the building but there is no evidence that any of them have strong or special associations with NRMA House.

In addition, the building is associated with a phase in Canberra's planning when the NCDC was establishing new principles and policies for the development of Northbourne Avenue. These principles and policies were developed by the National Capital Planning Committee (NCPC) and were accepted by the NCDC to guide the application of the *Buildings (Design and Siting) Ordinance 1964*. While this is an interesting aspect of the changing attitudes of various planning authorities, it fits into a context of evolving planning development that is represented by many other examples (as in the case of different suburbs reflecting evolving planning concepts). In applying the criteria the Council has to determine which, if any, of the places in that evolving context merit registration. Nearly every

building in the ACT could be said to fit into a story of a particular design or planning context, or historical trend, but this does not mean that every place meets the threshold imposed by the criteria. An entry on the Heritage Register is valid to the extent that it establishes a level of significance that is strong and special that is therefore above the ordinary.

Conclusion

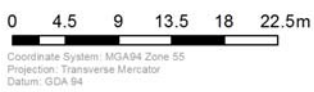
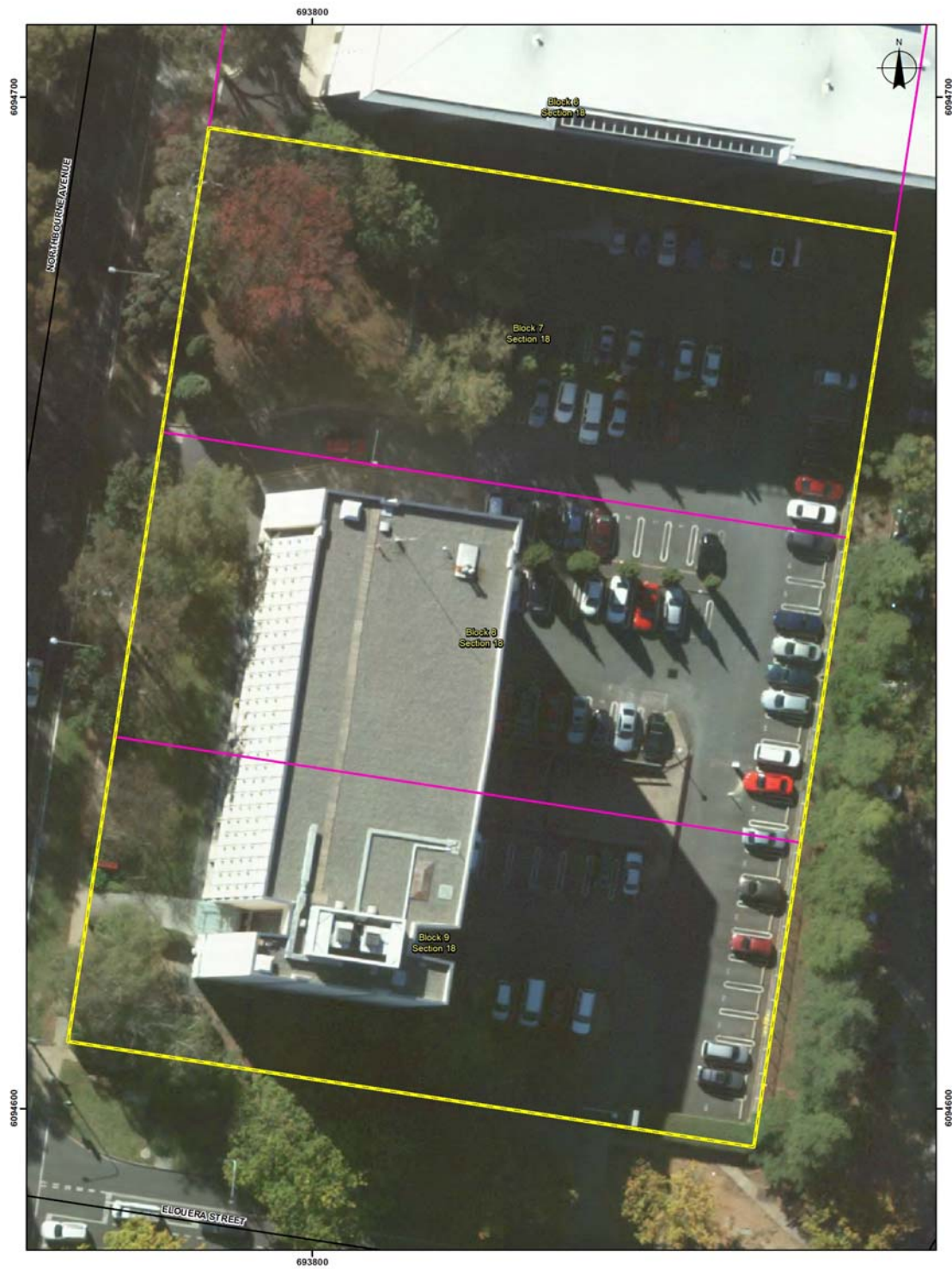
NRMA House, Braddon, is a distinctive design that uses a structural system of load bearing precast concrete wall panels with integrated architectural features supporting long span precast pre-stressed floor beams. NRMA House is of some interest as an early adoption in the ACT of the extensive use of a precast structural system which allowed for quick erection and open internal floor spaces. The structural system, using precast post-tensioned 'T' floor beams supported by precast post-tensioned 'I' spandrel beams and the use of post-tensioned precast concrete 'T' beams is not considered to be rare or uncommon for the period. Whilst there are several interesting technical and design features evident in NRMA House, the Council does not consider that it passes the necessarily high thresholds for meeting any of the criteria under the *Heritage ACT 2004*.

The Council notes that NRMA House is a modest example of the Late Twentieth Century International style and uses an interesting application of precast reinforced concrete technology, including load bearing facade units with integrated sun control and water control, to create a column free internal space. Additionally, while the siting of the building on the block is interesting and helps the building stand out from its neighbours, the Council considers this to be but one element of the style. Stylistically and technologically, it is part of an evolving design and technological development that uses reinforced concrete technologies developed in the mid-1960s as a part of the Late Twentieth Century International style of architecture, a continuation of the Post War International style, as applied to medium-sized commercial buildings. In applying the criteria for inclusion on the Register, the Council has to determine which, if any, of the places in that evolving context merit registration. Nearly every building in the ACT could be said to fit into a story of a particular design or planning context, or historical trend, but this does not mean that every place meets the threshold imposed by the criteria. An entry on the Register is valid to the extent that it establishes a level of significance that is strong and special that is therefore above the ordinary.

The Council has no evidence that the ACT community or a cultural group in the ACT highly value the building, either in its association with the NRMA or for its aesthetic qualities. The Council does note that the Institute value the place through its listing on the Register of Significant Twentieth Century Architecture. The Council acknowledge that NRMA House is valued by the Institute and other architects for reasons relating to its design and aesthetic qualities. The Council-endorsed *Heritage Assessment Policy*, interprets a cultural group as 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'. The Council therefore do not consider the Institute, or the ACT architectural community, to be a cultural group for the purposes of the criterion.

This Statement of Reasons provides an assessment of NRMA House and finds that the place does not meet any of the criteria of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

SITE PLAN



NRMA House, Braddon

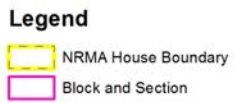


Image 1 Nominated area