

# Heritage (Decision about Provisional Registration of Former Commonwealth Bank Building, City) Notice 2022

Notifiable instrument NI2022–300

made under the

Heritage Act 2004, s 34 (Notice of decision about provisional registration)

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## 1 Name of instrument

This instrument is the *Heritage (Decision about Provisional Registration of Former Commonwealth Bank Building, City,) Notice 2022*.

## 2 Commencement

This instrument commences on the day after its notification day.

## 3 Decision about provisional registration

On 2 June 2022, the ACT Heritage Council (the *Heritage Council*) decided to provisionally register Former Commonwealth Bank Building, block 2, section 13, City (the *Place*).

## 4 Registration details of the Place

The registration details of the Place are in the schedule.

## 5 Reasons for the decision

The Heritage Council decided to provisionally register the Place because it is satisfied on reasonable grounds that it is likely to have heritage significance as it is likely to meet one or more of the heritage significance criteria in section 10 of the *Heritage Act 2004* (the *Act*). A detailed statement of reasons, including an assessment against the heritage significance criteria, is provided in the schedule.

## 6 Date of provisional registration

The date of provisional registration is 3 June 2022.

## **7 Indication of the Heritage Council's intention**

The Heritage Council intends to decide whether to register the Place under division 6.2 of the Act during the period of provisional registration.

## **8 Invitation to make written comments during public consultation period**

- (1) The Heritage Council invites written comments about the registration of the Place. Any written comments must be made within 4 weeks after the day this notice is notified.
- (2) Written comments can be provided to the Heritage Council by the following methods:
  - (a) mail to  
The Secretary  
ACT Heritage Council  
GPO Box 158  
CANBERRA ACT 2601
  - (b) email to [heritage@act.gov.au](mailto:heritage@act.gov.au)
  - (c) via the consultation website at [www.yoursay.act.gov.au](http://www.yoursay.act.gov.au).

Edwina Jans  
A/g Secretary (as delegate for)  
ACT Heritage Council  
2 June 2022

**Schedule**  
**(See sections 3 and 4)**

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ACT Heritage Council

**AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**  
**HERITAGE REGISTER**  
**(Provisional Registration)**

For the purposes of s 33 of the *Heritage Act 2004*, a provisional entry to the heritage register has been prepared by the ACT Heritage Council for the following place:

**FORMER COMMONWEALTH BANK BUILDING**

**BLOCK 2 SECTION 13, CITY**

**DATE OF DECISION**

2 June 2022

**DATE OF PROVISIONAL REGISTRATION**

3 June 2022 Notifiable Instrument: 2022–

**PERIOD OF EFFECT OF PROVISIONAL REGISTRATION**

Start Date: 3 June 2022 End Date: 2 November 2022

Extended Period (if applicable) Start Date \_\_\_\_\_ End Date \_\_\_\_\_

Copies of the Register Entry are available for inspection at ACT Heritage. For further information please contact:

The Secretary  
ACT Heritage Council  
GPO Box 158  
CANBERRA ACT 2601  
Telephone 13 22 81

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This statement refers to the location of the place as required in s 12 (b) of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

#### **LOCATION OF THE PLACE**

Former Commonwealth Bank Building, 187 London Circuit, corner of Ainslie Place, Block 2, Section 13, City.

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This statement refers to the description of the place as required in s 12 (c) of the *Heritage Act 2004*. The attributes described in this section form part of the heritage significance of the place. For the purposes of s. 12(c) of the *Heritage Act 2004*, the boundary of the place is at Image 1.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF THE PLACE**

Former Commonwealth Bank Building, also known as the Commonwealth Savings Bank, consisting of the following attributes:

The two façades facing the public domain, not including the door canopy. Particular features of note include:

- The scale, massing and street presence of the building, including the height as related to Ainslie Place and the neighbouring Civic Square Precinct;
- The vertical emphasis created by the fins on the facade;
- The artworks incorporated into the façade at street level, within the pedestrian view; and
- The materials and neutral palette.

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This statement refers to the heritage significance of the place as required in s 12 (d) of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

#### **STATEMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE**

The external presentation of the Former Commonwealth Bank Building is strongly reflective of the National Capital Development Commission's (NCDC) planning framework and design ambitions that guided new construction in the Civic area during the mid-1960s. This was a particularly important time in the development of Canberra and its recognition internationally as a notable planned city, marking a rapid change from the relatively slow pace of growth in the city in the war years and through the 1950s. The formation of the NCDC and the planning guidance thus established, was a direct result of the priority given to the city by the Commonwealth in the 1960s. A core focus of NCDC attention was the planning of the inner-city areas and oversight of the construction of institutional buildings in ways that reflected aesthetic principles and development priorities. The scale, massing and form of the Former Commonwealth Bank Building reflected these NCDC concerns. The building was planned as an integral component of the neighbouring Civic Square Precinct, Ainslie Place and London Circuit schemes. The external appearance of the building has remained little changed to the present, retaining the integrity of this original planning context.

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#### **CONSERVATION OBJECTIVE**

The guiding conservation objective is that Former Commonwealth Bank Building shall be conserved and appropriately managed in a manner respecting its heritage significance.

The ACT Heritage Council may adopt heritage guidelines applicable to the place under s 25 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

For further information on guidelines applicable to the place, or for advice on proposed works or development, please contact ACT Heritage on 13 22 81.

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## REASON FOR PROVISIONAL REGISTRATION

The Council has assessed the Former Commonwealth Bank Building, City against the heritage significance criteria and is satisfied that the place is likely to have heritage significance when assessed against criteria [a] under s 10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

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## ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

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

In assessing the heritage significance of Former Commonwealth Bank Building, City, the Council considered:

- the original nomination and documentary evidence supplied by the nominator;
- the Council's *Heritage Assessment Policy* (March 2018);
- information provided by a site inspection on 5 August 2021 and 23 February 2022 by ACT Heritage; and
- the report by ACT Heritage titled, *Background Information Former Commonwealth Bank Building*, June 2022, 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;**

The Council has assessed the Former Commonwealth Bank Building (FCBB) against criterion (a) and is satisfied that the place meets this criterion.

Approved by the National Capital Planning Committee (NCPC) in 1965, and opened in 1967, the FCBB is associated with a significant period of development of the city centre under the direction of the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC).

The external presentation of the FCBB exemplifies the NCDC's planning and design intentions in the 1960s, which were imposed on the building design through the requirements set out in the lease of the land. These required features and design intentions include:

- The use of distinctive architectural design elements, including the 'form, silhouette and the colours and textures of the finishing materials', as well as an emphasis on strong horizontal elements softened by rhythmic vertical lines;
- The coordination of these features and the building height with nearby buildings in Sections 13, 14 and, particularly in the Civic Square precinct, to achieve a coherent design composition;
- The presentation of FCBB as a 'portal' building to balance road access and amenity, and to achieve a sense of balance and proportion between it and its neighbouring buildings;
- The FCBB reflects the NCDC's encouragement of private enterprise investment in the achievement of its planning intentions, in which they assessed the designs put forward by eminent private architects for their conformity to their standards; and
- The encouragement of the inclusion of sculptural works within new buildings as a part of projecting an appropriately sophisticated and progressive image for the city of Canberra.

The siting, external form and façade of the FCBB relate directly to each of these elements and provide a largely intact and well-preserved representation of these values. It is these elements of the FCBB that Council judges to have direct reference to a crucial period in the cultural history of ACT, and especially in the planning of and investment in its inner-city development and functions.

In recommending approval for the building in September 1965, the NCPC noted its ‘high standard’ of design. This endorsement should be seen in the context of the NCDC’s commitment to anchoring its approach to ‘civic design’ not only in individual buildings but in a spatial and visual aesthetic applied in several areas of the city. The FCBB was integral to this approach and practice, including – most immediately – in the Civic Square/Ainslie Avenue precinct already recognised by the Council, and to the west on London Circuit in Hobart Place.

NCDC concepts for the further development of the city centre at that time reflect the considered management of issues of height, bulk, scale, form. Multistorey office developments were proposed to the east of the Civic Square area achieving a tiered affect with lower-level buildings defining the Ainslie Avenue axis off London Circuit graduating to higher buildings further back. The portal and street level elements of the FCBB were integral to this graduated planning, and the symmetry in brought to experience and development of the city.

The investment by the Commonwealth Bank in commissioning a building, designed by then prominent, award-winning firm of Peddle Thorp and Walker, also reflects not only the NCDC’s encouragement of other investment in construction beyond the housing sector but also the desire of the commercial, professional and financial sectors to be more fully represented in the city.

The sculptural panels confirm the NCDC’s intention to promote the inclusion of art in construction projects throughout Canberra at the time of construction. From this perspective, it is primarily the inclusion of those panels in the FCBB that indicates an important dimension of Canberra’s cultural history, rather than the quality of the panels themselves.

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

The Council has assessed the Former Commonwealth Bank Building (FCBB) against criterion (b) and is not satisfied that the place meets this criterion.

The FCBB does not appear to be uncommon or rare as post-war bank building in Canberra. While the contextual history of bank buildings in the ACT is not well documented, at least a number of other surviving examples in the City and elsewhere.

The FCBB is not an uncommon or rare example of the Late Twentieth Century International style. A number of other examples are known to survive, including major examples such as the Cameron Offices and the Edmund Barton Building.

In pursuing its design objectives in planning and building the national capital, the NCDC promoted and encouraged the incorporation of artworks in public spaces and as part of buildings. While many of the known examples are government buildings, the practice was also occasionally extended to other buildings, including commercial buildings. The importance of the artworks is not in their uncommon, rare or endangered aspects, but in the contribution of these to the building’s presentation and the way in which this appearance reflects the urban planning intentions of the NCDC at the time of the building’s construction, rather than in any particular merit of the artworks outside of the context of the building.

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

The Council has assessed the Former Commonwealth Bank Building against criterion (c) and is not satisfied that the place meets this criterion.

There is no evidence before the Council that the building has the potential to yield information that will contribute significantly to a wider understanding of the cultural history of the ACT. Any information the place may provide has already been obtained from the documentary and physical evidence and it is unlikely that any further significant evidence could be gained from the physical fabric of the place.

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

The Council has assessed the Former Commonwealth Bank Building (FCBB) against criterion (d) and is not satisfied that the place meets this criterion.

The FCBB displays several features characteristic of the Late Twentieth Century International style. These key features include cubiform overall shape, structural frame expressed (by the columns and beams on the façade) and plain, smooth wall surface (at the splayed corner). Other features are external sun control devices (fins and louvres) and contrasting texture (between the stone cladding and the decorative panels). The expression of these characteristics on the façade of the place are relatively intact. However, there are other examples of this style in Canberra; it has not been shown that this building is comparatively distinctive or recognised (for example, by architectural awards) as important in Late Twentieth Century International architecture.

The FCBB is an example of a post-war and 1960s commercial building and there are some distinctive design features, such as the strong room, that are directly relevant to its use as a bank. However, there is no known type profile for either commercial or banking buildings as a class of place that would enable a meaningful assessment. The range of examples of such buildings in Canberra is also relatively large. In this context, it is not possible to assess any significant values at this time.

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

The Council has assessed the Former Commonwealth Bank Building (FCBB) against criterion (e) and is not satisfied that the place meets this criterion.

The FCBB is an example of the Late Twentieth Century International style and is appreciated for aesthetic characteristics associated with this style by the architectural profession as represented by the Australia Institute of Architects (the Nominator). It also contributes to the urban environment in proximity to the Civic Square precinct. However, the Council does not consider the architectural community to be a cultural group for the purposes of this criterion. The Council's 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'. There is no evidence that it is valued for in aesthetic characteristics by the wider ACT community or a cultural group.

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

The Council has assessed the Former Commonwealth Bank Building (FCBB) against criterion (f) and is not satisfied that the place meets this criterion.

There are two elements of the FCBB that could be considered within the context of creative or technical achievements, the decorative panels and the use of the Celdek flooring system. However, neither achieve the high standards necessary for meeting the thresholds of this criterion.

The decorative panels by Mariti on the ground floor façade display creativity, being abstract in form and in keeping with the progressive architectural style of the building. However, neither the artist nor the artworks themselves have been specially recognised for their artistic merit, such as being referenced in art publications. Their integrity has been affected by the loss of one panel, possibly two, and overpainting. As discussed in Criterion a, the artworks' contribution to the heritage significance of the FCBB is in the context of their integration of the artworks into the street presence of the building, and the way in which this reflects the urban planning context at the time the building was constructed.

This building was possibly the first in Canberra to use Celdek cellular steel decking for the upper floor structures. The decking provided ducting for wiring and services, as well as a permanent formwork for the concrete floor slabs of the building. Limited historical information has been found about this flooring system, including the extent of its use in Canberra. However, it was being used in major and much larger multi-story office buildings elsewhere in Australia, such as the AMP Building in Sydney from 1959. In this context, it does not appear that the use of the Celdek system represents 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;**

The Council has assessed the Former Commonwealth Bank Building against criterion (g) and is not satisfied that the place meets this criterion.

Although the building was the branch of a major bank for over 50 years, including providing foreign currency exchange, there is no substantial research into, or evidence, of a strong or special association with the ACT community, or a cultural group in the ACT for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. The closure of the branch in 2020 seems to have passed without public comment or community concern.

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

The Council has assessed the Former Commonwealth Bank Building (FCBB) against criterion (h) and is not satisfied that the place meets this criterion.

The building could potentially be associated with the architects Peddle, Thorp and Walker, the artist responsible for the decorative panels, Silvano Mariti, the Commonwealth Savings Bank of Australia and, given the heritage significance of the building under Criterion a, the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC).

Peddle, Thorp and Walker (now known as PTW Architects) are a prominent architectural firm that

has a long history of practise in Australia since 1924. Designs, such as the AMP Building in Sydney (1962), have brought them much attention and they have received many design awards. In Canberra, Peddle, Thorp and Walker designed the Swedish Embassy (a project undertaken in association with E G H Lundquist, 1951, and awarded the Sulman Medal in 1952), the Former Commonwealth Bank Building (1967), 221 London (former Electricity House, 1968), QT Canberra (former Lakeside International Hotel, 1972), and National Gallery of Australia extensions (1997 and 2010). However, in the case of the FCBB, there is nothing to suggest a special association with Peddle, Thorp and Walker: the building was not an early example of its work, it does not appear to be a seminal example and did not achieve wider acknowledgement such as through winning any design awards.

The panels on the façade of the FCBB are the only known examples in Canberra of the work of the artist Silvano Mariti. Outside of Canberra, Mariti appears to have made only modest artistic contributions in Sydney. He was not a prominently recognised artist, was not the focus of critical acclaim or attention, and his works of art are not represented in major collections. Consequently, Mariti is not considered an artist of note in the history of the ACT.

The FCBB was constructed to house the commercial operations of the Commonwealth Savings Bank of Australia, an entity that operated in the building from the time that it was opened in 1967 until its sale in 2020. However, the branch of the bank located nearby, on the corner of London Circuit and Northbourne Avenue, was earlier and its length of association at that location existed for a longer period of time.

SITE PLAN



**Image 1** Former Commonwealth Bank Building site boundary. This corresponds to the cadastral boundary of block 2 section 13 City.