

22 January 2020



Professor Stuart Macintyre AO
Chair
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File No.: B5230 GMH Administration Building and Social Centre, 251 Salmon Street, Port Melbourne

RE: National Trust support for the Executive Director's recommendation to include GMH Fishermans Bend in the Victorian Heritage Register

Dear Professor Macintyre,

The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) (National Trust) is the state's largest community-based heritage advocacy organisation actively working towards conserving and protecting our heritage for future generations to enjoy. As Victoria's premier heritage and conservation organisation, the National Trust has an interest in ensuring that a wide range of natural, cultural, social and Indigenous heritage values are protected and respected, contributing to strong, vibrant and prosperous communities.

The National Trust supports the Executive Director's recommendation to include GMH Fishermans Bend in the Victorian Heritage Register. We support the Executive Director's recommendation as advertised, including the proposed extent of registration, and assessment that the place reaches the threshold for state significance under Criterion A and D. We provide the following submission in support of this recommendation.

1. National Trust Heritage Register

The National Trust maintains a Heritage Register of Significant Places, including buildings, landscapes, gardens, trees, and public art. The GMH Administration Building and Social Centre was added to the National Trust Heritage Register in November 1989, classified at state level. The Statement of Significance reads as follows:

Situated at the eastern end of a 50 acre site in Port Melbourne, the Administration building for General Motors Holden's Limited is a substantially unaltered example of a formally planned two-storey office complex of the 1930s. Designed by a team of four (L H Hartnett, Managing Director; E J L Gibson, Construction Engineer; J S Storey, Director of Engineering and N A Pointer, Equipment Engineer) and built in 1936, the reinforced concrete building with its central tower incorporates typical stylistic devices of the Moderne; incised lines and badge motifs to vertical surfaces between windows, layered geometric mouldings and stylised geometric detail to the central flagpole.

The Social Centre built in 1948 and sited behind the main office block, is a late but intact example of the Moderne with a large hall complete with first floor stage, fine chromed canteen hardware details and two murals depicting the progress of transport, one of which is carried out in the manner of American industrial designer, Norman Bel Geddes. This building is significant as evidence of the substantial commitment by General Motors Holden to the provision of well catered and comfortable service facilities for its employees.

The entire General Motors Holden site has historical importance as the location for the production of the Holden motor car. The first car was completed in 1948 and the occasion was attended by the Prime Minister of Australia, Mr Ben Chifley.

2. Extent of Registration

We support the extent of registration proposed by the Executive Director which includes the land, buildings (including exteriors and interiors), other features, and all fixtures attached to the building at the time of registration, as shown in *Diagram 2399*. While the inclusion of the place on the National Trust Heritage Register only includes the Administration Building and Social Centre, we support the rationale provided by the Executive Director that the site should be understood more broadly and incorporate the variety of building typologies and other features that demonstrate the former uses and phase of development of the place in its entirety. We agree that the extent of registration should include sufficient land around buildings and other features to protect, conserve and understand the place, and to maintain an appropriate setting if future development is proposed.

We further support the inclusion of the registered objects integral to the place, specifically the two murals painted on boards and attached to either side of the stage in the Social Centre. Printed in 1945 by GMH employee Eileen Robertson for the opening of the Social Centre, one mural depicts the history of transport and features a bullock cart in the foreground and ship in the background, and the other depicts the future of transport and features ultramodern cars, trains and flying craft. The National Trust Statement of Significance identifies that the latter has been carried out in the manner of American industrial designer, Norman Bel Geddes, which has not been specifically identified by the Executive Director. We support the assessment that these murals are integral to the place, and support their specific inclusion in the extent of registration and proposed Statement of Significance under Criterion A.

3. Proposed Statement of Significance

3.1. Criterion A

The National Trust supports the Executive Director's recommendation that GMH Fishermans Bend reaches the threshold for State-level significance under Criterion A as 'one of Victoria's most important automotive manufacturing facilities', representing the development of the automotive manufacturing industry in Victoria in the 1930s and 1940s which is a phase of historic importance having made an influential contribution to Victoria's manufacturing ability and capacity.¹ The place also has a clear association with the development, production and

¹ Recommendation of the Executive Director and assessment of cultural heritage significance, 20 Nov 2019, p8.

launch of the Holden 48-215, the first Australian made, mass-produced car, signalling that Australia had 'achieved a level of industrial sophistication and independence.'² We support the Executive Director's assessment that these associations are evident in the physical fabric of the place, and can be understood better than most other places in Victoria with substantially the same association.

We believe that GMH Fishermans Bend is also historically significant at the State Level for its design which was grounded in modernist concerns regarding the relationship between aesthetic and function. As noted in the National Trust Statement of Significance for the place, the Social Centre in particular 'is significant as evidence of the substantial commitment by General Motors Holden to the provision of well catered and comfortable service facilities for its employees'. As argued by Philip Goad *et al* in their work on modern Australian architecture, this commitment to sound design in a contemporary style is an example of the 'middle decades of the 20th century when architectural ideas, embodied as modernism, became entwined with ideas of social welfare.'³ We submit that the Social Centre should be recognised for the intent to be a beneficial space for factory workers health and sense of community, typifying the early to mid-century Modernistic emphasis on health and place making.

A direct comparison in this regard would be the Fletcher Jones Factory and Gardens in Warrnambool, established in 1948. As referenced in the Victorian Heritage Register Statement of Significance for the place, Fletcher's 'Modern New Decentralised Garden Factory' was a result of 'growing demand and advanced views of employee satisfaction and engagement.'⁴ The company became renowned not only for the quality of its clothing but also for Fletcher Jones's progressive approach to employer/employee relations and an innovative shareholding scheme. Fletcher Jones Factory and Garden is an example of an enlightened employer providing quality staff facilities, demonstrating this in its landscaping. As noted in the Executive Director's comparative analysis of the place (p28), it is acknowledged that GMH Fishermans Bend similarly expressed this aspect through the Social Centre.

3.2. Criterion D

The National Trust supports the Executive Director's recommendation that the place reaches the threshold for state level significance under Criterion D as 'a notable example of an automotive factory complex', demonstrating 'the principal characteristics of the class through its variety of building types which are indicative of their former uses, including the landmark corporate buildings, quality staff facilities for a sizeable workforce and extensive manufacturing areas'. We agree that this phase is of historic importance, having made a strong and influential contribution to Victoria's manufacturing capacity.

We also support the assessment that the Administration Building, Parts Building and Social Centre are notable examples of Moderne-style architecture in Victoria, and are of higher quality than other similar places already in the Victorian Heritage Register, specifically the

² Ibid.

³ Philip Goad, et al., "Making the Modern Community." In *Community: Building Modern Australia*, Hannah Lewi and David Nichols, ed. 2-23. (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2010).

⁴ Fletcher Jones Factory and Gardens, Victorian Heritage Register *Statement of Significance*, accessed online 22 January 2020, <https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/2409>

Former Clifton Motors Garage (significant as a 'notable example of a motor garage in the Moderne style') and Former Melford Motors (significant as a 'notable example of the streamlined Moderne style in a commercial setting').

4. Specific Permit Exemptions

We support the specific permit exemptions as advertised by the Executive Director. We submit that they provide a suitable balance in preserving the established cultural heritage significance of the place whilst allowing for adaptive reuse in the future if proposed.

5. Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment regarding the Executive Director's recommendation that GMH Fishermans Bend should be included in the Victorian Heritage Register. The National Trust strongly supports the Executive Director's recommendation. We would welcome the opportunity to make further submissions in support of the inclusion of GMH Fishermans Bend in the Victorian Heritage Register if a Registration Hearing is called.

Kind Regards,



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National Trust of Australia (Victoria)

Attached: National Trust of Australia (Victoria) Classification Report for GMH Administration Buildings and Social Centre, accessed 22 January 2020