

INVESTIGATION SUMMARY



Anzac Hill High School



Alice Springs Higher Primary School, PH0755/0042, Adam Collection, Northern Territory

Summary of investigation

The Office of the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption (ICAC) received a report alleging improper conduct by public officers in relation to the Anzac Hill High School (Alice Springs) Heritage Assessment Report ("the Report").

The Office of the ICAC commenced an investigation.

The investigation focused on the actions of public officers from the Department of Tourism, Sport and Culture Heritage Branch who were involved in the preparation of the Report, and the NT Heritage Council.

The Office of the ICAC has reviewed documents related to the heritage nomination of the site and interviewed public officers involved.

Investigators also sought independent expert opinion on the Report prepared by the Department of Tourism, Sport and Culture Heritage Branch.

The investigation examined the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics' (DIPL) processes leading up to the award of a \$2 million tender to demolish the Anzac Hill High School.

Results and findings

The Anzac Hill High School is a valuable public asset and the NT Government had touted this site as the preferred location for its proposed National Aboriginal Art Gallery.

Amid discussion over the future of the National Aboriginal Art Gallery, the Anzac Hill High School was nominated for heritage listing. The Department of Tourism, Sport and Culture Heritage Branch prepared

the Report for the NT Heritage Council as part of the heritage assessment process.

An allegation of improper conduct was received by the ICAC, relating to the conduct of public officers involved in the preparation of the Report.

The Heritage Branch's report found the Anzac Hill High School to be in "good condition", with "no sign of deterioration in any of the external walls, floors, pylons, or concrete stairs".

The NT Heritage Council ultimately found that the school did not meet the threshold to proceed to the next stage of the heritage assessment process.

An independent expert consulted as part of the investigation gave the opinion that in his view the school building did have heritage significance and this would have been sufficient to continue on to public consultation.

In this instance, the difference between expert professional opinion does not constitute improper conduct.

The investigation confirmed factual inaccuracies in the Report, but these did not impact upon the outcome of the assessment.

In contradiction to the Report, DIPL announced a decision to issue a \$2 million tender to demolish the site on the grounds that the "building structure is unsafe and is beyond economical repair".

The ICAC found that a Beyond Economical Repair report was not commissioned to support the above description of the Anzac Hill High School's condition

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and the decision to demolish it. The ICAC requested copies of any reports, notes or other documentation that referred to the condition of the Anzac Hill High School and the need to demolish the school.

In a response to a request from the ICAC for information and documents, DIPL has made the following points:

- Cabinet made the decision to demolish the building in early December 2018, subject to the nomination for heritage listing.
- DIPL cannot comment on Cabinet's decision for approval for demolition.
- Advice to Cabinet did not include detail on the current state or ongoing usefulness of existing facilities.

The ICAC specifically asked for the information and advice (and copies of the same) regarding the condition of the school available to DIPL when it made a statement on 15 March 2019 that the "old Anzac Hill High School building structure is unsafe and is beyond economical repair".

The only documents produced at any time were two reports in respect of Hazardous Building Materials, a series of photographs, and a spreadsheet setting out some ongoing costs in respect of the buildings.

The reply stated other matters such as:

- The buildings were not considered best use of the site ongoing.
- Technical officers had in-depth knowledge of the facility and considered it beyond economical repair.
- To upgrade the facility to today's building standards "was considered cost prohibitive".

No detail on these matters was provided and no documents to substantiate the "beyond economical repair" proposition were produced. It appears also that no such advice or details were provided to Cabinet.

Contact the ICAC

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