

## Investigation into the Anzac Hill High School Heritage Assessment

25 September 2019

The Office of the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption (ICAC) has finalised an investigation into the Anzac Hill High School Heritage Assessment.

The investigation had found no evidence of improper conduct on behalf of public officers or public bodies involved in the Heritage Assessment.

Commissioner Ken Fleming QC acknowledged that a heritage nomination over the Anzac Hill High School, and the proposed demolition of the site at a cost of \$2 million, were matters of public interest to the Alice Springs community.

“The Office of the ICAC currently has more than 30 matters under investigation involving allegations of serious, sensitive and systemic improper conduct,” Mr Fleming said.

“This investigation had to be finalised due to the imminent demolition of the Anzac Hill High School, and I have published the following investigation findings in the public interest and for transparency to interested parties.”

### 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 a Heritage Assessment Report (the Report) for the NT Heritage Council as part of the heritage assessment process.

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

The 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 opinions 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, the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics (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”.

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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 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.

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