



ROYAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF VICTORIA INC.

239 A'Beckett Street, Melbourne 3000

23 January 2019

Prof Stuart Macintyre AO, Chair,
Heritage Council of Victoria,
8 Nicholson Street,
East Melbourne, Vic 3002.
heritage.council@delwp.vic.gov.au

Dear Professor Macintyre,

GMH Fishermans Bend, 221–261 Salmon Street, Port Melbourne

Provisional VHR Number: PROV H2399

Provisional VHR Categories: Registered Place, Registered Objects Integral to a Registered Place

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

The Royal Historical Society of Victoria (RHSV) is a peak body representing approximately 340 community historical societies throughout the state. It has been active on history and heritage issues since its formation in 1909. The RHSV Heritage Committee is accountable to the RHSV Council and has specific responsibility for preparing submissions and liaising with other relevant heritage bodies concerning the uses and preservation of heritage-protected buildings and sites. The committee encourages its affiliates to make submissions on relevant local as well as state heritage matters, and acts in support of their submissions.

On the matter of the GMH Parts Building, Administration Building, Plant 3 and the Social Centre, and contributory significance of The Technical Centre and Plant 5, we write in support of the case made by the Port Melbourne History and Preservation Society. More broadly, this case fits the RHSV's overall commitment to heritage protection and advocacy of sites of state-wide interest and so we would on our own advocate strongly for registration of this site.

The RHSV thus supports the recommendation of Heritage Victoria's Executive Director to include key buildings at GMH Fishermans Bend in the Victorian Heritage Register and concurs with the Executive Director on the proposed extent of registration (as shown in Diagram 2399), which goes beyond the current National Trust register and statement of significance (1989). 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 agree that the place reaches the threshold for state significance under Criterion A (Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history) and D (Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places and objects), as per the Executive Director's recommendation.

Under Criterion A, however, we recommend greater emphasis on the point made in the National Trust statement of significance about the Social Centre as ‘evidence of the substantial commitment by General Motors Holden to the provision of well catered and comfortable service facilities for its employees’.

The centre reflects contemporary employer concerns for the mental and physical health and wellbeing and for the provision of cultural facilities for the workforce, deriving from predominantly American doctrines of industrial welfarism dating from the early twentieth century. In this context we also stress the cultural and symbolic importance of the two murals painted by GMH employee Eileen Robertson for the opening of the Social Centre and their preservation in situ.

We also believe that the key buildings meet the threshold for Criterion B (Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria’s cultural history), since the parts building as well as the administration, plant and social buildings are rare surviving examples of these types of construction within the overall category of automotive industry building types.

As the Executive Director himself writes: ‘GMH Fishermans Bend is one of few major automotive factory complexes dating from the 1930s and 1940s. A feature of this phase was the centralisation of automotive manufacture. It is to be expected that there would be few similar facilities in the same State’. The construction of GMH Fishermans Bend was a major cultural milestone in the history of Victoria’s manufacturing and transport development.

We further submit that the site meets not only the threshold for Criterion B but also and importantly that for Criterion G for its social value to the ‘broader Victorian community’, beyond but transcending and including particular local, social or cultural communities. Key to the significance of this site to Victoria is the facility’s ‘association with the development, production and launch of the Holden 48-215 (the FX Holden) the first Australian made, mass-produced car’, in 1948.

The launch was a national occasion that focussed attention on Victoria: Prime Minister Ben Chifley launched the car, and, as the eminent historian Graeme Davison writes, the FX ‘was a striking realisation of Australians’ wartime dreams’.¹ It was marketed as ‘Australia’s Own Car’ and then as ‘Australia’s Most Popular Car’.² The FX in particular and Holden in general effectively symbolised Australia’s mid-century emergence as a prosperous, industrial nation. Great community interest persists in the Holden as a symbol of Australian independence. That symbol is associated with Melbourne and Victoria through its location at this site.

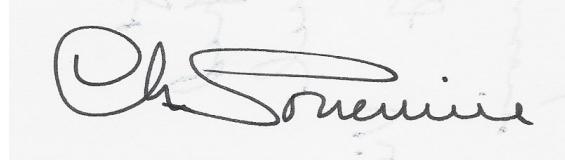
It is also arguable that both Sir Laurence Hartnett and Sir John Storey made contributions to the course of Victoria’s history beyond the establishment of GMH at Fishermans Bend, given their advisory roles to the Commonwealth government in peace and war and Storey’s association with RMIT University. Elaboration of these roles may meet the threshold for Criterion H.

¹ Graeme Davison, and Sheryl Yelland *Car wars : how the car won our hearts and conquered our cities* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2004), p. 10.

² John Wright, *Heart of the lion : the 50 year history of Australia’s Holden* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1988), pp. 61, 62, 71. Cf. John Wright, ‘The untold story of the Holden car’ (Ph.D., University of Melbourne, 2008).

The RHSV strongly supports the Executive Director's recommendations and would welcome the opportunity to be further involved in support of the inclusion of GMH Fishermans Bend in the Victorian Heritage Register if a Registration Hearing is called.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ch Sowerwine".

(Professor) Charles Sowerwine,
Chair, Heritage Committee,
Royal Historical Society of Victoria.