

25 September 2020

Executive Director  
Heritage NSW  
Locked Bag 5020  
PARRAMATTA NSW 2124

Dear Madam,

**Proposal to list the MLC Building, 105-153 Miller Street, North Sydney on the State Heritage Register**

Docomomo Australia supports the proposal to list the MLC Building, North Sydney on the State Heritage Register.

The MLC Building was identified in *The Modern Movement in NSW: a thematic study and survey of places* (Hericon Consulting 2013) as a potential item for listing on the State Heritage Register but its listing was not prioritised because it was already listed on a statutory instrument as an item of environmental heritage (North Sydney LEP 2013). However, it appears that this listing at a Local level may not be sufficient to prevent the building's demolition in the upscaling of sites adjacent to the Victoria Cross Metro Station, which is currently under construction.

Docomomo Australia considers that the MLC Building is at least of State significance and, because of the size, quality of the design, early date of construction and the national attention it drew upon opening (being opened by the Australian Prime Minister) it is of possible National importance in the development of Modernist commercial architecture in Australia.

The building is a heritage item, currently listed as having Local significance but which has been recognised as having at least State, and possibly National, significance under assessment Criteria a) and c) and regional significance under Criterion g) in the current North Sydney LEP listing. Demolition of heritage items can only be justified in the most exceptional circumstances and every effort must be made to find compatible uses for heritage items and to apply re-use and refurbishment strategies.

The evidence presented in the development application to North Sydney Council for the replacement of the MLC Building does not demonstrate in any detail that alternative strategies to demolition have been pursued with any rigor and that there is, indeed, any pressing need for the building's demolition.

**Significance:**

*Statutory:*

The MLC Building has been listed as an item of environmental heritage on the various iterations of the North Sydney Local Environmental Plan since 1989.

The LEP listing's Statement of Significance states:

The first high rise office block in North Sydney and the largest for a number of years after its construction, the MLC Building in North Sydney is a seminal building on subsequent highrise design in Sydney and utilised construction and structural techniques not previously used in Australia. With the first use of a curtain wall design and the first use of modular units in Australia, its use of exceptional modernist building materials in the curtain wall facade and terracotta glazed bricks are representative of the Post-War International style of architecture that predominated in these early commercial high-rise buildings. The architect, Walter Osborn McCutcheon's desire for his buildings to integrate modern art within the fabric of the design is demonstrated by the inclusion of significant artists such as Andor Mészáros and Gerald Lewers. As a result, and despite subsequent modifications, the interior, exterior and landscape

setting are of high aesthetic, technical and representative significance. The building is also of historical, associative and aesthetic significance as an important work by a significant firm of architects Bates Smart and McCutcheon, and master builders Concrete Constructions, and as a landmark site at North Sydney which signified the transformation of the centre of North Sydney from Nineteenth Century town to the second commercial hub of metropolitan Sydney from the late 1950s.

Whilst the building has been listed as being an item of Local significance on the North Sydney LEP the analysis of its significance, under the State Heritage Register criteria in that SHI listing, ascribes a higher level of significance to the building. Under Criterion (a) (Historical Significance) it is stated that the building is “significant on a local and state level as it was marked as beginning the transformation of North Sydney from [a] low-scale commercial town to the high-rise second CBD of Sydney”. Under Criterion (c) (Aesthetic Significance) it is stated that “The building is a key building in the development of high-rise buildings and is considered to be one of the first true high-rise buildings in Australia, making the MLC Building of national significance.”

As part of this submission we are suggesting a Statement of Significance that is considered more appropriate to the building. See Attachment A.

*Non-statutory/professional – Docomomo:*

Docomomo Australia, using Docomomo International’s assessment criteria, considers the MLC Building to have technical, social, aesthetic and iconic significance.

Docomomo Australia concurs with the NSW SHI listing assessment of the building being of at least State significance and probably of National significance and listed the building on the Docomomo Register in 2004 (copy of the listing fiche is attached). It should be noted that Docomomo strives to list the buildings in Australia that have a national resonance and importance and that the fiches prepared by the various national branches of Docomomo International (of which there are currently 72) together comprise the International Register of Docomomo. It is a summary of the important buildings of the Modern Movement around the world, of which the MLC Building is one.

Docomomo Australia’s listing fiche states that the building is recognised as the first high-rise building in North Sydney and a building that represents a number of Australia’s firsts:

- first freestanding office building;
- first office building incorporating two office slabs separated by a services tower, with a podium, *pilotis* and roof gardens;
- first example of a deliberately decorated curtain wall;
- first large-scale commercial office development in the International Modern style, incorporating, at all levels from conception through finishes to furniture, the contemporary architectural influences of the USA and Europe;
- first large-scale commercial office development utilising large areas of glazed curtain walls in association with large capacity, sophisticated-control air conditioning for comfort conditions.

The Docomomo listing fiche states that the North Sydney MLC building has iconic/canonical significance because it is:

Australia's first large-scale commercial office development embodying the sleek, modern, recognisable, rectangular glazed prism so recently embraced by US corporations, as exemplified by the UN Secretariat and Lever House, [both in New York];

And because it is:

the largest and the best one of a series of buildings around Australia constructed by the MLC insurance company to project a modern image and to house its workers in open plan, modern office buildings with up-to-date facilities for work and leisure.

*Non-statutory/professional – Australian Institute of Architects:*

The importance and significance of the building to the development of architecture in Australia is also recognised by its listing on the Australian Institute of Architects’ *Register of Nationally Significant 20<sup>th</sup> Century Architecture* as item 105.

*Non-statutory/academic – Jennifer Taylor (University of Sydney & Queensland University of Technology):*

Jennifer Taylor’s seminal 2001 book on high-rise buildings in Australia, *Tall Buildings Australian Business Going Up: 1945-1970*, devoted much of the chapter on the MLC buildings in Australia to the MLC Building at North Sydney. Taylor states: “the first fully developed lightweight, freestanding, modern modular office block does not appear until 1957 with the completion of the MLC Building, North Sydney, by Bates Smart & McCutcheon (in association with Hennessey and Hennessey)” (page 22) and

“Leaping ahead of its predecessors, the MLC Building, North Sydney, was a fully developed and committed work with a level of contemporaneity and excellence in design comparable to most buildings of this type throughout the world.” (page 48) Taylor also explores the design of the building in terms of height (ie not attempting to use the landscaped setback to Miller Street in order to gain additional height) and also the effect of daylight penetration into the offices on the width of the office floors.

The importance of the MLC Building at North Sydney to the development of the modern high-rise office building in Australia cannot be overstated.

*Non-statutory/academic – Philip Goad (University of Melbourne):*

Philip Goad, in his 2004 book on the architectural firm, Bates Smart, wrote of the firm’s projects for insurance company, MLC that they “represented the aesthetic and technological development of a new typology. ... BSM in effect attained the status of an Antipodean Skidmore Owings and Merrill (SOM), the corporate architectural firm par excellence.” (page 162) and “Of all the projects, it was MLC in North Sydney that was to be the most impressive exposition of BSM’s newly acquired expertise. ... the Sydney building was at the time the largest office building in Australia. Presenting a huge façade to the street (almost 100 metres in length), the building was completely integrated in its design from interiors, external landscaping and modular construction to the tinted glass and ribbed aluminium spandrel panel curtain wall that appeared like a vast weightless mosaic.” (page 164)

The MLC Building is also cited as an important development of post-war office buildings in the essay “Work & War” (pages 84-91) by Noni Boyd & Scott Robertson in the book edited by Hannah Lewi & Philip Goad, *Australia Modern: Architecture, landscape & design* (2019).

*Summary of Architectural Significance:*

The MLC Building is the most significant large office building dating from the 1950s in Australia. The ICI Building in Melbourne, also designed by Bates Smart & McCutcheon, is recognised as a building of importance to the people of Victoria and Australia by virtue of its listing on the Victorian State heritage Register.

The MLC Building at North Sydney, completed the year before the ICI Building, is of at least equal importance to the ICI building in terms of its design and historical importance and should be listed on the NSW State Heritage Register. The importance of the building was recognised at the time of its completion by being opened by the Australian Prime Minister and its aesthetic significance, historical significance as well as its rarity is beyond question.

**Challenges and Opportunities:**

*Urban design opportunities:*

The MLC Building was the tall, iconic genesis of North Sydney’s transformation into Sydney’s second CBD. One of the excellent features that has become an important aspect of the North Sydney office worker experience is the grass area on the Miller Street frontage where office workers could sit and relax to eat their lunch in a non-structured manner or in a location where they had to pay to eat. This strip of lawn remains sunny in mid-winter, unlike the so-called Brett Whiteley Plaza (the closed off section of Mount Street) which is overshadowed in mid-winter.

An opportunity exists for North Sydney Council and the building’s owners to capitalise on the ideal location of the west frontage of the MLC Building to create an urban space that could provide a sunny winter square or shaded summer plaza in a similar vein to the plaza of Australia Square. The half-floor level difference between Miller Street and the entrance level of the MLC Building opens up the opportunity to have a two-level public square with the lower level at the entrance level of the building and an upper level which would be approximately half a level above Miller Street. Cafes and restaurants could be located under the upper level opening out on to the lower level square. The narrowing of Miller Street to two lanes (for public transport and access to the Northpoint car park) would create more land for an expanded public square. It would be anticipated that the section of Miller Street in front of the new Metro station would need to remain 4 lanes wide to permit a train/bus interchange.

The public square would provide access from the new Metro station to the escalators to Greenwood Plaza and thence to the North Sydney Railway Station. There would also be a possibility for an underground link between the two stations under a public square connecting into Greenwood Plaza.

*Urban design challenge:*

The scale of the current MLC Building anchors and emphasises it as the heart of North Sydney and, in contrast to the over-scaled, tall towers surrounding Victoria Cross and the Pacific Highway adjacent, the MLC Building’s height does not overpower the open expanse at Victoria Cross and the long, slab-like

rectilinear nature of the building acts as an urban space-defining “wall”. Any more unmodulated tall tower blocks in this vicinity of the North Sydney CBD will cause it to become an unusable and unpleasant place; a narrow, cold and windy ghetto where no-one wants to go or to linger. The existing wide area of lawn and carriageway is a pleasant area of decompression for pedestrians, for people waiting for buses and a place in which one can linger to enjoy the scale of Victoria Cross. The mid-rise height of the MLC Building now complements Victoria Cross in conjunction with the lower rise podiums of the surrounding buildings which emphasise this and make it a proper Cross, a better urban space.

*Maintenance:*

The argument that the building is in need of maintenance is not disputed as all buildings require regular maintenance. The use of a maintenance backlog as a reason for demolition is not supported. Careful examination of the maintenance needs by experts can resolve the problems and an ongoing maintenance plan and strategy would alleviate future backlogs. The façade of the almost contemporary Qantas Building in Chifley Square, Sydney was retained and repaired in the building’s refurbishment. Retention of curtain walls is possible and the MLC building’s aluminium curtain wall is unique in Sydney with its patterning of aluminium ribs and is a distinctive feature that is an integral part of its aesthetic significance.

*Stormwater management:*

Even without a new public square in front of the MLC Building the stormwater infrastructure at this point of Miller Street will need to be addressed to alleviate the flooding of the foyer level of the MLC Building. The lack of Council infrastructure upgrades to accommodate the increasingly severe weather events exacerbated by climate change is not a reason to demolish the building.

The opportunity exists for an integrated approach to draining the area through land-forming involved with a new plaza and the re-forming of the upper end of the Mount St plaza.

*Financial implications:*

The MLC Building was purchased by the current owner as a building that was already heritage-listed and therefore subject to any actual or perceived “heritage discount” during the purchase. The building had been refurbished internally to a high level (and has received awards for the design excellence of the interior environment) and provides excellent quality office space. There is no financial imperative to demolish the building in terms of maintaining tenancy occupancy rates.

A financial uncertainty that all commercial office space is facing is the nature of office work and spatial requirements in a post-COVID-19 world.

**Conclusion:**

The importance of the MLC Building at North Sydney to the development of the modern high-rise office building in Australia cannot be overstated. The building is recognised by North Sydney Council, the Australian Institute of Architects, Docomomo Australia and academics around Australia as a rare, surviving, seminal work of Modern Australian architecture that should be retained for future generations.

Docomomo Australia fully supports the upgrading of heritage buildings to adapt to new requirements and technology. The MLC Building itself has already been the subject of such an award-winning adaptive upgrade at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and it is possible to continue to upgrade the MLC Building sensitively to provide office accommodation of a high standard in such an important and convenient location. There are numerous international examples of adaptive re-use of significant heritage buildings such as the conversion of the Van Nelle factory in Rotterdam, The Netherlands to provide world class office and studio accommodation, or the retention of 1950s and 1960s high-rise buildings in Dallas, USA with refurbished original façades and important interiors.

The building should be listed on the State Heritage Register as a minimum step in preserving the building and consideration should be given to listing it on the National Heritage List.

An update of the 20 year old Conservation Management Plan should be undertaken before any decisions are made regarding the building’s future.

North Sydney Council should, as an urgent priority, commence negotiations with the NSW Government regarding commencing a Heritage Floor Space Scheme for the sale of heritage floor space similar to the scheme operated by the City of Sydney. This would provide funding for the building's conservation and refurbishment.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SBR', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr Scott Robertson  
BSc (Arch), BArch (Hons), MBE (Bldg Conservation), PhD  
President  
Docomomo Australia

## ATTACHMENT A: ASSESSMENT & STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### A1. Assessment of Significance of the MLC Building, North Sydney in accordance with Heritage Council of NSW Criteria.

**Criterion (a) An item is important in the course, or pattern, of NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area).**

*Guidelines for INCLUSION*

- shows evidence of a significant human activity
- is associated with a significant activity or historical phase
- maintains or shows the continuity of a historical process or activity

*Guidelines for EXCLUSION*

- has incidental or unsubstantiated connections with historically important activities or processes
- provides evidence of activities or processes that are of dubious historical importance
- has been so altered that it can no longer provide evidence of a particular association

**Discussion:**

The post-World War 2 period saw the expansion of office-based commercial activity and the expansion of accommodation to house this activity. The modern office building in the post-war period was characterised by the clean lines and rectangular prism shapes of the glazed curtain-wall skyscrapers that were constructed in the USA, with the important first exemplars being the United Nations Secretariat Building (1952) and Lever House (1952), both in New York City. Within two years of these first two US skyscrapers work commenced on Australia's first curtain-wall skyscraper, the MLC Building, North Sydney (1954-1957). A year later work commenced on ICI House (1955-1958) in Melbourne by the same architects as the MLC Building, Bates Smart & McCutcheon. It should be noted that ICI House is listed on the Victorian State Heritage Register as being of significance to the State of Victoria.

The MLC Building, North Sydney was Australia's first building with a large lift capacity designed to cope with a high level of inter-floor traffic resulting from the head office operations of a single tenant. In association with the state branch office buildings for the MLC in Adelaide and Perth, the North Sydney office building is significant for the ground-breaking aspects of its construction including: use of light-weight materials; materials testing leading to evolution of building regulations; prefabricated steel structural framing and flooring system; incorporation of modular design and fitout of the interiors; adoption of 'fast-track' construction methods.

Docomomo Australia's listing fiche states that the building is recognised as the first high-rise building in North Sydney and a building that represents a number of Australia's firsts:

- first freestanding office building;
- first office building incorporating two office slabs separated by a services tower, with a podium, *pilotis* and roof gardens;
- first example of a deliberately decorated curtain wall;
- first large-scale commercial office development in the International Modern style, incorporating, at all levels from conception through finishes to furniture, the contemporary architectural influences of the USA and Europe;
- first large-scale commercial office development utilising large areas of glazed curtain walls in association with large capacity, sophisticated-control air conditioning for comfort conditions.

The MLC Building was the first tall building in North Sydney, signalling the commencement of the development of North Sydney as Sydney's (and NSW's) second CBD.

**Significance:**

The MLC Building, North Sydney is significant at a National level as Australia's first high-rise curtain-wall skyscraper and for the introduction of innovative construction methods and details as well as building services.

The MLC Building, North Sydney is significant at a National level for the ground-breaking aspects of its construction including: use of light-weight materials; materials testing leading to evolution of building regulations; prefabricated steel structural framing and flooring system; incorporation of modular design and fitout of the interiors; adoption of 'fast-track' construction methods as well as building services such as high-capacity lifts.

It is significant at a State level as the first high-rise building in North Sydney, signalling the commencement of the development of North Sydney as Sydney's (and NSW's) second CBD.

**Conclusion:**

The MLC Building, North Sydney meets the requirements for the criterion of historical significance because it:

- shows evidence of a significant human activity
- is associated with a significant activity and historical phase

**Criterion (b): An item has strong or special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area).**

*Guidelines for INCLUSION*

- shows evidence of a significant human occupation
- is associated with a significant event, person, or group of persons

*Guidelines for EXCLUSION*

- has incidental or unsubstantiated connections with historically important people or events
- provides evidence of people or events that are of dubious historical importance
- has been so altered that it can no longer provide evidence of a particular association

**Discussion:**

The MLC Building, North Sydney is associated with the work of Melbourne-based architects, Bates Smart & McCutcheon, who were the pre-eminent architects for the design and development of early post-war Modernist office buildings in a number of Australian cities. The building is also associated with the long-established Sydney construction firm, Concrete Constructions Pty Ltd, that had been involved in the construction of a number of Sydney's tall buildings since 1916.

The building is also associated with significant artists for the artworks commissioned for the building, such as Andor Mészáros for the bronze bas relief on the south façade, and Gerald Lewers for the stone sculptures in the Miller Street garden.

**Significance:**

The MLC Building, North Sydney is significant at a State level because of its association with significant Australian architects, Bates Smart & McCutcheon, who were the pre-eminent architects for the design and development of early post-war Modernist office buildings in a number of Australian cities. The building is also significant for its association with the long-established Sydney construction firm, Concrete Constructions Pty Ltd, that had been involved in the construction of a number of Sydney's tall buildings since 1916.

The building is also significant for its association with significant artists for the artworks commissioned for the building, such as Andor Mészáros for the bronze bas relief on the south façade, and Gerald Lewers for the stone sculptures in the Miller Street garden.

**Conclusion:**

The MLC Building, North Sydney meets the requirements for the criterion of historical association significance because it:

- shows evidence of a significant human occupation
- is associated with a significant person

**Criterion (c): An item is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in NSW (or the local area).**

*Guidelines for INCLUSION*

- shows or is associated with, creative or technical innovation or achievement
- is the inspiration for a creative or technical innovation or achievement
- is aesthetically distinctive
- has landmark qualities
- exemplifies a particular taste, style or technology

*Guidelines for EXCLUSION*

- is not a major work by an important designer or artist
- has lost its design or technical integrity
- its positive visual or sensory appeal or landmark and scenic qualities have been more than temporarily degraded
- has only a loose association with a creative or technical achievement

**Discussion:**

The aesthetic significance of the MLC Building, North Sydney has been recognised in the statutory listing under the North Sydney LEP 2013, by the Australian Institute of Architects in its *Register of Nationally Significant 20<sup>th</sup> Century Architecture* (as item 105) and by Docomomo Australia in its listing fiche as having technical, social, aesthetic and iconic significance.

The building's aesthetic significance has also been recognised and documented in a number of important publications. Jennifer Taylor's seminal 2001 book on high-rise buildings in Australia, *Tall Buildings Australian Business Going Up: 1945-1970*, devoted much of the chapter on the MLC buildings in Australia to the MLC Building at North Sydney. Taylor states: "the first fully developed lightweight, freestanding, modern modular office block does not appear until 1957 with the completion of the MLC Building, North Sydney, by Bates Smart & McCutcheon (in association with Hennessey and Hennessey)" (page 22) and "Leaping ahead of its predecessors, the MLC Building, North Sydney, was a fully developed and committed work with a level of contemporaneity and excellence in design comparable to most buildings of this type throughout the world." (page 48) Taylor also explores the design of the building in terms of height (ie not attempting to use the landscaped setback to Miller Street in order to gain additional height) and also the effect of daylight penetration into the offices on the width of the office floors.

Philip Goad, in his 2004 book on the architectural firm, Bates Smart, wrote of the firm's projects for insurance company, MLC that they "represented the aesthetic and technological development of a new typology. ... BSM in effect attained the status of an Antipodean Skidmore Owings and Merrill (SOM), the corporate architectural firm par excellence." (page 162) and "Of all the projects, it was MLC in North Sydney that was to be the most impressive exposition of BSM's newly acquired expertise. ... the Sydney building was at the time the largest office building in Australia. Presenting a huge façade to the street (almost 100 metres in length), the building was completely integrated in its design from interiors, external landscaping and modular construction to the tinted glass and ribbed aluminium spandrel panel curtain wall that appeared like a vast weightless mosaic." (page 164)

The MLC Building is also cited as an important development of post-war office buildings in the essay "Work & War" (pages 84-91) by Noni Boyd & Scott Robertson in the book edited by Hannah Lewi & Philip Goad, *Australia Modern: Architecture, landscape & design* (2019).

The aesthetic significance derives from a number of aspects of the building's design. The building is divided into three parts, the undercroft defined by a recessed façade behind a colonnade of *pilotis*, the curtain-wall-clad prism of the main body of the building and the roof-top terrace with its blue-coloured blade-supported roof.

A distinctive feature of this early skyscraper is the treatment of the curtain-wall façade of the main body of the building. The US antecedents, the United Nations Secretariat Building (1952) and Lever House (1952), both in New York City, both have glass windows, opaque coloured glass panel spandrel panels and aluminium mullions whereas the MLC Building, North Sydney (and its suite of smaller MLC buildings in other cities – now all sadly altered or demolished) has a curtain-wall that is more textured and detailed with ribbed aluminium panel spandrels in lieu of coloured glass. This textured curtain-wall façade treatment is rare in Australia but imparts a visual interest that is often lacking with all-glass curtain walls.

The long, rectangular nature of the building acts as a type of wall that defines the urban centre of North Sydney with the open space in front of the building. The textured façade also reduces the large size of the façade and prevents it from being monotonous or overbearing. The length of the building façades is also skilfully modified and visually reduced by the vertical emphasis given to the façades. The ribbed aluminium spandrel panels are not continuous along the entire façade; they are broken with smaller bays of spandrel panels incorporating smaller dark grey and ribbed panels that define vertical elements. It should also be noted that the use of non-reflective aluminium panels breaks down the reflective nature of the glass façades and creates a cross-emphasis of reflective horizontal ribbons. Thus there are two visual treatments that both counteract yet balance one another, the horizontal bands of glazing and the subtle vertical bands of small façade modules.

The grey/blue tiles on the end walls of the rectangular prism are distinctive and blend with the aluminium panels and mullions of the main facades.

**Significance:**

The MLC Building, North Sydney is of aesthetic significance at a National level for its use of a textured aluminium and glass curtain-wall façade system. The ribbed aluminium textured panels are a rare use of such a system so early in the introduction of the curtain-wall onto Australian skyscrapers when its Australian and overseas contemporaries were usually clad in all-glass façades. The proportions of the building, the use of a ground level colonnade and the blade-supported rooftop terrace awning demonstrate a sophisticated design that was the equal of any contemporary skyscrapers. These design elements created a rectangular prism that was supported above the ground and which met the sky in a modulated fashion.

Not only is the MLC Building the earliest of the Australian skyscrapers, it also demonstrates a high level of aesthetic sophistication and skill by its architects.

**Conclusion:**

The MLC Building, North Sydney meets the requirements for the criterion of aesthetic significance because it:

- shows and is associated with, creative or technical innovation and achievement
- is the inspiration for a creative and technical innovation or achievement
- is aesthetically distinctive
- has landmark qualities
- exemplifies a particular taste, style and technology

**Criterion (d): An item has strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group in NSW (or the local area) for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.**

*Guidelines for INCLUSION*

- is important for its associations with an identifiable group
- is important to a community's sense of place

*Guidelines for EXCLUSION*

- is only important to the community for amenity reasons
- is retained only in preference to a proposed alternative

**Discussion:**

The building has been recognised by the general North Sydney community by its early inclusion on as an item of environmental heritage on the North Sydney LEP as well as being recognised by the architectural and academic community by non-statutory listings and inclusion in important publications on the development of Australian architecture.

**Significance:**

The MLC Building has social significance at a National level because of its recognition by the architectural profession as an important work of architecture through its non-statutory listings by architectural associations, and by the academic community through the building's inclusion as a significant building in important books on the development of Australian architecture.

**Conclusion:**

The MLC Building, North Sydney meets the requirements for the criterion of special association with a particular cultural group because it:

- is important for its associations with an identifiable group

**Criterion (e): An item has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area).**

*Guidelines for INCLUSION*

- has the potential to yield new or further substantial scientific and/or archaeological information
- is an important benchmark or reference site or type
- provides evidence of past human cultures that is unavailable elsewhere

*Guidelines for EXCLUSION*

- the knowledge gained would be irrelevant to research on science, human history or culture
- has little archaeological or research potential
- only contains information that is readily available from other resources or archaeological sites

**Discussion:**

The MLC Building is the embodiment of the early advanced technologies in skyscraper construction and services.

It is significant for its potential to store and reveal information about construction techniques, construction materials, internal finishes and services then being introduced into Australia, and all of which were part of a deliberate shift away from the conservative approach to construction taken before the war; this potential is supported by the existence of a comprehensive archive of construction documentation.

It is significant for the exceptional quality of the curtain-wall as well as scarce evidence of the best available 1950's curtain-wall technology and for the exceptional quality of the surviving original exterior and interior finishes and fittings, which incorporate a consistency controlled by the modular concept of the design; this quality is supported by the existence of a comprehensive collection of photographs by arguably, Australia's foremost photographer, Max Dupain.

**Significance:**

The MLC Building has technical and research significance at a National level for its potential to store and reveal information about construction techniques, construction materials, internal finishes and services then being introduced into Australia, and all of which were part of a deliberate shift away from the conservative approach to construction taken before the war; this potential is supported by the existence of a comprehensive archive of construction documentation.

It is significant at a National level for the exceptional quality of the curtain-wall as well as scarce evidence of the best available 1950's curtain-wall technology and for the exceptional quality of the surviving original exterior and interior finishes and fittings, which incorporate a consistency controlled by the modular concept of the design; this quality is supported by the existence of a comprehensive collection of photographs by arguably, Australia's foremost photographer, Max Dupain.

**Conclusion:**

The MLC Building, North Sydney meets the requirements for the criterion to reveal information because it:

- has the potential to yield new or further substantial scientific and/or archaeological information
- is an important benchmark and reference site or type

**Criterion (f): An item possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area).**

*Guidelines for INCLUSION*

- provides evidence of a defunct custom, way of life or process
- demonstrates a process, custom or other human activity that is in danger of being lost
- shows unusually accurate evidence of a significant human activity
- is the only example of its type
- demonstrates designs or techniques of exceptional interest
- shows rare evidence of a significant human activity important to a community

*Guidelines for EXCLUSION*

- is not rare
- is numerous but under threat

**Discussion:**

As the first large curtain-wall skyscraper in Australia the building is rare because of this unique distinction of it being the first. It demonstrates a curtain-wall technology that is no longer used in terms of the patterning and textured approach to the curtain-wall and also a mid-century approach to the tripartite division of the building into a “base” (the colonnade), a “body” (the curtain-wall façade) and a “head” (the blade-supported rooftop awning).

It is also endangered as illustrated by the 2020 proposal to demolish the building.

**Significance:**

The MLC Building, North Sydney is significant at a National level because of its rarity as the first large curtain-wall skyscraper in Australia, because of its rare design quality, and because it is a rare example of its size and scale.

**Conclusion:**

The MLC Building, North Sydney meets the requirements for the criterion of rarity because it:

- provides evidence of a defunct custom, way of life and process
- shows unusually accurate evidence of a significant human activity
- is the only example of its type
- demonstrates designs and techniques of exceptional interest

**Criterion (g): An item is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of NSW's**

- cultural or natural places; or
- cultural or natural environments

*Guidelines for INCLUSION*

- is a fine example of its type
- has the principal characteristics of an important class or group of items
- has attributes typical of a particular way of life, philosophy, custom, significant process, design, technique or activity
- is a significant variation to a class of items
- is part of a group which collectively illustrates a representative type
- is outstanding because of its setting, condition or size
- is outstanding because of its integrity or the esteem in which it is held

*Guidelines for EXCLUSION*

- is a poor example of its type
- does not include or has lost the range of characteristics of a type
- does not represent well the characteristics that make up a significant variation of a type

**Discussion:**

The MLC Building, North Sydney demonstrates the principle characteristics of a mid-twentieth century skyscraper with its aluminium and glass curtain-wall, the definition of the building into three parts with a ground floor colonnade that raises the rectangular prism of the building and the oversailing roof of the building supported on blade walls, and the blank end walls of the prism.

The large size of the building when it was constructed is still a place-defining characteristic in the urban heart of North Sydney as it forms a large urban wall defining the flat area at the base of Miller Street.

**Significance:**

The MLC Building, North Sydney is representative at a National level because it embodies the principal characteristics of the early mid-twentieth century skyscrapers, is the earliest extant example of a high-rise curtain-wall skyscraper, retains a high degree of external integrity, and is outstanding for its contribution to the urban heart of North Sydney.

**Conclusion:**

The MLC Building, North Sydney meets the requirements for the criterion of representing the principal characteristics of its class because it:

- is a fine example of its type
- has the principal characteristics of an important class and group of items

- has attributes typical of a particular way of life, philosophy, custom, significant process, design, technique and activity
- is a significant variation to a class of items
- is outstanding because of its setting, condition and size
- is outstanding because of its integrity and the esteem in which it is held

## **A2: Statement of Significance**

The MLC Building, North Sydney is significant at a National level as Australia's first high-rise curtain-wall skyscraper and is of aesthetic significance at a National level for its high level of aesthetic sophistication and skill by its architects including the use of a textured aluminium and glass curtain-wall façade system, which is scarce evidence of the best available 1950's curtain-wall technology. The ribbed aluminium textured panels are a rare use of such a system so early in the introduction of the curtain-wall to Australian skyscrapers when its Australian and overseas contemporaries were usually clad in all-glass façades. The proportions of the building, the use of a ground level colonnade and the blade-supported rooftop terrace awning demonstrate a sophisticated design that was the equal of any contemporary skyscrapers. This aesthetic and technical significance is recognised by the architectural profession through their non-statutory listings and by the academic community through the building's inclusion as a significant building in important books on the development of Australian architecture.

The MLC Building, North Sydney has technical and research potential at a National level, for the introduction of innovative construction methods and details as well as building services including: use of light-weight materials; materials testing leading to evolution of building regulations; prefabricated steel structural framing and flooring system; incorporation of modular design and fitout of the interiors; adoption of 'fast-track' construction methods as well as building services such as high-capacity lifts; for its internal finishes and services.

The building retains a high level of exterior integrity.

The MLC Building, North Sydney is significant at a State level as the first high-rise building in North Sydney, signalling the commencement of the development of North Sydney as Sydney's (and NSW's) second CBD.

The building is significant at a State level because of its association with significant architects, Bates Smart & McCutcheon, who were the pre-eminent architects for the design and development of early post-war Modernist office buildings in a number of Australian cities. The building is also significant for its association with the long-established Sydney construction firm, Concrete Constructions Pty Ltd, that had been involved in the construction of a number of Sydney's tall buildings since 1916. The building is also significant for its association with significant artists for the artworks commissioned for the building, such as Andor Mészáros for the bronze bas relief on the south façade, and Gerald Lewers for the stone sculptures in the Miller Street garden.