

## HERITAGE COUNCIL DETERMINATION

Determination Date	6 June 2024
Place/Object Name	Benalla Railway Station Box ('the Place')
Location	Cnr Mackellar Street and Nunn Street/Midland Highway, Benalla, Yorta Yorta Country

### DETERMINATION

The Heritage Council of Victoria determined on 6 June 2024 that:

- i) the above Place is not of State-level cultural heritage significance and is not to be included in the Victorian Heritage Register ('VHR') in accordance with section 49(1)(b) of the *Heritage Act 2017* (Vic) ('the Act').

### BACKGROUND

Following a request made to the Heritage Council in late 2023, an Interim Protection Order ('IPO') was made under section 143 of the Act on 21 December 2023.

The IPO had the effect of immediately including the Benalla Railway Signal Box in the VHR. Heritage Victoria was required to make a recommendation on whether to include the place, or part of the place, in the VHR within 60 days of the IPO being served. That is, whether the place or object is of cultural heritage significance to the State of Victoria.

### BASIS OF RECOMMENDATION

The Executive Director prepared a detailed report setting describing the Place, its condition, integrity, intactness and condition (including multiple photographs) ('Recommendation'). The Recommendation contained a history including of the North-Eastern railway line and Benalla Railway Station precinct, the evolution of signalling technology and signalling on the North-Eastern railway line. The larger Signal Box B was demolished several decades ago.

The Recommendation's comparative analysis with some 16 places focused on comparators with the Benalla Railway Signal Box. They were signal boxes already in the VHR, usually as part of larger station complexes.

The Recommendation provided a detailed assessment of the Place under the criteria and process contained in *The Victorian Heritage Register Criteria and Thresholds Guidelines* (2022). The conclusion made after that assessment was that none of the criteria were achieved at a State-level. The Recommendation was that the Benalla Railway Signal Box is not of State-level cultural heritage significance and should not be included in the VHR in accordance with section 49(1)(b) of the Act.

## SUBMISSIONS

Two submissions were received by the Heritage Council in relation to this matter, neither of which required a hearing. These were:

- The Australia Rail Track Corporation ('ARTC'). This organisation supported the Recommendation. The Corporation has explained its interest with respect to the delivery of the Inland Rail Project. The submission was accompanied by a number of documents. These included a full heritage assessment by Lovell Chen (April 2024). That report contained a detailed assessment of the Place under the criteria and process contained in *The Victorian Heritage Register Criteria and Thresholds Guidelines (2022)* ('Guidelines').
- Mr D Moore on behalf on Better Benalla Rail Inc. The submission referred to the focus of this organisation and the recognised heritage value of the Benalla Railway Signal Box. The potential economic benefits of retention of the Signal Box were identified with respect to broader proposals involving historic trains for (among others) tourism purposes. The submission provided letters of support from the National Trust. The submission requested the following from the Heritage Council:
  1. A reconsideration of the listing of Signal Box A giving due consideration to the potential economic and social values to the Benalla community.
  2. A recommendation to include Benalla Signal Box A on the VHR.
  3. A recommendation from the Heritage Council that Signal Box A relocation and restoration be approved subject to ARTC and VLine agreement.

## COUNCIL'S FINDINGS

The Heritage Council's decision was reached having considered the information included in the Recommendation and the submissions received in response to the Recommendation.

The Heritage Council accepts the Executive Director's Recommendation and the rationale provided in the Recommendation.

The Heritage Council is of the view that the Place is not of State-level cultural heritage significance and should not be included in the VHR in accordance with section 49(1)(b) of the Act.

It accepts the detailed assessment by the Executive Director which identifies the local significance of the Place, but without reaching State-level thresholds under the 2022 Guidelines. The findings by Lovell Chen broadly align with that assessment.

Among the points made in the assessment are that railway signal boxes are not uncommon in Victoria. The scale, form and materiality of the Benalla Rail Signal Box are not rare and are not notable when compared with other examples of its type, including in terms of aesthetic quality and architectural design. The signalling function, equipment and typology are also not rare nor uncommon. Further, modifications and alterations have affected the integrity of the Place. An historical association between the establishment of the North-Eastern railway line and Engineer-in-Chief, Thomas Higinbotham is broad and not directly linked to the signal box specifically.

Expressions of the economic and social value to the community are acknowledged by the Heritage Council but are considered to resonate at a local level rather than across the broader Victorian community. In this regard, it is noted that the submission by Better Benalla Rail Inc. states:

*“Benalla is a railway town; families are connected historically and view the retention of historic elements of the towns once great rail presence as important. While this may not qualify the signal box to be of “state level cultural significance,” it resonates with the Benalla community as a most important element of our collective history.”*

Future benefits are not part of the required analysis under the Guidelines.

The current process is related to qualification for VHR registration. It is not within the Heritage Council’s scope to consider or recommend that Signal Box A’s relocation and restoration be approved subject to ARTC and VLine agreement.

It is noted that the signal box is included in a Heritage Overlay under the Benalla Planning Scheme. It is also affected by other planning scheme provisions through an incorporated document.



**Professor Philip Goad**  
**Chair, Heritage Council of Victoria**