

# Australian Institute of Architects ACT Chapter Register of Significant Architecture

RSA No: R 041

REVISED CITATION 30/7/25

**Name of Place:** Fisher Government Housing Group

**Other/Former Names:** Fisher Radburn housing project

**Address/Location:** 1 Pilbara Place, 3 to 14 Pilbara Place, 16 Pilbara Place, even numbers 2-16 Rosebery Street and 14 Ballarat Street, FISHER 2611, on Blocks 1-16 Section 44 and 12-18 Section 45 of Fisher. Plus the parkland on Block 17 Section 44 and Block 13 Section 46 of Fisher.

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Listing Status:	Registered	Other Heritage Listings:	None
Date of Listing:	1984	Level of Significance:	Territory
Citation Revision No:	2	Category:	Residential
Citation Revision Date:	July 2025	Style:	Late Twentieth-Century Sydney Regional
Date of Design:	1967/8	Designer:	Cameron, Chisholm & Nicol & NCDC
Construction Period:	1968-71	Client/Owner/Lessee:	NCDC
		Builder:	JJ Marr Homes Pty Ltd

Revised by Ken Charlton, who took the unattributed photos, and Katrina Keller.

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## Statement of Significance

The Fisher Government Housing Group is significant as a development of medium density housing following the Radburn principles of urban planning. It was conceived by the National Capital Development Commission as a rare pilot study, for the suburb of Charnwood. The nine types of house, nearest in style to Sydney Regional, but now described as Modernist houses, were well designed by notable Perth architects Cameron Chisholm & Nicol to provide a good solution to group housing, allow for individual preferences and visual variety and relate to adjoining garden and service areas, all within extremely tight cost limits. The housing group was awarded the 1971 C S Daley Medal, a housing award for meritorious architecture, by the ACT Chapter of the RAI. The original architectural character of the housing group can still be seen in Pilbara Place today.



5 Pilbara Place, Block 5/44 in 2025. The service front and the initial plan before the living space was enlarged.<sup>1</sup> Following Radburn principles, there is another entrance to the block from the walkway. This was the Information House – opened, with three other houses, to the public on each Sunday in May 1971. Visitors' comments were invited by the NCDC.



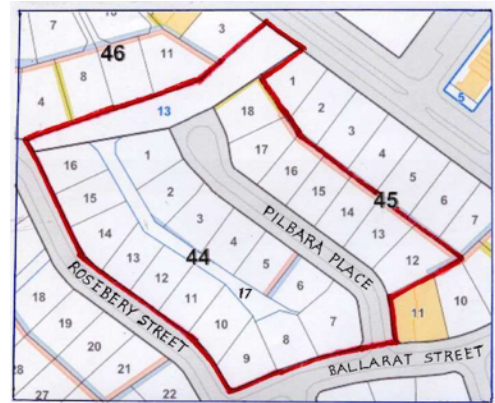
Group housing, Pilbara Place, initial layout.<sup>2</sup>



Aerial Base Map, c2025

### Description

A group of houses commissioned by the NCDC to test design and construction ideas for the suburb of Charnwood in Belconnen. The scheme is based on Radburn principles: houses with vehicular access from the street and a separate pedestrian access through community parkland. (There is no parkland NE of Pilbara Place). There were 24 houses of eight different three-bedroom types, and one four-bedroom house. The layout originally provided a consistency of landscape throughout the neighbourhood.



Fisher Government Housing Group Boundary

The houses are on small blocks, making maximum use of the available space, originally with double carports located to the front of the building line and service yards grouped in pairs on the street face, concealed by higher walls and carport roofs. A broad area between the paved carport - service yard elements allows a pleasant landscaped approach to the front door of the house. Originally all the houses, carports and fences in Pilbara Place were constructed of similar materials, form and detail. Construction was of brick veneer, with timber floors, joinery stained brown, and roofs, on trusses, covered with concrete tiles. More variety was provided along Rosebery Street. The majority of houses have a north-east orientation, and were planned around the family room, located near the kitchen and facing the parkland for the supervision of children.<sup>3</sup>



7 Pilbara Place, Block 4/44; left, the service front and right, from the walkway, from which there is pedestrian access.

## Condition and Integrity

In 2025 Pilbara Place retains its original architectural character, despite almost all the houses being altered, some extensively, and the demolition of many carports. Walls of houses in Pilbara Place are mainly still painted white. There is evidence of other colours and some face brick elsewhere, but much is now painted a variety of colours. It is difficult to see some houses from the street. The house and carport built as part of the Housing Group at 2 Pilbara Place on block 11 have been demolished. The two replacement houses at 2/2 Pilbara Place and 1/8 Ballarat Street, have no heritage significance and are not included in this listing. The house and carport at 6 Rosebery Street on block 11/44 have been demolished. The original character of the houses along Rosebery Street, always a transition from the strictness of Pilbara Place to the freedom in surrounding streets, is now difficult to discern. Its properties can still be entered from the parkland walkway, as can the adjacent properties in Pilbara Place. The original open outlook from the now-secluded pedestrian walkway has been lost with the growth of gardens and the parkland trees and shrubs. The houses now have quite an intimate relationship with the parkland.<sup>4</sup>

## History

The name Radburn comes from a 1920s scheme near New York, and the idea spread to many countries, one of the first major trials in Australia being in Canberra. This style of planning provided blocks with “two fronts”, the pedestrian, traditional front of the house facing parkland and the service front facing the road. The National Capital Development Commission began considering the Radburn design principles for housing layouts in Canberra around 1960. The Curtin Radburn Residential Precinct was designed in 1961-62 by the NCDC to achieve a safe and pleasant housing precinct. Houses overlook attractive and expansive landscaped open spaces with long vistas. Private gardens merge with the public space and houses have direct access to a path network leading to nearby services, schools and playgrounds. Vehicles and garages are confined to service roads with screening fences. Services are underground to maintain a clutter-free landscape.<sup>5</sup>

A Radburn housing development of 58 semi-detached two-storey houses for the ANU was constructed in Hughes in 1964, on minimal blocks in a parkland close to shops and a school.<sup>6</sup> For the Fisher Government Housing Group, the NCDC engaged the notable Perth architects Cameron Chisholm & Nicol in 1967. They had won a competition that year, limited to invited architects, three Australian and three British, to design the National Carillon (1970).<sup>7</sup> They then opened a branch office in Canberra.

The Fisher Government Housing Group was completed in 1971. The Information House, 5 Pilbara Place, was opened, with three other houses, to the public on each Sunday in May, 1971. Visitors' comments were invited by the NCDC.<sup>8</sup>

The 1971 C. S. Daley Medal, awarded for a house or housing group in the ACT, was given to the Fisher Government Housing Group. The jury “considered that the project had tackled, with success, one of the most difficult problems with housing in Australia today.” A major reason for the development achieving this award was the merit of its architecture. The houses had been completed as a prototype for a large NCDC Radburn-planned neighbourhood in Charnwood. That was a less successful venture by the NCDC, which had difficulty selling blocks. There was little demand for them in 1976.<sup>9</sup>

## ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA IN THE HERITAGE ACT 2004

### a. Importance in the course or pattern of the ACT's cultural or natural history.

The Fisher Government Housing Group has a place in the course of the ACT's cultural history, by being a pilot study by the National Capital Development Commission to test Radburn planning ahead of the development of the suburb of Charnwood. The housing group meets this criterion.

**b. Has uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of the ACT's cultural or natural history.**

The Fisher Government Housing Group, being a pilot study to test Radburn planning, seems to be a rare development by the NCDC. Further research is necessary to determine whether the housing group meets this criterion.

**d. Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or objects.**

The Fisher Government Housing Group is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of houses designed to be located in a Radburn planned development. This style of planning provided blocks with "two fronts", the pedestrian, traditional front of the house facing parkland and the service front facing the road. The housing group meets this criterion.

**f. Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement for a particular period.**

The Fisher Government Housing Group demonstrates a high degree of creative achievement. For this project, Cameron Chisholm & Nichol showed how adept they were at designing medium density housing. The nine house designs have an aesthetic consistency and are arranged to provide commendable variety in the development. Their creative architecture was the major reason for the development being awarded the 1971 C S Daley Medal, a housing award for meritorious architecture, by the ACT Chapter of the RAI. The housing group meets this criterion.

**h. Has a special association with the life and work of a person, or people, important to the history of the ACT.**

The Fisher Government Housing Group has an important association with the National Capital Development Commission, which transformed Canberra into a city worthy of its symbolic purpose, and the notable Perth architects Cameron Chisholm & Nicol. They had won a competition in 1967 limited to invited architects; three Australian and three British, to design the National Carillon (1970). They then opened a branch office in Canberra. The housing group meets this criterion.

End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Architecture in Australia June 1972, Group housing, Pilbara Place, Fisher ACT, pages 306-313

<sup>2</sup> Architecture in Australia

<sup>3</sup> ibid

<sup>4</sup> Site inspections in 2025

<sup>5</sup> Reeves and Roberts 100 Canberra Houses, Halstead Press, 2013, p148

<sup>6</sup> Jenny Tyrrell. The Neighbourhood of Hughes, 2017 p 17 and 61

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Metcalf, Canberra Architecture, Watermark Architectural Guides, p 41

<sup>8</sup> GML Heritage for the National Trust of Australia (ACT) Modernist Houses in the Australian Capital Territory - Thematic Heritage Study - October 2024, p 81

<sup>9</sup> Architecture in Australia, and GML Heritage, p 81