

South Fremantle Power Station to be placed on interim heritage register

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The power station which influenced the development of the Kwinana industrial complex is to have its heritage values recognised, Heritage Minister Graham Kierath announced.

The South Fremantle Power Station will be placed on the interim register of the Heritage Council of Western Australia's Register of Heritage Places.

Mr Kierath said the power station housed the first major power generation equipment in the State specifically designed to generate alternating current at the Australian and British standard frequency of 50 Hertz.

"As the second largest thermal power station in WA it also contributed to the establishment of the interconnected power grid of the South West Power Scheme," he said.

"Previously, the East Perth Power Station had supplied the electricity needs for Perth at 40 Hertz. However, the question of continuing with the 40-cycle frequency came under scrutiny with the need to build a new power station in order to keep up with demand.

"A report by electrical engineer VJF Brain recommended converting the power supply to 50 cycles, in line with the east coast of Australia.

"The cost of converting all existing electrical equipment and appliances to operate on the higher frequency would have entailed a huge cost beyond this State's resources, however, the Federal Government agreed to contribute to the cost so a national standard could be achieved."

Mr Kierath said South Fremantle was chosen as the site of the new power station because it was relatively close to the metropolitan population, had railway facilities for the delivery of coal, and was also near sea-water which could be used for the cooling process.

He said that construction began in 1946 with a significant amount of the plant used at the power station designed and manufactured in England. Power was first generated from the station five years later.

"Many of the contractors decided to stay in Western Australia and work for the State Energy Commission," Mr Kierath said.



Graham Kierath

"The SEC encouraged the recruitment of staff for the power station by providing housing in Hilton Park and the new suburb quickly grew, offering many amenities including a bus service from the power station to Hilton and Fremantle.

"The workforce developed a strong team spirit and people were often seen playing a game of soccer or water polo at lunch time, fishing or swimming.

"In 1962 that team spirit led to volunteers from the power station developing the State's first local credit union to provide assistance to workers in financial trouble."

A major fire at the South Fremantle Power Station three years after it opened led to the conversion of its boilers from coal to oil fuel, a decision that was not rescinded until the mid-1970s.

With the start of the development of the South West Power Scheme, the building of an interconnected power grid became necessary.

In 1956, the Wellington Dam Hydroelectric Generating Station was commissioned and Collie Power Station interconnected with East Perth and South Fremantle.

"So South Fremantle Power Station signaled the beginning of a totally new venture, the interconnected electricity system which still functions today in the South West of our State," Mr Kierath said.

"As the State expanded and demand for electricity grew, additional power stations were added to the grid at Kwinana, Bunbury and Muja.

"Increasingly, these stations were more technologically advanced than South Fremantle and able to produce electricity more efficiently.

"This led to the closure of South Fremantle Power Station in 1985 when its electricity production became uneconomical."

The site was cleaned up in 1994 when asbestos, plant and equipment were removed from the building. Since that time, the building has remained vacant.

The State Government is currently considering several options for its future use and Mr Kierath said the South Fremantle Power Station could have an exciting role in the future.

"The building is a good example of an Art Deco industrial structure which can be adapted for a variety of purposes," he said.

"Its proximity to the coast and the panoramic views which it has only added to its potential.

"The building has played an important role in this State's development and as such deserves the protection of Western Australia's heritage laws."