



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA  
DEPARTMENT OF PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

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Ms Peggy Danaee  
Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Danaee

### INQUIRY INTO CANBERRA'S NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

On behalf of the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS)—in conjunction with my colleagues in the Department of the House of Representatives (DHR) and the Department of the Senate (DoS), with whom we work closely to tell the story of Australia's living Democracy—I am pleased to contribute some observations about the role of Australian Parliament House (APH) in respect of public engagement with particular reference to its educative responsibilities.

#### Purpose of APH

The core purpose of APH is to serve as a working parliament. However, it was also designed to be an iconic symbol of parliamentary democracy and one which is accessible by its citizens. APH was designed to encourage public access and involvement while responding to the Australian climate, landscape, vegetation, and even the quality of the light. It was designed to be both a functional building and a major national symbol.

The winning design of the New York-based architectural firm Mitchell/Giurgola & Thorp imagined a Parliament that symbolically rose out of the landscape. Romaldo Giurgola, the principal Architect, said Parliament House:

*could not be built on top of the hill as this would symbolise government imposed on the people...it was important that [it] be seen as extending an invitation to all citizens...*

Since its opening in May 1988, APH has been one of the most visited buildings in Canberra. In recent years, visitation has ranged around 800,000 per year (including approximately 140,000 school students), placing it as the second most visited destination after the Australian War Memorial. The image of the building's iconic flag mast is frequently appropriated by many entities within the Canberra region for their own branding – it has become the instantly recognisable symbol for the Nation's Capital.

APH is the obvious place to showcase democracy in action and a platform to promote trust in the institutions of government. The DoS, the DHR and the DPS, have a special role in interpreting and promoting Australia's representative democracy. Our public engagement strategy has at its heart the objective of improving civics literacy, helping to encourage in Australians the idea that democratic institutions are open to them and promoting their own roles in the electoral system.

### **Creating a strong brand and online presence**

While the DoS, the DHR and the DPS each have their own identity, we are also joint custodians of the APH brand.

All three parliamentary departments have a role in the delivery of civics education, particularly through the Parliamentary Education Office (PEO) and guided tours of APH. There are comprehensive education resources accessible through the [www.aph.gov.au](http://www.aph.gov.au) and the [www.peo.gov.au](http://www.peo.gov.au) websites. The [www.aph.gov.au](http://www.aph.gov.au) website was redesigned in recent years and provides a wealth of visitor related material. There is nevertheless scope for further developing accessibility.

In addition to the guided tours, the DPS is nominally the custodian of APH and manages the physical infrastructure of the building and its extensive art collection. The DPS also operates the Parliament Shop, and a substantial food and beverage operation branded *APH Catering and Events* which includes the public Queens Terrace Café. In an effort to multiply the impact of its visitor brand and differentiate itself in the marketplace, the DPS launched its own in-house operated catering enterprise in December 2016. The key strategy was to deliver a quality product that showcased the Canberra region. The Queens Terrace Café now provides an opportunity for new visitors and the local population to enjoy a memorable visit. In the case of special offerings, such as High Teas on weekends, our catering offering acts as its own incentive for people to choose APH as a dining destination - in combination with the quality of accommodation, accessible parking and the view across the Burley-Griffin axis.

The brand image that the DPS has developed for all APH products and marketing bears the symbol of the building façade and its iconic flag mast. The words Australian Parliament House is seen as necessary given the many stylised images of the flag mast and building currently seen across Canberra.



### **New forms of public engagement and audience participation**

In tourism terms, APH can be regarded as an important destination asset, or “drawcard”, but one that is not necessarily the determining factor in a person’s decision to visit Canberra or APH. For many years, heavy reliance was placed on the iconic status of the building to draw visitors. Consequently the public areas are burdened with static displays that have changed little since the building opened.

In consultation with the DoS and the DHR, the DPS is developing a renewal program that will include use of technology to better engage children of school age and provide a richer experience for all visitors to APH whether they are interested in viewing parliamentary sittings in action, the history of parliamentary democracy in Australia, the art and architecture of APH or a relaxing dining experience while enjoying the unmatched vista across Lake Burley Griffin towards the Australian War Memorial. One such initiative will include a smartphone or web based application that facilitates a self-guided tour which will provide extensive interpretive information.

In addition, more effort has been applied to recognising and celebrating special events. For example, this year APH commemorates its 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and a year-long program of events has been developed to mark its opening. One successful event was held on 5 May, where the public was invited to the Great Hall for a panel discussion *Fundamental to democratic life – Australian Parliament House 30 years on*, hosted by Barrie Cassidy. The panel included special guests such as

former Cabinet Minister, Professor the Hon Gareth Evans AC QC reflecting on the architectural, social, historical, political and cultural legacy of Australian Parliament House over the last 30 years. The event was promoted through social and traditional forms of media and was attended by approximately 600 people and was Auslan interpreted to improve accessibility. The panel event generated interesting debate particularly given the range of views about the relevance of the building and the change it has experienced over time.

During National Reconciliation Week, events and an exhibition will be hosted to commemorate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Barunga Statement.

The culmination of the 30<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations will be an *Australian Parliament House Open Day* on Saturday 6 October 2018 which is being promoted as “the building’s biggest Open Day yet” – allowing visitors to experience a side of APH not normally accessible to the public including Chamber tours and access to the heart of the building, Members Hall and picnic in the beautiful courtyards. Visitors will be able to meet with parliamentary staff, discuss how the parliament works, and learn about the activities our dedicated staff undertake every day to keep APH running and its grounds in pristine condition.

### **Outreach**

The PEO and the DPS participate in the National Capital Educational Tourism Project (NCETP) which aims to encourage schools to see the wonderful opportunities available for educationally valuable school excursions to Canberra. The NCETP draws approximately 160,000 primary and secondary school students to Canberra each year.

Over 130,000 students are expected to visit APH this year, with over 90,000 undertaking an immersive learning activity facilitated by the PEO. These figures place student participation rates at APH ahead of most other institutions in Canberra. However, the particular constraints of delivering education and public programs in a working building should be noted. These constraints mean it is not likely to be possible to expand these numbers in the foreseeable future.

In addition, Canberra’s national institutions have a mandate to engage with audiences beyond Canberra: online programming and outreach are critical strategies in meeting the needs of citizens who cannot physically visit APH. In recognition of this, the PEO and the DPS devote considerable resources to digital and offsite initiatives, including video conferencing, outreach to those regions with historically low rates of participation in education programs at APH and the development of resources to enable teachers to deliver parliamentary education in their own classrooms.

### **Private sector support and revenue streams**

As with most Commonwealth entities, the parliamentary departments are reliant on appropriations provided through the Federal Budget. Sustained efficiency dividends and other fiscal measures constrain the ability to significantly enhance the visitor experience without a New Policy Proposal or some form of revenue offset.

The DPS has some capacity to generate revenue from specialist guided tours, its catering operations and *The Parliament Shop* but these functions largely cover operational costs only. The offering is constantly being reviewed in an effort to meet customer or visitor expectations.

There is scope to consider events sponsorship or the creation of a legal entity vehicle for the purpose of charitable giving, however there are complex legal and political sensitivities which would need to be navigated. It is critical for the parliamentary departments to be impartial and be seen to be impartial if we are to maintain the confidence of all serving parliamentarians irrespective of political affiliation – service to the work of the parliament is our core function.

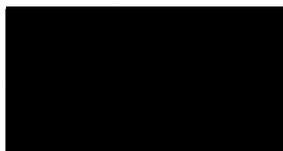
**Other relevant matters – a holistic approach**

As Secretary of the DPS, I have engaged extensively with other National institutions to strengthen our connections and improve collaboration. Noting our collective fiscal restraints, there would be opportunities for our cultural institutions to leverage from each other's special events to create a tourist trail and encourage longer visitation in Canberra. In particular, there is scope for institutions within the parliamentary triangle to engage on a more strategic level given our geographical proximity.

On behalf of APH I also sit on the board of the Canberra Convention Bureau and have recently engaged in strategic discussions with *Visit Canberra* and *Canberra's Tourism Industry Advisory Council* to explore options for APH to expand its role and influence in the Canberra tourism sector. I expect these relationships will mature into a greater range of joint events and efficiency through cross-promotion. Ultimately this will better serve the economy of the Canberra region.

I would welcome the opportunity to provide further evidence if requested.

Yours sincerely



Rob Stefanic  
Secretary

29 May 2018