

The Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories

Submission by
Canberra Convention Bureau

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Introduction

This submission presents the views of the Bureau in response to the Joint Standing Committee's inquiry.

Canberra Convention Bureau

Canberra Convention Bureau is the peak organisation responsible for securing conferences, meetings, incentive programs and other business events for Canberra and region. The Bureau partners with industry and stakeholders to attract and deliver business events to our Capital.

Many of these events attract delegates that would not visit our Capital otherwise. This is particularly true when targeting international business events.

Associated with business events attraction to our city and region are the significant citywide economic benefits that support tourism and visitor economy businesses. Hotels, venues, restaurants, transportation providers, event services and the retail sector are the key beneficiaries, however business events also deliver rich benefits in terms of social, human and export capital. Canberra's intellectual, cultural and political capital is a drawcard for business events. The Bureau facilitates access to global research, innovation and industry leadership through its THINK Canberra program. Underpinned by the Research and Learning Institutes Group (RALIG), THINK Canberra fosters relationships between conference organisers and Canberra's knowledge sector.

Terms of Reference

The Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories will inquire into and report on ways to foster and promote the significance of Australia's National Capital, including:

- 1) Requirements for the National Institutions to convey a dynamic, representative national story;
- 2) Maintaining the currency and vibrancy of Australia's national capital as a source of pride and international recognition;
- 3) Raising the profile of Australia's national capital and its symbolic importance in reflecting the character, values and identity of Australia;
- 4) Consider the importance of Australia's national capital in highlighting our sporting, cultural and tourism potential; and
- 5) The needs of existing infrastructure and identifying future infrastructure needs to facilitate a), b), c) and d) above.

This submission will focus on addressing points 2, 3, 4, 5.

1. Requirements for the National Institutions to convey a dynamic, representative national story;

The Capital plays an important role in telling the national story and what it means to be Australian. Aside from the collection and preservation of those important pieces of our history, the institutions in Canberra are venues that are in demand for business events once the gallery doors are closed for the evening.

Hosting business events within the walls of our institutions provides further access for Australians from a broad cross section of communities to engage in unique settings not found anywhere else.

While not core business, we encourage consideration of more usable space within institutions or consideration with new projects for the purpose of revenue generation activities like hosting business events and associated functions.

2. Maintaining the currency and vibrancy of Australia's national capital as a source of pride and international recognition;

Business events are opportunities to showcase our leadership in areas of emerging expertise. Exhibitions, trade shows, expert panels, collaboration activities and sharing innovation from Australia's thought leadership are key reasons why hosting business events in the Capital are important.

Incidental connections occur at every business event that lead to strengthened relationships, knowledge sharing, innovation, and advancement of ideas. Business events are also recognised for the opportunities to bring the world to our country and engage in connections that can be described as soft diplomacy.

For too long Canberra has not had the infrastructure required to host large international business events. The Capital plays an important role in connecting our international neighbours to our government and government departments. Our embassies and the international connections possible through their networks is an underutilised opportunity for the country when the Capital cannot host the important global meetings that we attend in other capitals. E.g. COP26 in Glasgow, G20 in New Delhi in 2023.

A commitment to an infrastructure plan that includes a new convention centre for Canberra will deliver private investment in the capital through new supporting infrastructure like the new hotels that will also be required to host signature international events.

3. Raising the profile of Australia's national capital and its symbolic importance in reflecting the character, values and identity of Australia;

There are many well recognised city capitals around the globe that international visitors will find their way to. Australia's capital is not considered in the same way and requires a reason for visitation. The hosting of an international business event is often the prompt for visitation however to achieve this, larger, more flexible conferencing infrastructure is required.

4. Consider the importance of Australia's national capital in highlighting our sporting, cultural and tourism potential;

It is hoped the Federal Government will seriously consider supporting the construction of a new Convention Centre in Canberra. This will be the most secure meeting facility in Australia, able to host major international forums and visits by world leaders and delegations.

5. The needs of existing infrastructure and identifying future infrastructure needs to facilitate a), b) and c) above.

Canberra's ability to deliver the benefits that conventions in our capital bring that contribute to the national story, vibrancy and raising the profile of the national capital is limited with historically limited investment in business events infrastructure.

Since 1989 Australian cities have invested over \$4,460 million in business events infrastructure. **In that same time Canberra has spent \$35 million.**

Consider the investment by our neighbouring competitors in New Zealand and we can add a further \$1,404M of investment in NZ convention centres that are opening between 2021-2024.

The convention centre in Canberra is the 2nd oldest in the country and the only one that has not had its footprint expanded since construction.

Historical investment in Australia and New Zealand:

CITY	OPENED	COST	REFURB \$	YEAR	DELEGATES	EXHIBITION SQ.M	FUNDED
Sydney	2016	\$1.5BN	N/A	N/A	8,000	32,600	PPP
Melbourne	1996	\$129M					
	2009	\$413M	\$305M	2018	5,541	40,000	PPP
	2018	\$305M					
Brisbane	1995	\$170M	\$140M	2012	3,958	20,000	Govt. w Mgt.
Adelaide	1987	\$39M	\$350M	2017	3,500	10,400	Govt. w Mgt.
Cairns	1996	\$80M	\$11M	2005	5,000	4,000	Govt. w Mgt.
			\$6.3M	2011			
			\$179M	2021			
Canberra	1989	Unknown	\$30M \$5M	2007 2017	2,500	2,000	Govt. w Mgt.
Darwin	2008	\$110M	N/A	N/A	1,500	4,000	PPP w Mgt.
Gold Coast	2004	\$167M	\$40M	2009	6,020	6,345	Govt. w Mgt.
Perth	2004	\$225M	N/A	N/A	2,500	16,600	Private w Mgt.
Geelong	2025	\$200M w City Deal	-	-	1,000	2,000	-
Wellington	2023	\$179M	-	-	1,100	10,000	-
Christchurch	2021	\$475M	-	-	1,400	3,300	-
Auckland	2025	\$750M	-	-	2,850	8,100	-

Bureau Recommendation:

It has long been argued locally that a convention centre for Canberra should reflect the size of the population. Canberra is one of the fastest growing cities in the country nearing 500,000 residents (which is double the population when the Canberra centre was constructed) and already has a regional population of well over one million.

Examples of smaller cities and populations with larger convention facilities include:

- Darwin with a population of 150,000 people and a 23,000 sqm convention centre
- Cairns with a population of 160,000 people and 45,000 sqm convention centre

The recent Cairns Convention Centre expansion of 10,500 sqm is larger than the 10,000 sqm footprint of the 1989 constructed Canberra convention centre. Arguments about city population size ignore the fact that the majority of delegates attending any national business event are from elsewhere, and significantly more so when hosting international business events.

The growing national capital in terms of influence and size deserves infrastructure investment commensurate with other cities in Australia. We encourage the Federal Government to consider the platform that business events provide for hosting our regional international neighbours to our capital, and for the bonds that can only be forged through meeting in-person and working together on the shared problems that our region is facing.

For further information

Canberra Convention Bureau is available to provide additional information, and to participate fully in the Inquiry.

Contact:

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