

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

Dear Sir / Madam

Please find attached my submission to - Inquiry into fostering and promoting the significance of Australia's National Capital.

My submission relates to developing a long-term plan for Canberra's major sporting facilities infrastructure. This submission relates to four of the Committee's terms of reference -

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

It is now time to have a long- term plan Canberra's major sporting facilities infrastructure and not a band-aid approach to meet the needs of the Canberra community in 2060.

Regards

Greg Blood

Long-term Plan for Major Sports Facilities in Canberra – Time to Stop the Band-aid Approach by Greg Blood

Submission to Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories Inquiry into fostering and promoting the significance of Australia's National Capital

5 April 2023

Canberra is at a critical time in relation to the future planning and investment in major sports facilities. A great deal of media and public discussion and several reports have been narrowly focussed on an outdoor stadium in the city. But there is also lobbying [for housing at Thoroughbred Park](#), possible development of a [4000 indoor stadium at University of Canberra](#), future of swimming pool facilities in the city, further development of Manuka Oval and the AIS lack of interest in managing major sports facilities – AIS Arena and Canberra Stadium.

I believe that the ACT Government should be looking at a long-term major sport facility plan that takes Canberra to 2060 when the population is projected to be [904,000](#) and takes into consideration of future developments raised above.

In recent years, I have published articles in the *Canberra Times* on the history of major sports facilities in Canberra – [History of Sports Facilities under Lake Burley Griffin](#) and [Development of Major Sports Facilities in Canberra](#).

The basis of my long-term suggestions below is –

- Land close to the city is now more valuable than it was when Canberra was established and developed – there is the need for more density closer to the city centre to reduce the costs of managing Canberra's services.
- Maximum use should be made of any major sports facility – they should be suitable for multiple sports and utilised most of the year – not a white elephant for parts of the year as Canberra Stadium is now.
- Facilities should be of the standard and capacity to attract major events i.e. World Cups, Test Matches etc. Canberra is now missing out on significant major events due to inadequate facilities.
- Outdoor stadium should look to have a retractable roof to cater for Canberra's cold winters that can impact on crowds and therefore revenue for sports organisations
- Major sports facilities should be on major transport corridors – light rail and major roads and near a hospitality district.

Civic Pool Site

The Canberra Olympic Pool (Civic Pool) was constructed in 1955 and has been expensive to maintain in recent years and the need for it to be covered due to Canberra's cold winters. There will still need to be a pool in the city due to the densification of the city. The main current suggestion for the site is a rectangular outdoor sports stadium. The major issue with this proposal is the lack of land

available and the compromises that will need to be made particularly in siting and crowd capacity.

I suggest that the site is used for a major indoor stadium (at least 10,000 seats) with an indoor swimming pool underneath the stadium to cater the needs of residents living in the city. The proposed indoor stadium would be more easily incorporated with a new convention centre. The proposed indoor stadium would be more attractive to WNBL, NBL and Super Netball and allow for Canberra to attract major concerts and other significant indoor events that require high seating capacity. The AIS Arena's seating capacity of 5,000 will not be viable for major events in 20 years' time.

Manuka Oval

Over time Manuka Oval will become unsuitable for major cricket and AFL competitions due its small land imprint, limited spectator capacity and inadequate transport access. Manuka Oval will need major upgrades to cater to the increase in population and the likelihood of an AFL team permanently based in Canberra – say into the 2040s. It is suggested that the proposed new outdoor stadium needs to also cater for major cricket and AFL competitions.

Canberra Racecourse and Exhibition Park

The Canberra Racecourse was established near Springbank Island Acton in 1925 but moved to Lyneham in 1962 with the creation of Lake Burley Griffin. It is now known as Thoroughbred Park. In the early 1960's, the Canberra Showgrounds (now Exhibition Park) were established next to the Canberra Racecourse. Previously Canberra Show and other events were held at the Hall Showgrounds. In those days, Lyneham was on the outskirts of the city but it is now part of the [City Renewal Precinct](#)

Both these facilities are now on the light rail but are underutilised in terms of frequency of events. Horse racing is held at the racecourse with about 25 meetings per year and harness racing at Exhibition Park. Canberra Racecourse is currently endeavouring to add [housing to the site](#) to make it more viable. My research has found that some cities have combined facilities for horse racing and harness racing to optimise use. Cranbourne outside of Melbourne is a great example – [Aerial Cranbourne Racecourse](#)

My proposal would be to redevelop Canberra Racecourse and Exhibition Park on [CSIRO Ginninderra Experimental Station](#) on the Barton Highway and Gundaroo Rd. This Australian Government owned land could easily accommodate a combined Canberra Racecourse and Exhibition Park and some housing. Combining these two facilities would lead to more frequent and efficient use of a significant portion of land.

With the suggested move of Canberra Racecourse and Exhibition Park to CSIRO site, there will be significant land available for the development of a new outdoor stadium and medium to high density housing with numerous hospitality venues. This will mean that the new outdoor stadium and additional medium to high density housing will be on the light rail and close to major arterial roads – Gungahlin Drive,

Majura Parkway/Horse Park Drive and Northbourne Ave. It would be envisaged that this development would be attractive to hospitality businesses.

The new outdoor stadium in this location will not have to be designed with the constraints of the current Canberra Olympic Pool Site in terms of land size and siting.

In terms of the new outdoor stadium, I propose a modified Melbourne Docklands stadium –

- Capacity 30-40,000 to cater for future city growth.
- Cater for **all** major outdoor sports – rugby codes, football, AFL and cricket.
- Retractable roof to cater for weather events than impact of sports and concerts.
- Retractable seating close to the field of play – ability to make the stadium oval or rectangular – technology offers many possibilities these days.

I often read that fans of rugby league, rugby union and football only want rectangular stadiums. But they still attend major rugby and football events at Docklands due to its capacity. The new stadium will be used all year round and there will not be the need to maintain two major outdoor stadiums (Canberra Stadium and Manuka Oval). Auckland's [Eden Park](#) hosts both major rugby union and cricket matches. Canberra is struggling to fund and maintain one major stadium.

Future of Canberra Stadium and AIS Arena – owned by the Australian Government

These facilities should be maintained by the ACT Government until the proposed city indoor arena and outdoor stadium are constructed. There appears to be a move for the ACT Government to take over the [management of the AIS Arena](#), and fund the [redevelopment of Canberra Stadium](#). These are band-aids – the ACT Government is investing in facilities it does not own.

The Australian Government that owns the AIS facilities then has the option of selling the land for housing or develop additional AIS training facilities when new facilities are developed.

Conclusion

My suggestions are about **long-term major sport facility planning** with an expected population of 900,000 plus regional populations in 2060 and facilities that efficiently use limited land and are used by multiple sports to justify their significant cost. These proposed new facilities would make them attractive to attend due to location, state of the art, access to transport, entertainment and cater for Canberra's cold climate.

The cost of this future sport facility development could be alleviated by –

- the Australian Government transferring to the ACT Government the CSIRO land at no cost.

- ACT Government would be able to sell land at the current Racecourse and Exhibition Park for medium to high density housing and use the revenue for these proposed long-term major sport facilities.

What I'm looking from the ACT Government is **long term plan for major sports facilities not band-aids**. Interesting, the development of Lake Burley Griffin and the need for major sports facilities in 1960's, led to location of today's current major sports facilities but they are now 50 to 60 years old. I sympathise those that want the major outdoor stadium in the city like in Adelaide, Melbourne and Brisbane. But Canberra lost this option when the land set aside for a national sports arena in Turner area was transferred to the ANU as part of its development. It's now time to develop a long-term major sports facility plan that takes into account the need to densify the city and projected growth of Canberra and surrounding cities and towns.

I know these suggestions will upset those that want an outdoor stadium in the city, rectangular outdoor stadium, and status quo with Canberra Racecourse and Exhibition Park. Many would say that why the need for new or upgraded facilities due to current poor attendances at Brumbies and Raiders games – but is this partially the result of outdated facilities and poor transport. I have a vision for 2060 not the next ten years.

References

1. [History of Sports Facilities under Lake Burley Griffin](https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/7081541/capitals-hidden-sporting-history/) by Greg Blood, *Canberra Times*, 16 January 2021 - <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/7081541/capitals-hidden-sporting-history/>.
2. [Development of Major Sports Facilities in Canberra](https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/7348326/a-case-of-fair-play-or-bad-sports/) by Greg Blood, *Canberra Times*, 24 July 2021, <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/7348326/a-case-of-fair-play-or-bad-sports/>

This submission was originally published in Australian Sport Reflections, 2 April 2023 - <https://australiansportreflections.com/2023/04/02/long-term-plan-for-major-sports-facilities-in-canberra-time-to-stop-band-aid-approach/>