

Inquiry into the proposed Parliament House security upgrades

perimeter fencing is a negative symbol

Dear Senators

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. I am a graduate architect in Canberra, which I love. I visited Parliament regularly as a child with my grandmother who was one of the guides.

In my view the democratic and egalitarian symbolism of Parliament House, and the National Capital, is fragile. I believe the impact of perimeter fencing would be significant, and diminish Parliament House as a place for the people.

The way I see Parliament in this regard is that, beyond making manifest the workings of the Parliament, the particularly significant symbolic aspects are: *maintaining the people above the parliament* (ie that the people can stand on the grassed roof at the top of the hill); and *connecting the parliament to the city* (ie by placing the various wings toward the perimeter of the site, which also allowed for the magnificent central halls and courtyards) and *making it accessible to the people* (ie especially the public galleries of the chambers).

I say that the democratic and egalitarian symbolism is fragile because Parliament has been positioned in the most important location at the top of the hill instead of an institution for the people and ASIO and Russell Defence Offices have taken the place of the Market Centre, central railway station and high street on the other side of the Lake, also for the people. To me this appears to privilege an image of entrenched power and militarisation.

The requirement, since September 11, to go through security to access the grassed roof of Parliament has further diminished the symbolic position of the people above the Parliament. Romaldo Giurgola, speaking at the 2009 national student architecture congress I co-organised, said he hoped that my generation would seek to reinstate free access to the top of the hill.

The proposed perimeter fence to the Ministerial wing will symbolically disconnect the Parliament from the city. Surely a visually prominent fence – reported by the Canberra Times to be intended expressly to act as a deterrent – is a negative image for the Parliament? What society do we aspire to? A fence divides, it says to be fearful. If we are fearful, that has a material impact on the fabric of our society. Instead the Parliament, should say we are resolute in our values – and we are inclusive.

If this is accepted as necessary for the Ministerial wing, then what will be next? Perimeter fencing to the Senate and House of Representatives wings? Every other government office building – the AFP, DFAT, PM&C etc? Other symbolic public locations – the War Memorial and the parade grounds where ANZAC Day services are held, the Sydney Opera House, Martin Place and Federation Square?

I trust we can have sufficient security without prominent fencing.

Kind regards
Patrick Stein