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

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## **RE: Inquiry into fostering and promoting the significance of Australia's National Capital**

The Canberra Business Chamber (CBC) would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide our suggestions to the Inquiry. To think about Canberra through the prism of Australia's national capital requires all levels of government, business, academia and civil society to have a role in elevating the importance of a successful, growing and enticing national capital to Australia's future.

There are now almost 34,000 private businesses in Canberra. <sup>1</sup>They employ around 150,000 people (63% of all current jobs in the Territory), and 97% are small businesses employing fewer than 20 people. The private sector includes both for profit businesses and not-for-profit organisations.

As the voice of the private sector in the Territory, we are well placed to encourage a unifying conversation about Canberra's future as Australia's national capital, to 2040 and beyond. This conversation should be founded on an agreed vision with key actions that harness our strengths and are strategically targeted to deliver maximum economic and social benefit to the Canberra community and the nation as a whole.

The Chamber is pleased to have an initiating role in such a conversation and believes that business – both locally owned businesses and the many national and international businesses that operate here – can help bring together the many disparate stakeholders whose contribution and support are essential.

The CBC has worked with a group of Canberra business leaders to develop a vision statement for Canberra - **A diverse, innovative and thriving national capital, with a connected, inclusive, sustainable and vibrant community, where employment, business, educational and cultural opportunities inspire new ideas and support Australia's national and global ambitions.**

Or, encapsulated in one sentence: **Canberra, the city to realise your (and the nation's) ambitions.**

Through this work, we have identified fourteen actions, in the form of recommendations, under four priority areas: Infrastructure, Innovation, Growth, Sustainability.

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<sup>1</sup> *Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022), Counts of Australian Businesses, Including Entries and Exits.*



## Summary of recommendations

### ***Infrastructure***

1. National Meeting Place (Centre for Dialogue)
2. National Stadium
3. Transport Connectivity

### ***Innovation***

4. National Innovation & Technology Hub
5. Digital Connectivity
6. Advanced Industries

### ***Growth***

7. Population
8. National Capital Region
9. Tourism Promotion

### ***Sustainability***

10. Affordable Housing
11. Planning and Amenity
12. National Institutions
13. Natural Environment
14. Community

## Infrastructure.

### 1. National Meeting Place (Centre for Dialogue)

Canberra means 'meeting place' in Ngunnawal language. Yet, Canberra does not have a fit for purpose location for major events, conferences, meetings symposiums or trade shows. There is the opportunity to build a centrally located National Meeting Place that would be both a physical location and digitally connected to the rest of Australia and the world. It would be large enough to host major events and conferences as well as the location for important national and international gatherings, conversations and dialogues. The business case for the National Meeting Place would involve a combination of government and private sector investment and would be a stand-out national institution.

### 2. National Stadium

Bruce Stadium is no longer fit for purpose and Canberra is losing access to major sporting and other events as a result. A rebuild of Bruce is likely to be nearly as expensive as a new stadium, while not addressing its issues in terms of location and capacity. Previous proposals combining a new stadium and a new convention centre can be revisited. The co-location of a new National Stadium with a National Meeting Place could result in the development of an entertainment and hotel precinct that



could reinvigorate Civic and help address Canberra's visitor accommodation challenges. Issues of parking and public transport access would need to be addressed.

### 3. Transport Connectivity

As the nation's capital, Canberra continues to be challenged by issues of international and domestic transport connectivity. While we have a world-class airport, Canberra is not seen by international visitors as a first stop-off for a variety of reasons. Canberra's distance from other highly populated parts of Australia also makes it more challenging to attract domestic visitors. A transport connectivity strategy is required focussing on both international and domestic visitors, working with other major Australian tourist destinations. The strategy should include ways to make Canberra a first (or last) stop for international visitors, greater competition in domestic air travel to Canberra and potential high speed rail links, to Sydney (including Western Sydney Airport) and Melbourne.

## Innovation.

### 4. National Innovation & Technology Hub

Canberra has the key elements of a National Innovation Hub, with internationally recognised universities with strong research capabilities, CSIRO, a growing number of technology companies across a range of sectors, a highly educated workforce and access to national industry leaders. However, these elements are not necessarily connected and they lack scale. A physical National Innovation Hub could bring together the existing disparate elements and seek to attract major Australian and global technology leaders by highlighting Canberra's relevant attributes and utilising national and local investment incentives. It would also require very fast, high-capacity digital connectivity. The Chamber understands the Technology Council supports development of a national technology hub.

### 5. Digital Connectivity

Any modern and growing national capital needs high speed digital connectivity as an enabler of businesses, jobs, education, innovation, promotion, and the delivery of services. Digital connectivity, digital uptake, and the intelligent application and use of digital technologies is a key underpinning to virtually all the other key actions that will drive the vision for Canberra as the nation's capital.

### 6. Advanced Industries

With its universities, research institutions, innovative businesses, highly skilled workforce and continuing demand from the public sector, Canberra is well placed to be a preferred location for a range of high growth, advanced industries, including in the defence, space, biotech, and broader ICT sectors. A strong focus on commercialisation of R&D, encouraging new and established technology businesses, and enhanced linkages across the innovation value-chain potentially through a



National Innovation Hub will help enable the development of these new industries in Canberra. The Federal Government's National Reconstruction Fund may provide a source of capital and a stronger focus on vocational education would enable the necessary upskilling, while a partnership with the surrounding region could provide opportunities for investment in advanced and niche manufacturing.

## Growth.

### 7. Population

Canberra's population is currently around 463,000 and is projected to increase to 784,000 by 2060. While this growth will put pressure on housing and services, Canberra will still be significantly smaller than most capital cities. Lack of scale has been one of Canberra's challenges both as a city and a national capital. Strong private-sector economic growth going forward is likely to be driven by population growth with flow-on benefits in terms of the ACT Government's revenue base. It will be important to plan carefully for this economic and population growth, recognising that it provides an overall benefit and that Canberra is also part of a broader region that is highly relevant and value-adding.

### 8. National Capital Region

There are significant opportunities to build upon the mutually beneficial relationship between Canberra and its surrounding region. A closer economic partnership, potentially through a single economic zone, would provide opportunities to build greater scale and manage population growth, along with increased tourism, access to capital and skilled workers, and economic diversification. Federal and State Governments have focussed increasingly on regional economic plans and there is an opportunity for such a plan to enhance Canberra's economic performance and attractiveness as the nation's capital situated in the broader National Capital Region.

### 9. Tourism Promotion

There is a need for a fundamental overhaul and increased investment in promoting Canberra as a domestic and international tourist destination. The Chamber believes that clearly positioning Canberra as the nation's capital provides a solid foundation for this increased effort. A number of the proposed key actions would also enhance Canberra's attractiveness for tourists. A new, higher intensity approach should be developed with the input and buy-in of a broad cross-section of the city's leaders and should be coordinated with and supported by Australia's national tourism promotion effort. There is a need for cultural change with government, businesses and the broader community seeing Canberra as a destination that actively attracts, welcomes and provides experiences for tourists.



## Sustainability.

### 10. Affordable Housing

In recent years, issues relating to access to affordable housing have exacerbated with large increases in purchase and rental prices along with shortages in housing stock. If Canberra is to continue to be an attractive destination for younger and higher skilled workers, there is a need to address housing affordability. This is likely to involve a variety of government and private sector initiatives and investments. There will be benefits in the ACT Government working with the Federal Government, the NSW Government and surrounding regional councils as well as the building industry, developing innovative approaches, including the fast tracking of land release, regulatory and planning approvals.

### 11. Planning and Amenity

The National Capital should be well designed city, supported by efficient planning and approval processes, including in locations that involve a combination of the National Capital Authority and ACTPLA. Agreement and clarity in relation to the key actions will assist in this regard, as will a common position on underlying issues such as the natural environment, population growth, tourism, and the surrounding region. It will be important that regulation does not unnecessarily delay or increase the costs of projects. At the same time, it will be important to retain and where possible enhance Canberra's high levels of amenity and public access, which is fundamental to the city's overall attractiveness as the nation's capital.

### 12. National Institutions

Canberra's National Institutions, ranging from Parliament House to the War Memorial and the national cultural institutions are world class and one of the city's main attractions for visitors. However, a number of these institutions need urgent capital investment and more work could also be done in implementing a coordinated approach to promoting the institutions both domestically and internationally. Consideration should be given to the early development of a National First Nations Museum on the banks of Lake Burley Griffin. Our National Institutions should be a core part of an enhanced tourist promotion strategy for Canberra and the surrounding region.

### 13. Natural Environment

One of Canberra's core strengths is its natural habitat both in the capital itself and the surrounding region. As Canberra grows, it is important that it maintains its clean and green credentials as the 'bush capital', including through the maintenance of parklands and water spaces, both in the suburbs and broader public locations. The National Arboretum, the National Botanical Gardens and the natural habitats on the outskirts of Canberra are under recognised and have the potential to be a significant eco-tourism



attraction, with the development of high-quality accompanying tourist infrastructure. Consideration should also be given to other opportunities to preserve Canberra's diverse natural habitats in ways that also enable sustainable public access.

#### 14. Community

The Canberra community is its greatest asset. It is diverse, inclusive, intelligent, active publicly-minded, ambitious, creative, respectful, quietly proud, law abiding, and environmentally and socially aware. Our businesses are a core part of the community and committed to advancing the interests of Canberra as the nation's capital. Ultimately, Canberra's future success as the nation's capital is inherently dependent upon the collective hard work, ingenuity and support of the Canberra community making it imperative that they are fully consulted and invested in our city. All great capital cities are known for their vibrant and distinctive communities. Canberra is no different and it is vitally important that the vision and key actions put Canberrans at the centre and that they are actively involved in every aspect of the development and implementation phases.

#### In conclusion

As set out above, there is genuine enthusiasm in the business community for opportunities that will drive a step-change in value-adding economic growth and high-skilled job creation in the areas where Canberra enjoys a competitive advantage, and are also fundamental to our future as the nation's capital. These include clean energy and emissions reduction, science and research, higher education, digital technologies, defence and cyber capabilities, regional infrastructure and the national cultural policy.

Other priorities such as skilled migration, skills enhancement, smart manufacturing, more affordable housing, reform of the public service, and First Nations recognition are also highly relevant to Canberra's future and provide the opportunity for an aligned approach. We believe now is the right time to have these conversations.

Thank you again and we would welcome the opportunity to discuss and explore any of these suggestions further, and please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to do so.

Your sincerely,

Archie Tsirimokos  
Chair of the Canberra Business Chamber