

SUBMISSION 80.1

The Committee Secretary,
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories
Department of House of Representatives 62774355
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Dear Senator Lundy,
I write to you as Chair of the Inquiry into the administration of the National Capital Plan being conducted for the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories.

The Commonwealth's responsibilities, on behalf of the people of Australia, to ensure that the National Capital is planned and developed in accordance with sound planning principles is clear and unambiguous. The Commonwealth also has responsibilities to preserve and enhance Canberra as part of the national estate and as the symbolic centre of the nation's cultural assets and facilities as well as being the centre of the nation's political life and administration.

Since self government the ACT government has had responsibility for what might be seen as the 'local community' aspects of Canberra's growth and management. These twin responsibilities are two sides of the same coin. Unfortunately some have seen these responsibilities as the site for contest and a consequence of which the planning and development of Canberra has often been less than optimal.

We must find a way of ensuring that these two 'sets' of responsibilities are brought together in a planning system that provides opportunities for both the Commonwealth and the ACT government to accept their obligations and with the integration of the planning and development of Canberra as a sustainable city as the desirable outcome.

It is within the abilities of the two levels of government to create an appropriate planning structure to ensure that the responsibilities of each is preserved. One way of doing so would be to create an independent statutory planning system that is answerable to the Commonwealth Parliament and to the ACT Assembly. Such a system would require complementary legislation in each jurisdiction. A major benefit of such a system would be the creation of a planning system that would be attractive to planning professionals across the country.

The guiding principle for the planning and development of the ACT would then be to develop the region as a sustainable centre. This

would mean that it was in the interest of each level of government to ensure the balanced growth of the region in accordance with the notion of ecologically sustainable development. Such an approach would automatically take into account problems of adaptation to climate change and the challenges wrought by considerations of energy supply and availability. It would also give due weight to the issues of water independence and security and of the need for the development of transport services to meet national, regional and local demands. Of course it would also embrace the obligations to ensure that the economic and socio-cultural aspects of Canberra's growth and management were consistent with the ambitions of both levels of government and of the community.

In short, the kind of planning such a system would entail might be described as the integrated assessment of the various environmental, social and economic opportunities, limitations and challenges provided in the ACT and would lead to a planning system which was beyond the limited range of physical determinism pursued by current planning agencies and provide the appropriate institutional architecture to ensure that environmental, social and equity aspects of the growth and management of the Nation's Capital were given proper weight.

The benefit that the independent planning system proposed would bring is that it would strengthen the integration of day-to-day development control etc with long run strategic planning in line with principles of sustainable development that incorporate social, environmental and economic considerations. The scale and governance arrangements of the ACT, given that it involves Commonwealth and Territorial interests make this more possible and with greater prospect of creating a sustainable urban region than anywhere else in Australia.

The development of such a desirable planning system would depend heavily on an information base being developed the critical review of which would provide the evidence base for development initiatives and management strategies.

It would also depend heavily on developing an open, transparent planning system one of the benefits of which is that it would lead to a public more informed and supportive of the two levels of government in their joint endeavours to create a sustainable creative city as the nation's capital.

I wish you well with your deliberations on the planning and development of the National Capital.

I would be happy to discuss these issues with you and other members of your Committee.

Regards

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