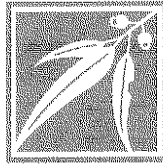


National Trust of Australia
Australian Capital Territory



NATIONAL TRUST



SUBMISSION 6

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The Inquiry Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital
Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Secretary

I attach a submission from the National Trust of Australia (ACT) into the inquiry into the role of the National Capital Authority

Yours sincerely

Colin Griffiths
Heritage Officer
21 May 2003

FILE COPY

INQUIRY INTO THE ROLE OF THE NCA
SUBMISSION BY THE NATIONAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA (ACT)

In the opinion of the National Trust there are two over-riding principles relevant to this inquiry

1. There is a legitimate role for the national government in the planning and administration of Canberra. Canberra is a national icon with national and international significance reflected in its urban landscape and buildings in that landscape. It is important that the national government and its agencies embrace that responsibility and ensure its ongoing integrity.
2. Particularly relevant is the National Capital Open Space System. (NCOSS) This planning legacy is now the responsibility of the national government and it is vital that the strong elements of the NCOSS be protected
3. Having said that however, the political reality is that Canberra has local self government through the Assembly and urban planning and particularly the control of development is one of the most keenly debated local issues, with strong community groups in virtually every part of Canberra ready to engage in and have a view about planning and development. It is vital that these sorts of responsibilities remain at the Territory level with the accompanying values of local responsiveness and accountability that a locally based system demand and produce. In this regard we understand that some residential areas, for example in the suburb of Forrest, are under the direct planning control of the NCA. This is considered an unsatisfactory situation. The NCA is not a residential planning authority and any such responsibilities should be transferred to the relevant ACT authorities.
4. The days of a single authority planning and developing Canberra as a single unit have gone forever. The challenge is to find a way forward that allows the two levels of government with legitimate responsibilities for the ACT in this area to discharge their functions in a transparent, community friendly and responsible way. There is nothing inherently wrong with two planning agencies: this occurs in the states with state and local authority jurisdictions
5. It is argued that at present this is not happening to the extent that it could or should. The ACT government has, since being elected in 2001, embarked on a plethora of consultative processes in the planning and land management

area and, it seems at least publicly, has made attempts to draw the Federal government agencies in to the processes. Yet there are still issues that emerge into the media where there has been an apparent failure of process between the two governments and the debate is then conducted through media releases rather than some more considered process that require the two governments to sit down and consider the issues in a less charged atmosphere.. It would seem sensible for the Commonwealth to seek to create a joint ministerial council on the ACT with each government being represented by the appropriate minister. A search of the web sites for both PALM and the NCA has not revealed the existence of such a council and yet such councils are basic to the affairs of our federal system and many examples can be drawn on as models. The council would be supported by a standing committee comprising the CEOs of the two agencies and other senior staff as necessary

6. In connection with the publicised differences at political level we understand that in contrast there is interchange of ideas and cooperation at professional officer level. The political wrangling that has taken place is unseemly and does a disservice to the image of the national capital. There is nothing wrong with holding a periodic review of an agency such as the NCA. But this ought to be taken as an opportunity for positive action and thinking, not looking negatively at the NCA and with political overtones. Both professional planning agencies share a common goal of trying to achieve the best planning outcomes for Canberra. This is a singularly important point because Canberra is different from any other city. It is an internationally renowned and remarkable example of a city in the landscape where the NCOSS is outstandingly special. Both planning authorities have a stake in the system and looking after it. Nevertheless most of it is on national land and it is true to observe that a number of the political problems have centred on who has the ultimate jurisdiction(see 6 below).

The NCOSS has both national and local significance as

- unique setting for the city;
- symbolic of the meanings behind the idea of the city from its inception;

- a recreational resource;
- transport and communication corridor system;
- nature conservation zones.

The attention of the inquiry is drawn to the 1992 Joint Parliamentary Committee Report into the NCOSS, which emphasised the need to protect the NCOSS as a national asset

6) There have been suggestions that with self-government that the ACT jurisdiction should be left alone to make planning decisions on all but the Parliamentary area. This is dissembling and ignores the fact that the national capital is set up under the Constitution to manage the land of the ACT for all Australians and involved different categories of land. These include:

- national land including the National Triangle, Parliamentary Zone, Defence, and CSIRO that few would argue should remain nationally controlled;
- designated land where the responsibility lies with the NCA for approval of works and landuse planning decisions including most of the NCOSS (in particular the inner hills such as Black Mountain , Mt Ainslie etc, but excludes Namadgi and River Corridors)
- territory land, ie all areas not required by the Commonwealth

A specific instance of a call for the ACT government to be left to make decisions on land other than territory land arose immediately prior the announcement of the inquiry and is connected with the line of the Gungahlin Drive Extension.(GDE). There was a suggestion that the NCA ought not to have interfered with the current ACT government election promise to support the western route of the GDE. This ignores the category of designated land and its primary role in the planning framework, layout and symbolism of the national capital. The inquiry might well ask why the then Labour Government of Prime Minister Hawke which gave us self-government instituted the category of designated land. It did so to protect

the integrity, setting and meaning of the national capital. It is unthinkable that control of this land should be ceded to the territory government. The criticism of the NCA when it advised its Minister against the western route was misplaced and misleading

- 7) It is worth noting in the view of the National Trust that the NCA has progressively undertaken what appears to be a successful profiling of Canberra and locally arranging functions for the public around the lake, in particular in the National Triangle. The Authority should be applauded for these efforts. The budgetary allocations made to the NCA should be sufficient to allow it to continue to discharge this and its other functions satisfactorily
- 8) The Trust firmly believes that the central part of Canberra should be nominated by the Federal Government, with its support, to the UNESCO World Heritage List. That Canberra is worthy of world heritage listing is a view held internationally, not just locally.