

## Ken Taylor Heritage & Landscape Planning Consultant

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Mr Stephen Boyd  
Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital & External Territories  
Parliament House  
Canberra

Dear Mr Boyd,

### **INQUIRY INTO THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AUTHORITY** **What is nationally significant?**

When giving evidence on 23 April to the above Inquiry, Senator Lundy asked if I would provide additional information on a number of matters. One of these, and I think of critical importance, is defining parameters that constitute national importance in connection with lands in the national capital. Following are my comments which I hope will be of use to the committee.

- In one sense the whole of Canberra as a concept and realisation of a planned capital city is a nationally significant achievement. The foundation for this is the way in which the landscape is the dominant element in the city's spatial structure in a way that does not occur in any other city (see *Tomorrow's Canberra*, NCDC 1970 and Taylor K, (2006), *Canberra: City in the Landscape*, Halstead Press, Ultimo). Landscape idealism underpinned the vision for an Australian capital city and its site choice, then the Griffin plan, the work of Weston and Sulman, Lord Holford's 1956/57 analysis, the NCDC Y plan, and is mentioned in the *Spatial Plan* and *National Capital Plan*. The rationale behind this is therefore an enduring tradition of Canberra's planning. *Tomorrow's Canberra* (pp. 74-76) succinctly explains it:

Canberra's spatial structure is planned through continuity with existing design elements ... Canberra is a city in a landscape with the topography the dominant element ... The need to preserve and develop the spatial structure conceived by Griffin and extended by the Commission [NCDC] has led to the definition of Areas of Special National Significance shown in Fig 5.13 [see Figure 1 next page]. They consist of the central areas, the main approach routes, Lake Burley Griffin and its foreshores, the prominent hills, and the ancillary national areas. All buildings, roads, and landscape improvements within these areas are given special attention and consideration.

Figure 1 shows in red what NCDC regarded as 'the vital elements in the city's spatial structure, and development within these areas is given special consideration.'

- There is no established reason to presume that the area shown in red in Figure 1 does not still represent spatially the area of special national significance within the city's urban boundary. It corresponds, with one small difference, to the current extent of the Central National Area [CNA] (see plan, pp. 20/21 *The Griffin Legacy* for detailed outline of the CNA) and the Inner Hills or Designated Area (See Figure 2 above reproduced from Figure 8.7, p. 159, *Canberra: City in the Landscape*.) The only difference is the current exclusion of the Molonglo River west of the CNA. The red and green areas in Figure 2 therefore represent land of special national significance.

**In the context of this historical planning data I suggest that the following factors are critical in elucidating what is nationally important in terms of the future planning of Canberra.**

1. The way in which the combined CNA and Designated Area create an element fundamentally critical to the integrity and authenticity of the city's spatial structure as a planned city and its unique character: a city not like any other.
2. The way in which these elements are part of the overall landscape setting of the city, the National Capital Open Space System (NCOSS) stretching to the outer hills and river valleys creating the magnificent landscape stage-like setting for the city. It is this system which distinguishes this city above any other and reflects the ideals on which the two visions for a national (federal) capital were founded. First, the ideal that a vigorous Australian national identity existed, that this was related to the ideal of the Australian landscape itself and that it could be symbolised in the layout of a capital city; second that city planning could create a better and healthier society (Taylor, p. 21). It also reflects the historic instructions to Scrivener to recommend a site in the Yass-Canberra District:

... the Federal Capital should be a beautiful city, occupying a commanding position, with extensive views and embracing distinctive features which will lend themselves to the evolution of a design worthy of the object, not only for the present but for all time; consequently the potentialities of the site will demand most careful consideration from an hygienic standpoint, with a view to securing picturesqueness, and also with the object of beautification and expansion.

Nationally important land therefore consists of three inter-related components each being an integral part of the NCOSS :

- |       |   |   |
|-------|---|---|
| (i)   | Central national area                     | ) Area within the urban                             |
| (ii)  | Inner hills and valleys [Designated Land] | ) setting of the city defined<br>in Figures 1 and 2 |
| (iii) | Outer hills and valleys                   |   |
3. The tangible and intangible values of this national component of the city's structure:
    - (i) tangible physical presence of the hills and valleys which articulate the city's spatial structure guiding integration of built areas with natural features and the planned open space (see p.76, *Tomorrow's Canberra*).

- (ii) intangible values of the system, ie the meanings and symbolism we associate with the landscape setting of the city not like any other.

## **National importance and concept of significance**

The existence of national importance in connection with special parts of the city is related to the concept of *significance*. Significance is best explained as it is applied in cultural heritage practice: it is an idea that has national and international recognition. It is defined in Australia's Burra Charter (*The Australia ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance*, 1999) as

a concept which helps in estimating the value of places. The places that are likely to be of value are those which help in an understanding of the past or enrich the present, and which will be of value to future generations (p. 12).

**Significance** in the Charter means **aesthetic, historic, social and scientific values** for past, present and future generations. **Aesthetic** value is do with the way we see, interpret and use places. **Historic** value applies where a place may have been influenced by an historic figure, event, phase or activity; historic value may be greater where evidence of associations and/or events survive and where settings are intact. **Scientific** value depends on research value of a place, its rarity or representativeness and potential to yield further data. **Social** value embraces qualities for which a place has become the focus of spiritual, political, national or other cultural sentiment.

It is not difficult to see that these values apply to Canberra from the perspective of its planning history, ideas embodied in the planning of the city over time and in various figures (people) involved. Indeed I would suggest that the CNA and Designated Land constitute a remarkable planning laboratory reflective of Australian and international ideals in town and landscape planning.

## **National Heritage Criteria**

It is possible to expand the concept of cultural significance from *The Burra Charter* by reviewing criteria to establish national significance for places nominated to Australia's National Heritage List. There are nine criteria covering cultural and natural values. In my opinion the land shown in Figure 2 meets a number of these. The ones that are likely to apply are:

**a** – the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance in the course, or pattern, of Australia's natural or cultural history

**c** – the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Australia's natural or cultural history

**d** – the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of:

- i. a class of Australia's natural or cultural places

**e** – the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group

**f** – the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period

**h** – the place has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, or importance in Australia's natural or cultural history.

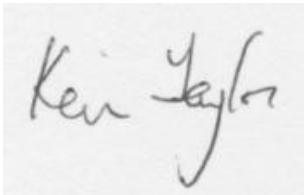
### **World Heritage**

In addition I believe it is also feasible and appropriate to look at which UNESCO World Heritage criteria for properties of outstanding universal value apply. These, I suggest, are:

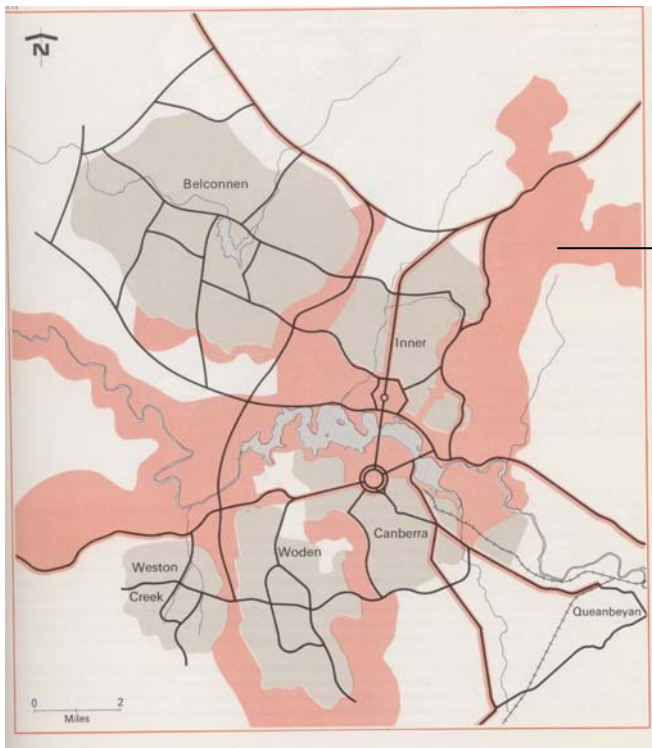
- (i) the city represents a masterpiece of human creative genius;
- (ii) exhibits an important interchange of human values, over a span of time, on developments in town-planning and landscape design;
- (iv) is an outstanding example of a type of architectural ensemble and landscape which illustrates a significant stage in human history and meets the test of authenticity in design and setting.

I hope the above comments will be of help to the Joint Standing Committee. The figures referred to in my comments are on the following page. Above all it is vital that the ongoing integrity and authenticity of land of national significance, ie CNA and Designated Land is protected under Commonwealth control. The proposed diminution by the NCA of land regarded as of special national importance is alarming (*The Canberra Times*, p. 2, 23 April 2008). I am happy to explain my comments further if the Committee wishes.

Yours sincerely

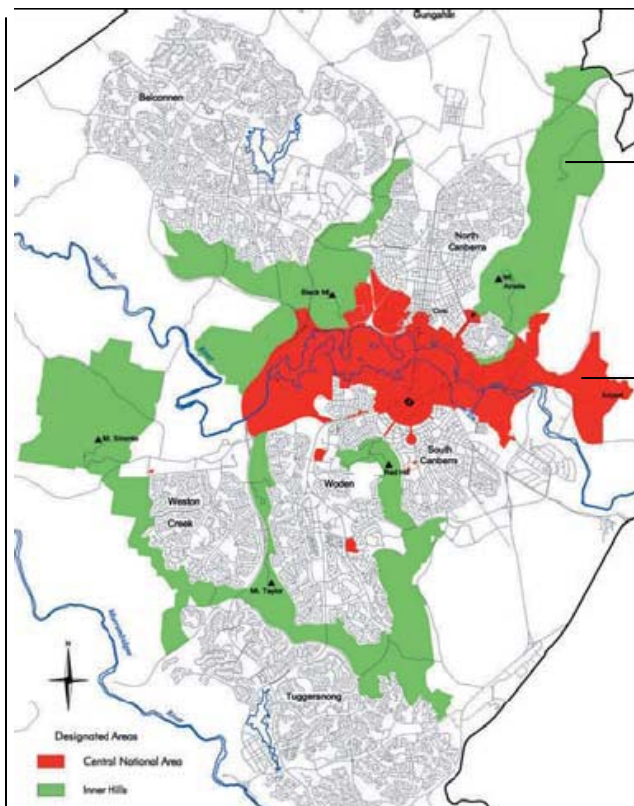
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken Taylor". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping 'T'.

Prof Ken Taylor



Areas in red comprise what NCDC regarded as areas of special national concern comprising vital elements in the city's spatial structure

Figure 1 (See Figure 5.13, p. 77, [NCDC 1970], *Tomorrow's Canberra*)



Designated Area of Inner Hills

Central National Area CNA

Figure 2 (see Figure 8.7, Taylor K, [2006], *Canberra: City in the Landscape.*)