

9 April 2008.

**Joint Standing Committee on the National
Capital and External Territories**

ENQUIRY INTO THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AUTHORITY

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission towards the above enquiry.

My submission addresses the terms of reference of the enquiry particularly regarding items (a), (b), (c) and (d). My submission is made from the perspective of strategic urban design and the need for Australians' national capital to represent best possible practice in terms of sustainable city plan and development.

I am making this submission as a Director of Colin Stewart Architects, a private independent company with headquarters in the ACT. I am an Architect with First Class Hons. from the University of NSW and a graduate with Masters Degree in City Planning and Urban Design from Harvard University. I have been National Director of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects, Past President of the ACT Chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects; Fellow of the Planning Institute of Australia and a past Adjunct Professor of Urban Design at University of Canberra.

The terms of reference of the enquiry raise important issues including red tape and duplication in planning; balance and independence, appropriate levels of oversight and opportunity for co-operation between the local ACT Planning Authority and the Commonwealth National Capital Authority.

I believe many of the problems faced today are a result of the lack of clarity between the Commonwealth's role and the ACT's role. The Commonwealth must have responsibility through a national capital authority for the planning and development of key aspects of the National Capital to ensure it has a national status and quality of planning and development befitting its position on the world stage. The two key roles are a **strategic role** to ensure the entire city and the ACT is developed as a sustainable national capital. The mechanism for this work is through the articulation of the general policy plan, the second role is more specific and relates to the **Parliamentary area** and the Central National Area. This is a more specialized focus and requires the designation of areas of special national interest. If these two roles are clarified and implemented accordingly, the work in relation to national promotion of the National Capital will, I believe, take care of itself as these roles require in depth, serious, open discussion and debate which itself will promote the National Capital and its meaning to Australia.

Strategic Role – the general policy plan

While the NCA currently has this responsibility I believe its focus has been in other areas and consequently there is no up-to-date strategic planning strategy for the ACT as a whole befitting its role as the National Capital of Australia. The lack of such a strategic plan obviously has caused confusion, red tape, inconsistencies and duplication. The key elements of this strategic plan should include:

- The principles and policies to ensure a more sustainable national capital
- Clear policies regarding urban density that will support public transport throughout the city
- A clear strategy for improving public transport and its evolution from a bus only system to a combination of bus and light rail serving the National Capital and its further evolution towards heavy rail in the long term.
- The development of the urban structure of the central area of the city which is made up of boulevards with adequate development and intensification to support light rail or other better forms of public transport.

These crucial strategic policies coupled with the National Capital open space system and other appropriate environmental standards and heritage standards must be prepared by the Commonwealth to ensure the National Capital can evolve as one of the leading well designed sustainable cities of the world in the decades to come.

This is not an area that can be or should be the responsibility of the ACT Government whose focus is towards more municipal responsibilities such as education, health, law and order etc.

The Commonwealth (NCA) must be responsible for articulating and developing these strategic planning and urban policies. It is not expected that the ACT Government could take on these larger National Capital roles however, the ACT will be better placed to implement and manage the development of the ACT once these key strategic policies are set in place by the Commonwealth.

The Parliamentary Zone – areas of special national concern

This more focused role relates primarily to the parliamentary triangle and appropriate designated areas which require a higher level of detailed responsibility for the Commonwealth to ensure very high qualitative standards are achieved for all the public and private buildings that make up this central area. However, this more focused role of the National Capital Authority is pointless without the underpinning of Commonwealth responsibility for the above strategic role. They are both intertwined and indispensable roles that the Commonwealth must take responsibility for particularly in this century. It is my observation that last century the major development in the ACT was focused towards building suburbia and suburbanization. Of course, key public buildings of national importance were also built last century. This century the focus appears to be towards transforming what we have towards making an urban place.

It is about city building and urbanism and making this a leading edge sustainable urban construct. The rapid pace of growth presents the Commonwealth with a huge responsibility to get this right. The Griffin Legacy document is but the introduction towards this massive challenge that the Commonwealth must address and confront on behalf of the people of Australia.

I would welcome an opportunity to present my submission and supporting material to the Joint Standing Committee.

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