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Committee Secretary

Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories

Department of the House of Representatives

PO Box 6021

Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Stephen,

Thank you for your letter of 26 March 2008 inviting comment to the inquiry into the role of the National Capital Authority (NCA). As a national institution in the Parliamentary Zone, Questacon works closely with the NCA, particularly in the context of the proposed Humanities and Science Campus development, Parliamentary Zone events planning and estate management.

Memorandum of Understanding

Questacon's formal relationship with the NCA has been through the Department of Communications, Information, Technology and the Arts up to 2003, through the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) from 2003 to 2007 and through the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research (DIISR) from December 2007 onwards. A Memorandum of Understanding was in place under DEST and work is now underway to re-establish the agreement under DIISR.

The following comments relate to criteria one in the Terms of Reference.

The proposed Humanities and Science Campus development has a significant impact on Questacon and the surrounds. The outcomes of consultation now provide for enhanced amenity and future options. Work was conducted by NCA

on varying legislation to accommodate Questacon's vision for a 'Garden of Wonder'. This Amendment 54 to the National Capital Plan, dated September 2006, changed a limited clause to one that will facilitate Questacon's vision for the future.

The current work on the proposed campus development has required ongoing consultation and partnership between Questacon and the NCA to achieve a plan that meets Questacon's business requirements and the broader vision for the zone between the National Library, Reconciliation Place and the foreshore. Issues of children, buses, visitors, parking, access, shelter, convenience and visual amenity required lengthy consultation which has now led to an effective plan.

Major events, such as the Cirque du Soleil, were a new and exciting event on Questacon's doorstep with the potential to have a detrimental effect on Questacon's business. The open and effective communications between the NCA and Questacon ensured that all risk was mitigated and a positive outcome was achieved. This model of communication was also used for other events, including concerts in the vicinity, with good result.

The footprint of Questacon sits on land under the jurisdiction of the NCA. This has meant that a reliance on NCA maintenance arrangements for surrounding gardens, paving and signage has not always met the seasonable and variable requirements of Questacon and its visitors. Clearer, more effective signage is required however restrictions have meant that signage remains less than desirable at this time. Paving and surrounding safety issues have received effective responses which is essential when dealing with large numbers of children and adults during daylight and evening activities.

The following comment relates to criteria three in the Terms of Reference.

Questacon sits as a national icon in the Parliamentary Zone, between the National Library, and the National Portrait Gallery. The area is unique and significant in the Capital. The benefits of an appropriate level of oversight will include the ability to provide consistency and links between existing and future agencies and developments. There are opportunities for leadership in infrastructure development in areas such as parking, signage and utilities. This shared approach to common functions for the precinct could provide further efficiencies. It is important that these opportunities are not diluted through multiple responsibility lines.

As Director, I have benefited from the expert advice and guidance provided by the staff of the NCA. The consultation model that has been developed between the NCA and Questacon is now effective. Questacon's future developments must meet not only our business needs, but also enhance our position as a national

institution in the Parliamentary Zone and meeting the broader requirements for the National Capital.

I would be pleased to provide further response to the Inquiry if requested.

Yours sincerely,

Graham Durant
Director, Questacon

11 April 2008