

Submission

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

Subject: Pierces Creek Settlement

Date: 13th August 2004



**From: Current and Former Residents of
Pierces Creek Settlement**

Resolution:

That, as an extension of the review of the Annual Report of the National Capital Authority for 2002-03, which was tabled in the House of Representatives on 4 November 2003 and stands referred to the Committee for inquiry if the Committee so wishes, the Committee conduct an inquiry and report on the role of the National Capital Authority in determining the extent of redevelopment of the Pierces Creek settlement in the ACT

Pierces Creek Submission

From the perspective of the former and present residents there are two key points that pertain to the issue of redevelopment at Pierces Creek. They are: whether to rebuild, and how big the development should be. The residents of Pierces Creek are totally committed to returning home, but are unfortunately entangled in the turmoil and politics of how that should be done.

Why Pierces Creek Should Be Rebuilt

Eleven of the twelve families who lived at Pierces Creek before the fires are totally committed to returning. There are many undeniable reasons why they should be given the opportunity to do this, and why it should be done as a matter of urgency.

1. The Remaining House

The residents of the remaining house were once surrounded by trusted friends and family. They are now isolated from their community, and frustrated by the existence of services and infrastructure that could be extended to the empty house sites.

2. Infrastructure and Services

The remaining house has power, telephone, mail delivery, garbage collection and school bus services. There is a water supply, fire hydrants, sewage, and a playground. These utilities and services should be extended or upgraded to return the former houses as soon as possible.

3. Moral Obligation

There is an overwhelming moral obligation to return the former residents to their homes. The residents of Pierces Creek were treated extremely badly before and during the fires, and were not provided with any information or support whatsoever on the day and there has still been no acknowledgement or apology. The remaining house was saved by some of the Pierces Creek residents. ACT Housing is responsible for the loss, and should be thankful to the residents that it still has one house left.

4. The History of the Settlement

The history of the settlement is significant to the former and current residents and the ACT as a whole. For decades the housing at Pierces Creek was tied to forestry, and a major responsibility of these workers was the detecting, reporting and control of fires. This was done extremely effectively until the depots of Pierces Creek and Uriarra were centralised in 1988, and many forestry workers were made redundant. Many of the workers and their families remained at Pierces Creek and comprised the core of the community. This community deserves respect and consideration for all the years it kept Canberra safe from the fires, and for the knowledge it contains. The history of many of these residents and their lifetime connection to Pierces Creek means that not only were their homes and possessions destroyed, but also their life's work.

5. Community Viability

The community functioned perfectly well, and this evidenced by the commitment and determination to return despite the time that has lapsed since the fires. The community was capable and stable, and also contributed to the wider community by having a presence in the forest and local knowledge. An important role still exists for these people that would ultimately benefit the ACT.

6. Bushfire Recovery

The 2003 bushfires were devastating for many communities. It is vital to do as much as possible to enable those families to return to their homes and friends. Pierces Creek should not be left out of this process, and it is not appropriate to relocate the people of Pierces creek to any other location than their own.

Suitable Size

The size of the redevelopment is difficult to nominate because the primary role and focus of the residents has been to return to the homes they had. Despite only requiring twelve homes, the former residents have always been willing to compromise on a number as they can see the advantages of the Draft Amendment process. The most obvious benefit being the opportunity to purchase their home. Most residents feel that a total number of houses of fifty is too many for the area, but that some

expansion would be acceptable without changing the character of the settlement.

A modest expansion would be the most appropriate compromise between the residents, the ACT Government, and the NCA. The aim and the result of this process must be *bushfire recovery*. The fires must not be used to determine the outcome of Pierces Creek

What we would like from the committee;

1. A decision as soon as possible that would allow the immediate return of the former residents while negotiation and planning for any further expansion continues.
2. The recognition that the community has the right to return, and that this is the only true reason to rebuild Pierces Creek.
3. Encouragement of all relevant parties to negotiate and compromise until an appropriate result is achieved.
4. Support of the relevant departments for any decision that will allow the residents to return to Pierces Creek.

Conclusion

A successful community is not one that is contrived, planned or regulated to work. It evolves over time and its success is proven by the trust and loyalty of the people who comprise it. It is not determined by size or 'social mix' and cannot be artificially created. The community of Pierces Creek was successful and the former residents will never be satisfied until they are returned to their rightful home.