

NATIONAL CAPITAL AUTHORITY

Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage

Sustainable Cities 2025

1. INTRODUCTION

The National Capital Authority has prepared this submission in response to the inquiry by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage into issues and policies related to the development of sustainable cities to the year 2025.

The Authority has been guided in its response by the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry provided by the Standing Committee:

Terms of Reference

- The environmental and social impacts of sprawling urban development;
- The major determinants of urban settlement patterns and desirable patterns of development for the growth of Australian cities;
- A 'blueprint' for ecologically sustainable patterns of settlement, with particular reference to eco-efficiency and equity in the provision of services and infrastructure;
- Measures to reduce the environmental, social and economic costs of continuing urban expansion; and
- Mechanisms for the Commonwealth to bring about urban development reform and promote ecologically sustainable patterns of settlement.

The Authority's submission provides the relevant background information on the Authority's role in planning and development in the ACT, and how the Authority both addresses and influences sustainability in its role to achieve '*a National Capital which symbolises Australia's heritage, values and aspirations, is internationally recognised, and which Australian's are proud*'.

It sets out the provisions of the National Capital Plan applicable to sustainability and identifies initiatives undertaken by the Authority to create a more sustainable environment.

2. NATIONAL CAPITAL AUTHORITY

The National Capital Planning Authority was established in 1989 as part of the introduction of self-government in the ACT, with a view to securing the Federal Government's continuing interest in the planning and development of Canberra as Australia's National Capital. The name of the Authority was changed to the National Capital Authority (Authority) in 1996.

Collectively the functions of the Authority provide a robust framework to secure the planning and development of Canberra as the capital; to accommodate the Seat of Government and associated national and cultural requirements; to provide national public places for all Australians to visit and enjoy; to enhance the unique character and symbolic meaning of the

capital; and to develop appreciation of the capital as a reflection of our democracy and national life. In effect the functions commit the Commonwealth to the creation and maintenance of a National Capital worthy of pride and valued by all Australians.

3. AUTHORITY GOALS

The Corporate Plan 2001-2005 sets out the Authority's vision for Canberra as '*a National Capital which symbolises Australia's heritage, values and aspirations, is internationally recognised, and of which Australian's are proud*'. Sustainability principles are implicit in the Authority's goals which are integrated through its business operations.

The Authority's goals (as applicable) are:

- ***to realise the promise of the city plan and the ideals of the founders***

We will work towards:

- *a Capital which is relevant to Australians, reflecting Australia's rich and diverse heritage, its people and their aspirations;*
- *a robust and sustainable planning framework that supports the needs of the Capital now and in the future, and establishes a dynamic relationship between the Capital's cultural and natural settings.*

- ***to foster Canberra as the National Capital***

We will work towards:

- *a Capital which broadens the experience of all Australian citizens and stimulates their understanding of country and culture.*

- ***to develop the special character of the National Capital***

We will work towards:

- *the retention and enhancement of Canberra's unique landscape character and recognition of Australia's diverse cultural heritage;*
- *the management and enhancement of the value of national land and assets for current and future generations;*
- *building accessible and affordable national public places and facilities for all Australians; and*
- *the establishment of a dynamic relationship between the symbolic and governance functions of Canberra as the National Capital and the lifestyle requirements of those for whom the city is home.*

In July 2003 the Authority endorsed a definition of sustainability, the definition is that '*Sustainable development is a reflection of standards acceptable to the community to using, conserving and enhancing the available resources so the ecological processes on which life forms depend are managed to achieve a desired quality of life now, and in the future, such that it can be maintained and improved*'.

4. LEGISLATION

4.1 NATIONAL CAPITAL PLAN

The functions of the National Capital Authority are set out in the *Australian Capital Territory (Planning and Land Management) Act 1988* (“the Act”). One of the functions of the Authority under the Act is to prepare and administer a National Capital Plan (the Plan). The Plan is the statutory tool which underpins the preservation and future of the Capital. Section 9 of the Act sets out the object of the Plan as follows:

Object of Plan

- 9. The object of the Plan is to ensure that Canberra and the Territory are planned and developed in accordance with their national significance.*

The Plan is required to set the general policies to be implemented throughout the Territory. In particular, the policies of land use (including the range and nature of permitted land use) [Section 10(2)(b) National Capital Plan]. A National Capital Plan has been prepared in accordance with the Act and is being administered by the Authority. Provisions of the Plan relevant to the inquiry into sustainable cities are set out below.

National Significance of Canberra and the Territory

The National Capital Plan identifies the matters of National Significance in the planning and development of Canberra and the Territory as including:

- The pre-eminence of the role of Canberra and the Territory as the National Capital.
- Preservation and enhancement of the landscape features which give the National Capital its character and setting.
- Respect for the key elements of Walter Burley Griffin's formally adopted plan for Canberra.
- Creation, preservation and enhancement of fitting sites, approaches and backdrops for national institutions and ceremonies as well as National Capital Uses.
- The development of a city which both respects environmental values and reflects national concerns with the sustainability of Australia's urban areas.

Within the framework of this legislative object or goal, key objectives of the National Capital Plan are to:

1. Recognise the pre-eminence of the role of Canberra and the Territory as Australia's National Capital.
2. Further develop and enhance a Central National Area which includes the Parliamentary Zone and its setting and the main diplomatic sites and national institutions, as the heart of the National Capital.
3. Emphasise the national significance of the main approach routes and avenues.
4. Respect the geometry and intent of Walter Burley Griffin's formally adopted plan for Canberra.
5. Maintain and enhance the landscape character of Canberra and the Territory as the setting for the National Capital.

6. Protect the undeveloped hill tops and the open spaces which divide and give form to Canberra's urban areas.
7. Provide a plan offering flexibility and choice to enable the Territory Government properly to fulfil its functions.
8. Support and promote environmentally responsible urban development practices.

Principles and Policies

To meet the obligations imposed by the Act, general principles and policies of the Plan combine to set the broad framework for land use in the Territory. The Plan shows which areas are planned for urban development and which areas are not to be developed. It also contains provisions relating to aesthetics and the environment, to protect and enhance the character of Canberra and the Territory. The Plan sets out a wide range of permitted land uses for each Land Use Category.

Urban Structure

The plan for Canberra and the resulting urban structure was based on principles of sustainability and sustainable growth. This has seen urban development based in town centres with the immediate landscape setting of the city and the distant mountain consciously protected from development. The decentralisation of employment to town centres as well as Civic outlined in the National Capital Plan seeks to reinforce an urban structure which minimises movements between home and work and supports a landscape setting and character for the Capital.

Importantly the urban and non-urban structure of the city works in a complementary and structured way to define future growth whilst retaining a quality natural setting and lifestyle benefits.

Urban Development

The Plan provides for additional urban development within the Territory. The urban areas of North and South Canberra, Woden-Weston Creek and Belconnen have already been substantially developed. Additional urban development in these areas will largely take place through measures generally described as urban consolidation.

The National Capital Plan provides for the continuation of urban development in the form of separate and distinct townships set in broad landscaped valleys, with the immediate hills, ridges and the Molonglo River Valley providing separation between towns, and the distant mountains providing a natural landscape backdrop.

Currently consideration is being given to future urban development areas by the ACT Government in a Spatial Planning exercise. The Authority has engaged in this process although detailed outcomes require further consideration (Refer to Section 6).

Non-Urban Land Use

Beyond the urban areas, the Plan contains a variety of non-urban land use categories which provide a setting for the city and possible recreational opportunities, conservation of the National Capital's bushland environment, and land resources for rural and future urban purposes. A major feature of Canberra and the Territory is the system of hills and ridges which

form part of the National Capital Open Space System (NCOSS). Also included within NCOSS are the river corridors and mountain bushland areas.

Canberra has been developed as a series of separate but linked towns, established in valleys and shaped and separated from each other by a system of open space. This arrangement has protected the major hills and ridges from development, and has created a scenic backdrop and natural setting for the urban areas. It has reinforced the garden character for which Canberra is renowned. This landscape setting makes a major contribution to the environmental quality which is a feature of Canberra's character. There is a need to conserve and enhance the landscape setting.

A key component of the NCOSS is Namadgi National Park. The Plan provides for its long-term maintenance through a special requirement that the development of the area conform to the existing Namadgi Policy Plan. In a similar manner, the Plan incorporates the provisions of the Murrumbidgee River Corridor Policy Plan as special requirements guiding development of the Murrumbidgee as it passes through the Territory. The river corridor provides an environmental and recreational resource which, under the terms of the policy plan, is also a long-term natural asset of the Capital. The Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve is largely contained within the National Capital Open Space System in the Plan.

The Plan also provides a basis for the continuation of longer-term rural production in the Territory, by identifying as rural lands, areas where the continuation of sustainable rural pursuits is considered both feasible and highly desirable.

National and Arterial Roads

The Act [Section 10 (2)(b)] sets out matters to be covered in the Plan. The Act requires that the Plan shall set out the general policies to be implemented throughout the Territory in the planning of national and arterial road systems. For the purposes of the Plan, national roads are deemed to include the major approach routes to the city which link Canberra with other capital cities and with the national highway network.

The arterial road network in the Territory comprises two elements - the arterial roads within Canberra's urban areas, which are major traffic collectors and distributors, and the network of peripheral parkways which serves to carry traffic between towns along routes lying largely at the periphery of the built-up areas.

Heritage and Environment

Principles and policies for environment and heritage are included in the Plan. The heritage policies place an obligation on proponents of development and also on planning and development authorities "...to give due protection to any natural or cultural heritage place in the ACT included on the Register of the National Estate and/or heritage register of the ACT Government" [National Capital Plan policies at 10.3 (a)]. Policies 10.3 (b) & (c), also place a requirement for Conservation Plans to be prepared for listed heritage places within Designated Areas and that applicable development conditions should conform with the requirements of any such Conservation Plan.

Designated Areas

The Griffin Plan's spatial and symbolic intent remains the dominant generator of the form and character of the Central Area. Griffin's 1918 Plan formed the basis for the original gazetted plan of Canberra. This established the main elements of the Griffin Plan including the axial lines, main avenues and open space areas. Despite departures to meet modern planning requirements, it continues to provide a clear vision for development of buildings and public spaces in and around the Central National Area.

After its establishment in 1957 the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) identified Areas of Special National Concern. These built on and attached particular importance to the main elements of the Griffin plan and gave them an extended expression as places of national significance. These Areas of Special National Concern were endorsed by Federal Cabinet in 1964 and included the central area, the lakeshore, hills and ridges and the main avenues and approach routes to Canberra. They received their first public expression in the NCDC's 1965 publication *The Future Canberra*. They were reflected in the NCDC 1967 Design and Siting Policies and were reiterated in the 1970 publication *Tomorrow's Canberra*.

With a rapidly growing population, plans for residential growth became a priority. The Commonwealth Government and the NCDC were concerned that growth beyond the bounds of the Walter Burley Griffin plan should not be at the expense of the symbolic and special characteristics of Canberra as the National Capital. Such characteristics were to be valued, protected and enhanced.

Today the Act makes provision for the Plan to identify "Designated Areas" which are areas exhibiting special characteristics of the National Capital [Section 10(1)]. The Designated Areas set out in the current National Capital Plan as *those areas of land that have the special characteristics of the National Capital* are almost identical to these Areas of Special National Concern. Within Designated Areas the National Capital Authority is solely responsible for detailed planning and all "works" require the approval of the Authority [The Act Section 12(1)(b)].

In identifying lands that have the "special characteristics of the National Capital" and deciding the extent of the Designated Areas, three primary factors are relevant:

- Canberra hosts a wide range of National Capital functions - activities which occur in Canberra because it is the National Capital and which give Canberra a unique function within Australia.
- Griffin's strong symbolic design for Canberra Central has given the National Capital a unique and memorable character.
- Canberra's landscape setting and layout within the Territory have given the Capital a garden city image of national and international significance.

The Designated Areas comprise:

- Lake Burley Griffin and its Foreshores;
- the Parliamentary Zone;
- the balance of a Central National Area adjoining the lake and the Zone, and extending from the foot of Black Mountain to the airport;
- the Inner Hills which form the setting of the Central National Area; and

- the Main Avenues and Approach Routes between the ACT border and the Central National Area.

The Authority has planning responsibility for these areas to ensure that they are developed in a manner which maintains their values for future generations.

4.2 LAKES ORDINANCE 1976

The Authority administers, on behalf of the Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads, the *National Land Ordinance 1989* and applied provisions, including the *Lakes Ordinance 1976*. In administering the *Lakes Ordinance 1976*, the Authority undertakes a range of measures to manage Lake Burley Griffin for a variety of functions and in accordance with management objectives that reflect community values.

Over the past year, the Authority has undertaken a number of management actions to protect the values of Lake Burley Griffin including **water quality management** – a comprehensive water quality monitoring program for the Lake and preparation of a draft Water Quality Management Plan and Strategy (September 2003).

5. AUTHORITY PRACTICES

In undertaking its role the Authority has achieved a number of specific measures, over 2002-03 specifically which relate to environmental performance. These are detailed below:

5.1 Establishment of an Environmental Management System

The Authority has an endorsed Environment Policy (December 2002) which reflects the Authority's values in relation to environmental management. The policy states:

In all its functions and operations, the National Capital Authority will:

- a) develop and implement measures and adopt technology to prevent and minimise pollution, and reduce waste, energy and natural resource use;
- b) comply with all applicable environmental laws, regulations, agreements and other requirements to which the organisation subscribes and require compliance by our contractors and suppliers;
- c) systematically manage our activities to achieve and promote continual improvement, by setting environmental objectives and targets and assessing our achievements; and
- d) annually review and update this policy, communicate it to all employees and make it available to the public.

The National Capital Authority and its employees are committed to improved environmental performance and will achieve this through implementation of this policy.

In developing its Environmental Management System, the Authority undertook a review of the effects of its activities on the environment. Through this Initial Environmental Review, the Authority has identified a number of its activities that are considered to have potentially significant environmental risks.

Energy Management Action Plan – During 2002-03 the Authority undertook a review of its energy use and identified the activities and sites that consume significant amounts of energy. An Energy Management Action Plan, that outlines actions to reduce energy usage and increase energy efficiency across the Authority's operations, has been established under the Authority's Environmental Management System.

Energy Management – The Authority uses 5 per cent Green Energy at all its major energy-using sites. The Authority met the Commonwealth energy targets in 2001–02 for office light and power. An Energy Management Action Plan is included in the Authority's Environmental Management System.

Environmental Management System – The Authority has established its Environmental Management System. All activities identified as having potentially significant environmental risks will be managed under the Environmental Management System through Environmental Management Action Plans and Standard Operating Procedures.

5.2 Preparation of Conservation Management Plans – The Authority's responsibility, in relation to protecting heritage places, is to provide direction to the planners and managers of places with heritage values of the actions that may be taken without adversely affecting those values. Within the last year the Authority has funded the preparation of Conservation Management Plans for:

- High Court and National Gallery Precinct; and
- National Carillon and Aspen Island.

The Conservation Management Plans establish the heritage significance of the heritage places and outline appropriate conservation policies and management mechanisms to enable that significance to be retained. The Conservation Management Plans have been prepared in accordance with *The Burra Charter*.

5.3 Risk Management Process – The Authority's Risk Management Process was revised to include environmental considerations. When fully implemented, it will ensure environmental issues are considered alongside economic and social considerations when dealing with risks to (or from) Authority activities.

The Authority's Risk Management Process defines environmental risks as both potential risks to the environment from Authority activities, and potential risks to the Authority's business from environment-related issues. In September 1998 the Authority entered into a Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with Environment Australia and Environment ACT for the protection of threatened species and/or ecological communities.

5.4 Water Management – A Drought Water Restriction Policy was developed in December 2002 to achieve progressive reduction of water consumption by the Authority. This policy forms the basis of a voluntary agreement with the ACT's water supply agency, ACTEW Corporation. While the policy was prepared in response to drought conditions, it is expected that the water saving strategy will continue as the quality of the Authority's landscape areas has not markedly reduced. Additional actions to reduce water use will be identified under the Environmental Management System (Refer to 4.2 for reference to the Lake Burley Griffin draft Water Quality Management Plan).

5.5 Parliamentary Zone Memoranda of Understanding

The Authority is currently finalising Memoranda of Understanding for three Campuses within the Place for the People (Parliamentary Zone) with the major institutions which have responsibility along with the Authority for their management. The MoU's are for the Treasury Campus, Arts and Civic Campus and the Humanities and Science Campus and will cover the mutual roles and responsibilities of the various bodies within each Campus to ensure the vision for the Place of the People is achieved for all Australians.

6. AUTHORITY PROJECTS

The Authority is responsible for the facilitation of the design and construction of building projects on National Land managed by the Authority on behalf of the Commonwealth. The Authority is committed to projects which result in sustainable additions to the built environment in the National Capital.

The projects range from public artworks and Memorials, to nationally significant monumental buildings and National Institutions. Authority staff are often involved in projects from the inception and therefore have the opportunity (in some instances) to guide the brief and ensure that eco-efficiency and accessibility issues are facilitated.

Projects such as the Memorials along Anzac Parade are designed to have a life of 200 years, which is a benchmark figure considered throughout the design in terms of materials choice, long-term maintenance issues etc. This benchmark inevitably plays a part in the decision making process which leads a project to fruition, and contributes to the durability and longevity of the finished product.

The Authority is then responsible for the long-term maintenance of such completed assets which involves itemising life-cycle maintenance regimes demonstrating the culture of commitment to thoughtful materials and finishes specification.

One example of eco-efficient building brought to fruition by the Authority is the National Capital Exhibition Centre at Regatta Point, Parkes ACT. The tourism and conference centre was completed in 2001. The building demonstrates a number of innovative building systems, including automated lightweight blinds and louvres which adjust according to light and wind pressure, and electronically coordinated mechanical systems and air handling. In June 2001, the building redevelopment was included in the award citations for 'Most Innovative Environmentally Friendly Solution' in the Annual Australian Greenhouse Office Commonwealth Energy and Environmental Management Awards.

In 2001 the Authority installed new lights along Anzac Parade. The new lamp has an exceptionally long life of between 15 and 20 years. The control system for the lights allows the lighting levels to be reduced during low use periods of the night. Other characteristics of the lamp also offer energy savings. Anzac Parade Street Lights were officially switched on in March 2001 and received the 2001 Engineering Excellence Award, Canberra Division, Institution of Engineers (July 2001) and the ACT Government, New Technology and Innovation Award in the Engineering Excellence Awards (July 2001).

Accessibility

The Authority in January 2003, completed an Access Audit to identify areas that require attention to provide equitable access to the public places in the Parliamentary Zone and to guide future projects and maintenance works to ensure appropriate access arrangements. The audit involved paths, bus stops, signage and toilets. The Authority is progressively undertaking work to upgrade access during new and maintenance works. Work has recently been undertaken to improve access to Magna Carta Place, the Science and Technology Centre, King Edward Terrace bus stops and street crossings, and the Treasury Building forecourt.

An audit of lighting levels in the Parliamentary Zone was undertaken in October 2002. The Authority is now progressively replacing the lights within the Zone with lighting with improved lighting levels and more energy efficient light sources.

Spatial Plan

The ACT Government is preparing a Canberra Plan. The Plan consists of three components – a Spatial Plan, an Economic White Paper and a Social Plan. In developing the Spatial Plan the ACT Government has involved the public in consultation on *Your Canberra – Your Say*, December 2002, *Your Canberra – Your Future* July 2002, and in *A City Like No Other*, June 2003. The Authority has been consulted at various stages of the process and has made presentations to the two ACT public forums on the Spatial Plan. The matters of planning interest to the Authority relate in particular to consideration of the Central National Area, transport (in particular arterial and national road systems), employment locations, and the National Capital Open Space System including any proposed changes in land use or landscape character.

In May 2003 the Authority agreed to a joint study with the ACT planning authority regarding the Spatial Plan growth scenarios with a focus on the Stromlo–Molonglo area. This area had been identified (among others) as ‘urban capable’ by the ACT planning authority. The purpose of the joint study is to ensure appropriate consideration is given to national capital values in any detailed appraisal of the suitability of the area for urban development.

Any use of the Stromlo–Molonglo area for urban development would be subject to independent consideration by the Authority as any such change would require amendment of the National Capital Plan.

The Griffin Legacy Project

A matter of national significance as set out in the Plan is to respect the geometry and intent of Walter Burley Griffin’s formally adopted plan for Canberra. However, it is some thirty years since there has been a major review of the philosophy, principles and policies guiding development of the rest of the Central National Area. To address this matter the Authority in 2002 commenced the ‘Griffin Legacy’ project.

The Griffin Legacy project, informed by an Advisory Panel, seeks to appraise the relevance and vitality of the Griffin plan to Canberra and the National Capital of the 21st century. This project

involves determining what has survived, what has been modified or discarded in the Griffin plan and what has continuing value and relevance. Where necessary the outcomes will be considered by the Authority for Amendment to the Plan. This project will also serve to inform and complement the current review of the Canberra Spatial Plan by the ACT Government.

7. CONCLUSION

The role of Canberra as the National Capital makes Canberra unique in Australia with a need for different policies to maintain its special qualities. The National Capital Plan seeks to ensure that Canberra is 'planned and developed in accordance with its national significance'. The Authority implements these ideals in its planning and development role in Canberra.

The Authority has established principles and practices including its Environmental Management System, Conservation Management Planning, Risk Management Process and Water Management policies to enable us to manage our activities, set policies and make decisions which support and enhance the ecological sustainability of Canberra.