

18 March 2008

The Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600

Dear Secretary

I make the following submissions to the Inquiry into the Role of the National Capital Authority.

I submit

- Experience shows that the role of the NCA needs to be narrowed and more precisely defined
- Experience shows that the NCA's work in relation to design and planning of areas of national significance is often of poor quality and greater oversight is necessary to improve standards.

I illustrate and support these 2 propositions with examples.

1. The NCA's role needs to be narrowed

The controversy over the Gungharlin Drive Extension is an example of the NCA at its worst. The ACT Government favoured one route and went to an election with this route as a major policy platform. The NCA favoured another route. The outcome of the election was ignored by the NCA. Such overriding of a clear electoral mandate is unprecedented in Australia. No significant national capital or other national issues were established to justify overriding the elected Territory government. I have no view on the substantive merits of the 2 possible routes other than that the NCA did not establish any significant national capital or other national issues. This was an issue where the NCA should not have been able to veto the elected Territory government.

More generally the demarcation of responsibilities needs to be reviewed against the background that the ACT now has a well established and competent democratically elected government capable of dealing with territory matters.

The NCA's role should now be confined to matters of genuine national capital significance. These will be primarily matters involving inner Canberra, especially the parliamentary triangle.

2. The quality of the NCA's work needs improvement through greater oversight

Two examples will suffice.

First I refer to the fiasco of the NCA's proposals relating to the Albert Hall precinct – these proposals have met with universal condemnation. The NCA was never able to explain any proper planning rationale for its proposals and it seems they have been

abandoned. I believe there is universal agreement that the quality of the NCA's work in relation to this proposal lacked basic planning skills.

Secondly, I refer to the NCA's appalling decision to approve ugly blocks of flats opposite Parliament House, on the two corners of State Circle and Melbourne Avenue. These are sites of national significance. Any redevelopment of these important sites should have been earmarked for landmark buildings of great architectural merit and preferably of some public significance. Instead the two corners on the access road to the executive wing of Parliament House are flanked by these two ugly blocks of flats. The NCA ignored objections by residents. These two developments are a damning indictment of the NCA's role and its professional competence in administering design standards in an area of such obvious national significance.

Yours sincerely

Ernst Willheim