

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories.

Inquiry into the role of the National Capital Authority.

To The Secretary of the Committee

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Canberra is acknowledged globally as a unique planned city, but this status is fragile and depends on informed and intelligent planning and design. The National Capital Authority currently ensure continuing acceptance of Canberra as a national concern, a city for all Australians to be proud of. This is manifested through a high quality physical environment. Without an authority with the power and vision to protect Canberra's unique heritage and guide new development with this heritage in mind, the risk of Canberra gradually deteriorating into an average provincial town eclipsed by our larger state capitals is imminent.

Walter Burley Griffin's 1912 plan readily responds to to-days environmental ideals of city planning and design, being so perceptive of the natural environment that topography was intrinsic to the plan with hills maintained in their natural state, and public parklands dominating the lake shore. These principles have been honoured by national governments since Canberra's conception. Until local government was introduced in 1988, the National Capital Development Commission guided the growth of a town into a beautiful city that attracted new residents and visitors. It ensured that the natural environment and the architecture were not based only on commercial values. By employing only the best designers and planners for public structures, thus ensuring economy of quality over expedience, Canberra has for decades been a model for planning worldwide. Many were relieved when a new authority successfully took up the key responsibilities of this difficult task – the NCA. It would be a tragedy and an embarrassment to all Australians should this quality of design and planning be lost.

Other great nations have understood the importance of using planning, architecture and landscape to symbolise high aspirations and accomplishments. Washington D.C., Ottawa and Brasilia are but a few well established and visible examples. Do we wish to project Australia as a country that values culture, creativity and the environment? If so Canberra represents these aspirations, and the NCA has proven a capable advocate of them. Walter Burley Griffin pronounced that he had created a city like no city before; 96 years later we must agree. But short term economic or political interests may not appreciate the cultural heritage of this unique city. I encourage the government to tread easy when considering reductions to this small but important authority and its projects. The NCA has performed extremely well in difficult circumstances in the past. The planning and design of Canberra must remain a national and not a local concern.

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