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Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories

As a practicing architect in the ACT, I write to the *Joint Standing Committee (JSC) for the National Capital and External Territories Inquiry* regarding the future role of the National Capital Authority (NCA).

The four key points I wish to make relate to the *Terms of Reference* of your inquiry, and are as follows:

- Canberra requires a commonwealth planning authority in recognition of its uniqueness as the National Capital of Australia;
- in pursuit of the highest quality urban design for Canberra, the NCA's (ie: the commonwealth's) responsibilities should be expanded to articulate all urban design, planning and built environment aspects of the capital, including infrastructure;
- many members of the construction industry would contest the duplication assertion in relation to the dual planning authority responsibilities. Dual authority responsibilities in practice, present few difficulties;
- Finally, in response to the suggestion that ACT Planning Authority (ACTpla) might assume some NCA responsibilities, it is widely known that ACTpla is currently under resourced and lacks capacity to assume an increased planning responsibility.

Canberra - the Nations Capital

The Commonwealth must maintain a strong interest in the city of Canberra as the seat of government, representing the nation, and national life.

The *National Capital Plan* should remain as the instrument under legislation that articulates the Commonwealth's aspirations for Canberra and its strong commitment to Canberra as the Nation's Capital, reflecting the needs and interests of the whole Australian community in its development.

Canberra is the physical and living symbol of Federation, incorporating the Burley Griffin Plan, and extending over the footprint of Canberra and its natural setting.

Expanding the NCA's responsibilities

The *National Capital Plan* (NCP) should be expanded to fully articulate all aspects of the national capital, including infrastructure, and in the form of a plan for Canberra which sets the future vision and provides a planning framework for:

- Boulevards, corridors and avenues including Northbourne Ave;
- Town Centres and surrounds, including Civic;
- Population targets and distribution;
- Public transport;
- Infrastructure and schools;
- Sustainability;
- Parliamentary Zone and axes;
- Places of public and National significance, including City Hill.

This might take the form of the existing NCP *General Policy Plan*, retained and enhanced through further research and greater depth of understanding of the planning framework and infrastructure demands of key areas across all of Canberra.

This further planning work for the National Capital is an important commonwealth responsibility.

Perceived duplication versus dual planning authority responsibility in practice

A review of both the National Capital Authority (NCA) and the ACT Planning Authority (ACTpla) concurrently is encouraged, with the goal of a single planning document that clearly articulates the regulations administered by each authority. Acknowledgement of the important differences between commonwealth and territory objectives for Canberra must survive any planning reform process contemplated.

With discussion within government of potential duplication across the two planning authorities, I believe that NCA responsibilities must not shrink to the Parliamentary Zone or similar. To do so will leave a planning and urban design vacuum for National Capital, and I fully support a strong ongoing role for the NCA.

I have progressed a number of Development Applications (DA) on sites featuring the involvement of both authorities, and have found the demarcation of responsibilities to be clear and unencumbered.

ACTpla capacity issues

The budget cuts and shedding of over 30 staff at the NCA, follows a similar cut to ACTpla of over 30 staff more than one a year ago. This produces a net loss to Canberra's planning authorities of over 60 staff, at a time when the construction industry is booming, and the demand for planning services is at a peak.

I believe we are obliged to maintain planning authorities with the capacity to set and plan for the future vision and needs of Canberra, backed up by research and consultation. Presently we have planning authorities that barely subsist.

The Territory government has asserted that it is ready to assume planning responsibilities if shed by the NCA, however it is difficult to see how ACTpla would do this, given its own staffing shortages, and excessive workload, including the restructuring of the Territory Plan.

My concern is that the NCA's potential contraction out of key areas of Canberra, will create a planning vacuum, with important areas of Canberra neglected.

I look forward to a positive outcome of this review.

Regards



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