

The Inquiry Secretary
 Joint Standing Committee on the
 National Capital and External territories
 Parliament House
 Canberra ACT



Inquiry into the Role of the National Capital Authority

The purpose of my submission is to grasp the opportunity presented by this Inquiry to help revive the planning of Canberra as the National Capital. I am delighted that your Committee has taken this initiative. In my dismay at the deterioration of National Capital planning and development, I have in fact been asking, along with others, When is the Parliamentary Joint Committee going to intervene?

The planning of Canberra as both city/State and National Capital is manifestly at one of those historic junctures when its future is in the melting pot. This is a main chance to resolve issues and provide new impetus, such as in 1901, 1911, 1925, 1955, 1973, 1984 and 1989. It is timely in view of recent natural, institutional and political setbacks to the development of Canberra as National Capital. The Inquiry can have a powerful influence towards restoring a vision for the National Capital.

I shall comment on the institutional arrangements and on the standard or ambit of planning for our National Capital. It is not my purpose to assess the performance of either the National Capital Authority or the ACT Government. My submission is confined to a number of specific propositions.

Terms of reference of the Inquiry notwithstanding, the evolution and planning of the National Capital are in the hands of various Commonwealth bodies, not just the NCA. **Proposition One** It is important to consider the respective roles of - or at least NCA's policy linkages with - the Defence Department, Territories Department, Finance Department and the Parliamentary Joint Committee itself. Liaison amongst Commonwealth authorities, on the one hand, and the relationship between them and Territory authorities, on the other, is currently deplorable. Communication, consultation, policy development, coordination and cooperation are all languishing. This situation is inimical to the NCA's capacity to plan the National Capital.

For example, decisions are taken about disposal of Commonwealth land and buildings that seem to have no reference to NCA responsibilities or corresponding ACT planning and management functions. A more egregious example is the unilateralism and presumption of the Defence Department. **Proposition Two** Defence has an inordinate presence in and around Canberra. Their landholdings in Majura, Belconnen, Harman, Weston Creek, training establishments (including ADFA) and soon new operational headquarters near Queanbeyan constitute a contestable scale and type of presence. Some of these occupations are obsolete, others could be located in other places, i.e. do not need to be in Canberra.

The Majura Valley is of particular relevance to the NCA. It contains substantial **Designated Areas**. The Majura Road is a main approach route, landscape setting and entry portal to the National Capital. A major feature of Canberra as the National

Capital is the Australianness of the “Bush Capital”, the interface between metropolitan area and rural landscape of farming, woodlands, grassland, grazing and agricultural production. Now that Gungahlin is spreading, Stromlo has been fire ravaged and ACT authorities are proposing the Molonglo Valley for urban development, Canberra is at great risk of losing its Bush Capital character. The Majura Valley’s representation of the Bush Capital is becoming increasingly valuable.

Plans are already laid for the Majura Parkway avenue and approach route, for the benefit of Canberra residents and visitors alike. Competent and enterprising farmers inhabit the Majura Valley. Yet Defence holds on to extensive tracts of land, much of it without current or prospective Defence uses. Defence administers the land with very little reference to National Capital and Territory planning considerations. This restriction denies security of tenure to the rural lessees in south Majura, who are thus limited in their agricultural land management and enterprise.

Proposition Three The National Capital Plan and Designated Areas incorporate various objectives, including

- the landscape setting for the National Capital
- an appropriate integrated transport system
- an overall metropolitan development strategy
- conservation of heritage
- maintenance of Canberra as a world best practice planned city and
- location of Australian government employment.

The planning and management of Canberra over recent years in a virtual Commonwealth/NCA vacuum has led to debacles such as the Gungahlin Drive Extension and the destruction by default of the National Capital landscape setting around the Scrivener/Stromlo/Glenloch western end of Lake Burley Griffin in the Christmas Day 2001 bushfires.

Thus ***Proposition Four*** The responsibilities of the NCA extend well beyond the Parliamentary Triangle and the waters of Lake Burley Griffin.

And ***Proposition Five*** It is essential to integrate both the planning and the institutional arrangements for the planning of Canberra. The National Capital and Territory Plans could remain separate but not continued separation of planning bodies and processes. At the very least, a memorandum of understanding between the ACT and Commonwealth planning bodies should clarify the respective functions and provide for their integration.

Much better planning outcomes should be expected to flow from this institutional and policy integration. I would emphasise two of the most important:-

Proposition Six The NCA should be supported in their efforts to preserve, restore and capitalise upon the greatest asset of the National Capital, namely Walter Burley Griffin’s Plan. At the same time, the NCA should, by dint of its assuming its full responsibilities – in accord with the above propositions – provide support to the ACT Government with its initiatives regarding the Canberra Plan, Bushfire recovery and sustainability strategy.

Proposition Seven The ACT Government's Spatial Plan, Economic White Paper and Social Plan components of *The Canberra Plan* and sustainability strategy *People Place Prosperity* have the potential to enhance Canberra as the National Capital, thus stressing the imperatives of reinforcing the role and capability of the NCA and ensuring integrated planning for the National Capital between the Commonwealth and Territory authorities.

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