

The National Capital Authority has been unable or unwilling to identify the countries currently without embassies in Canberra which will be allocated the pristine land at Stirling Park, Yarralumla, to build their diplomatic buildings.

The NCA is considering using the scarce and environmentally valuable land at Stirling Park, within 150 metres of Lake Burley Griffin, to accommodate new embassies even though there is no obvious need for that land to be developed. Even with that critical issue aside, if land for new embassies is needed, there is plentiful land elsewhere for embassies in O'Malley, Deakin West and within the current Yarralumla embassy precinct or in other suburbs.

Without much guidance to determine which countries are lobbying for new land to establish their embassy presence in Canberra, I have looked at countries who currently don't have an embassy or high commission in Canberra to see their trade or strategic importance to Australia or in the world more generally.

In terms of size of GDP, the World Bank data confirms that the largest 49 countries in the world currently have an embassy or high commission in Canberra. There are only three countries in the top 65 which are not in Canberra and when one examines their size, trade relationship with Australia and geographic or military importance to Australia, it is easy to see why.

The world's 50th largest country, Kazakstan does not have any representation in Canberra. Kazakstan has an annual GDP of US\$218 billion or about 0.27% of global GDP. Kazakstan is Australia's 106th largest trading partner with two-way trade flows of \$31 million in 2011-12. This accounts to 0.006% of Australia's trade.

The next largest country in the world without an embassy in Canberra is number 56 - Belarus which has annual GDP is just \$135 billion which is 0.17% of global GDP. Belarus is Australia's 167th largest trading partner with two-way trade flows of \$4.4 million last year. Belarus accounts for 0.0009% of Australia's trade.

After Belarus, we get to Angola which is Australia's 147th largest trading partner with two-way trade of just \$10 million a year. After that, we go to very small countries that have very little impact in the world economy, that account for mere fractions of Australia's trade and have no geographic or security significance for Australia.

It again begs the question, will Belarus, Cameroon, Swaziland and Saint Lucia stump up the many millions of dollars needed to invest in a new embassy in Australia when their trade links are trivial? It seems unlikely in the extreme.

And if the answer is that these small countries want representation in Canberra, why allocate what will be some of the most expensive land that will likely have a UCV of up to \$5 million in an open market? Will these small, often poor countries with no trade or strategic links to Australia want an embassy here? With

appropriate respect, perhaps these countries could have their representation in other parts of Canberra.

There of course is the possibility that the beautiful lake-side land in Stirling Park be taken from the people of Canberra and allocated to countries already in Canberra who merely want a nicer location to live. If this is true, the NCA is being pathetically weak giving up rare land to meet the whim of embassies no doubt in already fine lodgings. There is no obligation on the part of the Australian government to provide specific land to countries wanting to have their embassies in Canberra.

If there is a raft of small countries wanting to set up diplomatic residences in Canberra, it is short-sighted that the NCA will locate up to seven of them on pristine land near the lake when there is plentiful land elsewhere.

This land is dotted throughout the existing embassy precinct in Yarralumla, O'Malley and Deakin. While some land has seemingly been allocated to countries (some of which already have embassies in Canberra), they have been vacant for many years.

One option for the NCA is to tell those countries to use it or lose it and have that land allocated to countries who may need it.

In the end, the key issues are to assess which countries and how many need embassy sites in Canberra and only once that has been established and made public, existing vacant land should be allocated to those countries wanting to establish diplomatic posts here.

After that, consideration should be given to the costs and benefits of using Stirling Park versus some other plentiful land before deciding where to locate any new embassies.

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