

The Secretary,  
Joint Committee on National Capital and External Territories  
Parliament House,  
Canberra. ACT



Monday 19 May, 2003

**Inquiry into the role of the National Capital Authority.**

Dear Sirs,

I am writing this submission to the committee on the basis of both my professional qualifications as an architect and planner together with my longstanding and direct association with the national capital's planning and development. (Refer to brief curriculum vitae attached)

In particular I write concerning the Terms of Reference, Item 4 – i.e. the relationship between the Authority and Territory planning authorities.

My basic proposition is that, in principle, the current division of planning and development responsibilities as between both the National Capital Authority and the Territorial government is satisfactory. Further, no land currently identified as being 'areas of special national concern' or equivalent – should be relinquished to the territorial government. The following comments support this position.

Our Constitutional forefathers had done their research well, when in Section 117 of the Australian Constitution, they indicated that the national capital would be developed on land vested in and owned by the Commonwealth. This was done for two essential reasons. First and foremost to avoid the evils of land speculation. Second, to ensure that the Commonwealth retained both a presence and a continuing interest in the new national capital. Griffin in his plan for the city envisaged the central area and the Parliamentary Triangle as a stage upon which national events and history would unfold. This later aspect encompasses the need to develop a cultural and historical presence within the national capital that gives it national stature, permanence and longevity; a city to last a thousand years or more.

As an Australian citizen, I bemoan the fact that the Commonwealth has foregone our financial interest in the Capital by doing away with formal land rent. This act alone has cost the Australian taxpayer millions of dollars in lost income and was done for short-term political gain. The introduction of self-government for the territory to relieve some of the Commonwealth's financial burdens associated with Canberra's development, led to the disbanding of the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) and putting in its place the current two tier national and territorial planning authority situation. Respective planning responsibilities are defined principally in geographic but also in other terms.

While it is always difficult to generalize, for the most part it is true that in other state capitals, state governments typically retain metropolitan strategic planning and policy development responsibilities, and leave local government to deal with the majority of non-strategic urban planning and development issues. (In that pattern, Brisbane is unique because historically it opted for one large central local government to administer what was then the city. While this variant has historically served Brisbane well, now that the city has outgrown its previous bounds and urban development stretches from the Gold Coast through Brisbane to the Sunshine Coast, there is evidence of a lack of policy and strategic planning initiatives at the metropolitan level.)

The Canberra model then sits outside the Australian norm – as it should. The foundations for the geographic division of planning and development responsibilities were basically laid down by the NCDC's identification of "Areas of Special National Concern". (See *The Future Canberra*.) Implicit in this approach was the recognition that the responsibility for strategic planning and development of both the Parliament and its associated national institutions must reside in Commonwealth hands for the following reasons:-

- a) In order to maintain the fundamental place the Griffin plan has in determining the physical presence and appearance of the capital and its relationship to the topography within which it was placed. (The surrounding hills that are the backdrop to the city need to be preserved as do the scale relationships established by the Griffin axes.)
- b) in order to safeguard not only the current and future workings of the national Parliament and its associated institutions, but also their environment, appearance and national significance.
- c) in order to safeguard the long term significance, stature and presence of the national capital, Parliament and its associated institutions, as perceived at both national and international levels,

The history of the planning and development of the national capital has been one of interesting twists and turns. One common thread has prevailed however. Since 1925 when the Griffin plan was gazetted, and it became necessary for changes to that plan to be placed before Parliament, the Commonwealth has retained rightfully both the responsibility and initiative for planning and development of national capital functions. For it to do otherwise would be frankly absurd. It would be equally absurd to suggest that the commonwealth's strategic interests could be confined to say a smaller geographic area approximating to say the Parliamentary Triangle.

Clearly, when the division of planning responsibilities revolves around co-terminous geographic boundaries, the authorities concerned need to develop

transparent and responsive processes that enable them to jointly resolve their respective interests through joint consultation. Nothing I have seen or heard recently suggests that the current division of planning responsibilities has in any way impeded the on-going and appropriate development of the city. The evidence that the system works well is on the ground for all to see.

I trust these professionally informed views will be of interest to the Committee.

Yours faithfully,

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## **Brief Curriculum Vitae – James Rex Conner**

### **Degrees**

Bachelor of Architecture (Hons) – University of Sydney 1958  
Master of Architecture – University of Sydney 1960  
Diploma of Town and Country Planning – University of Sydney 1961  
Doctor of Philosophy – University of Edinburgh, 1964

### **Prizes and Awards**

John Sulman Prize for Design, 1958  
George McRae Prize for Construction, 1958  
University of Sydney Post Graduate Research Scholarship. 1959-60  
Commonwealth Post Graduate Travelling Research Scholarship, 1962-64  
Hezlett Bequest Travelling Scholarship, University of Sydney. 1963-64  
Earl of Buccleugh Prize for postgraduate research, Edinburgh University, 1963

### **Work experience**

a) Commonwealth Department of Works, Sydney Branch Office and Melbourne Head Office. Cadet Architect and Architect Grades 1 and II. 1955-66  
Design and construction of major buildings.

b) National Capital Development Commission, Canberra.  
Urban Design Architect Grades III to V, 1966-69  
Director of Planning, 1969-1972  
First Assistant Commissioner, 1972-1976  
Wide variety of executive planning functions and responsibilities including corporate planning, metropolitan strategy, external projects, submissions to parliament, regional strategic planning for commonwealth, state and local governments in the NSW Region No 8 and the ACT.

c) University of Sydney  
Senior Lecturer in Town and Country Planning, 1976-86  
Senior Lecturer in Urban Design, 1987-90  
Senior Lecturer in Conservation Planning, 1990-93  
Senior Lecturer and Head of the Department of Architecture, 1994-96  
Wide variety of teaching and research functions, membership of the Academic Board, Deputy Director of the Planning Research Unit, senior administrative duties as head of department. Retired at the end of 1996.

### **Work-study and recreational related overseas travel**

Edinburgh, Scotland 1962-64. Studied every UK new town as part of PhD thesis.  
South Korea, 1967 and 1969. International symposiums related to planning a new national capital for South Korea.  
Boston, USA Pacific Planning & Development Conference, 1996  
Barcelona, Spain. Union International of Architects Congress. (UIA)

Kobe, Japan. Reconstruction workshop with Japanese and Australian students, 1996

France, Italy and Bali long stays, 1997

Yemen and Crete, brief stays in 1998

Rome Conservation Conference, and UIA Congress, Beijing, China, 1999

Japan, 2000 working with my partner on a book on Japanese architect, Fumihiko Maki now in publication.

Oxford, UK Conference on Conservation and Hong Kong, 2001

Berlin UIA Congress; South Korea and Hong Kong visit .2002