

Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories

**Regarding your Inquiry into the NCA and the adequacy of the dual planning regime in the ACT:**

I am writing to you as a long term rower, coach and administrator who has been involved with the sport in Canberra since my arrival in 1974. I have previously spoken to your committee about the protracted process that rowing clubs have experienced when seeking planning approval to build boathouses. The long delays in planning approval have severely restricted the expansion of this sport during the NCA's involvement. The process takes so long that a successful college with a well-established rowing program went very close to withdrawing from the sport because of the bureaucratic delays and consequent increased costs associated with planning approval. Potential new clubs do not have the resources to overcome the red tape, notwithstanding that the current clubs are operating at full capacity, and there is potential for new clubs to start.

In my previous submission I discussed an example of a club persevering many years to get approval to finally build on Black Mountain Peninsula in 1991. In this submission I would like to focus on a rowing boathouse that has just recently started being built for Radford College. The planning approval process for the Radford College Boathouse commenced in August 2000, when the College met with the ACT Government (ACTPLA) and the NCA. Subsequently Radford submitted an application in January 2001. Final building approval was only granted in March of this year, and the construction is now underway. Taking more than seven years to approve this project is unacceptable. For those who might think that the project must be controversial, radical or ground-breaking, I quote from LR Killeen, Secretary and Manager to the NCA, writing to the ACT Rowing Association in October 1969, about this same boathouse site where Radford are building.

“The Commission has nominated an area on Black Mountain Peninsula for rowing boat storage. This decision was made after conferences with your Association and representatives from Rowing Clubs.

The area for boat storage on Black Mountain has now been provided with water and sewerage services. As well, a standard boat storage shed has been designed by the commission to enable clubs to build to an overall design similar to the Yarralumla Bay Boat Storage Development.”

It is clear from this correspondence that the planning forebears of the NCA were capable of making planning decisions and were supportive of community activities that had to be located next to the Lake. The current dual planning process involves too many nervous bureaucrats who are unwilling to make a decision. During the seven years that this process took, building costs approximately doubled for this boathouse and the College went very close to closing down their rowing program because of these delays, and associated costs. Those of us involved in any community or sporting club know that seven years for building approval would stretch the perseverance and credibility of any club management group.

Although the two planning authorities might claim that they work together well, the inability to make timely planning decisions indicate that the process is inefficient. Recent press reports show the average time for planning approval in NSW is 76 days, with those in Mosman waiting longest for 174 days (SMH 25.3.08). By comparison taking seven years to approve this Boathouse indicates planning gridlock.

Supporters of the NCA might attribute the delays to inaction within ACT Government agencies. I think the caution within ACT agencies is understandable, although very frustrating for those having to seek approval. I suspect this caution is because an external agency answerable to a different parliament with a different political agenda reviews every decision. Having two planning authorities with overlapping responsibilities does not improve planning outcomes. It results in timid decision-making and planning gridlock.

Yours sincerely,  
David Bagnall