

Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories Inquiry into the role of the National Capital Authority

Submission

Parks Forum is the Industry Association for park management agencies in Australia and New Zealand. We are committed to supporting the development of Australia and New Zealand's parks, through assisting our members in practicing the highest quality management and leadership, combined with ensuring that funding is at adequate levels to allow these agencies to carry out their important stewardship task of sustaining healthy parks systems, and therefore healthy communities.

The National Capital Authority is a member agency of Parks Forum.

We are aware that the NCA is responsible for the management of nationally significant parks and open space - the Parliamentary Zone, Anzac Parade, Commonwealth and Kings parks, Lake Burley Griffin, Scrivener Dam, Acton Peninsula, Yarramundi Reach and the Diplomatic estate. These parks also include assets such as key memorials, artworks, fountains and gardens, and broader public amenities. These settings contribute significantly to Canberra's national reputation for being a highly livable city, as well as a beautifully landscaped one.

It is widely understood that these assets need to be protected and properly maintained. They are not only local, in the context of the people of the city of Canberra, but are also areas of national significance - in particular the Parliamentary triangle - and the quality of both their maintenance and the community activities conducted within them reflects on the presentation of our national capital to the world.

The NCA has for more than 20 years, shown a level of expertise in the management of its parks and open spaces which is well reflected in the high quality of their presentation, as well as the diverse community benefits offered by them.

Recent very severe cuts to the budget of the NCA appear to have placed the organisation in the unfortunate position of having to strip its functions back very significantly, and at levels which will have resulted in a very significant loss of long-term knowledge and expertise from the agency. We are concerned about the impact of these cuts on the maintenance of these parks, and the assets within them. Regardless of the outcome of this inquiry, the permanent loss of skills and expertise through redundancies caused by funding cuts may have a long term impact on the facilities overall.

It is our understanding that while the NCA has a planning mandate which reflects the broader national interest in the ongoing planning and management of their parks, they have also provided a range of community activities and benefits to the community.

It is also our understanding that there are a number of planning-related issues, some of which reflect potential clashes of interest between the “national interest” planning approach and planning for community needs and interests. These require further reform and improvement, through any one of a number of approaches which we believe will be presented to the inquiry.

We understand that there will be a number of options discussed for improved cooperation with the ACT planning authority. In considering these options, it is important to note the benefits of having planning and land management/operations portfolios working closely together in the management of parks and green space.

Regardless of the outcomes of discussions around improving or streamlining planning issues, in considering Terms of Reference No. 1, the administration of the National Capital plan, we ask the inquiry to consider and underline the importance of maintaining a robust funding base which is adequate enough to:

- a) Maintain these parks in a condition worthy of their crucial role in contributing to the personal experience of peoples throughout our nation and the world, who visit the national capital;
and
- b) Sustain a vibrant and active range of community programs and engagement with the parks, without compromising a high standard of environmental and maintenance needs.

These parks should be sustained in the highest quality way, to continue to be a part of the positive experience of visitors as well as the way of life for residents.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Clarke'.

David Clarke
Chief Executive
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