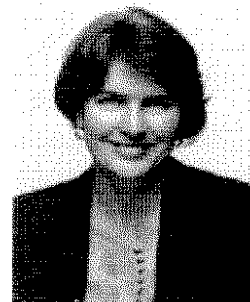


Kerrie Tucker MLA

Member for Molonglo



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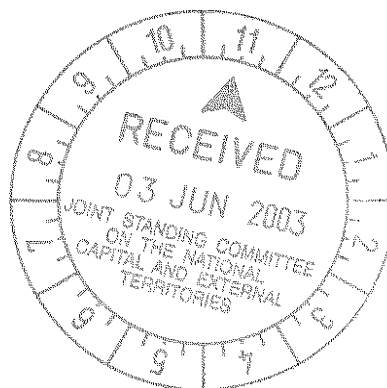
Joint Committee on National Capital and External Territories
Parliament House, Canberra

Submission

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



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The NCA has an important role in Canberra's development. This submission supports that role, but argues that the NCA's guiding principles should be refocused, using a careful consideration of the '*city in the landscape*' in the context of changed and changing understandings of our urban relationship with the land, and of needs to reduce consumption and other impacts on the ecology and landscape.

The aesthetics and the management practices guiding development of the look and feel of the National Capital of such a dry continent should be informed by these understandings.

Canberra is a modern city

Australia itself is a modern nation, formed by that typically modern amalgam of self-interest and humanism, and Canberra: in its location, design and very existence, is a direct product of that modernist project.

It is interesting then to look at the National Capital Plan, which talks about the National Capital needing to “reflect and symbolise the changing and maturing character of the nation as a whole”, and the NCA's management practices in the context of that plan, and see how it fits with the kind of direction we would want to prescribe for Canberra.

A city in the landscape

A capital city is a global statement really. Canberra is the lucky broadminded educated affluent capital of what is – in numbers at least – a lucky broadish minded affluent nation. And so, to indulgently overuse resources, and set ourselves extravagantly in a car dependent, water and energy swallowing conglomeration of Californian cottages and New Hampshire homesteads could be seen as offensive by most other people in the world, and anyone who hopes for sustainable life on this planet.

There is a particular issue in cities, namely the impact of urban development on the planet; the consumption of resources in building powering and feeding it, and what actually happens to the landscape it is set in.

And of course the Canberra idea is of a *city in the landscape*. Encapsulated in geometry and image by Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahoney, rather sadly abandoned at different times by Governments and bureaucracies, occasionally abused (as by the sale of Ainslie Avenue for retail development) it still a guiding light in our notion of this city.

Given that our understanding of the bush, landscape, environment and the planet has changed over the last hundred years, the Burley Griffin plan will support new policies that come from this changed view. I would like to see the NCA consider more profoundly the questions of land use (and abuse) in how it develops its *city in the landscape* plan.

This capital city could explore how people can in lesson their impact on this planet, with building and land use absolutely designed to suit the climate and the landscape.

A new interpretation

A city in the landscape is a metaphor for how it could work. Canberra could be a city that actually puts a lot back into the landscape. It could be done immediately with water. It could be done with energy. It could be done in how we live. Canberra could also be a city that models a respectful relationship with the land. And while the details of land use throughout the Territory are not the primary responsibility of the NCA, commitment to the broad goals and vision must be.

The NCA already needs to consider Matters of National Significance in the planning and development of Canberra and the Territory. They include:

- The pre-eminence of the role of Canberra and the Territory as the National Capital.
- Preservation and enhancement of the landscape features which give the National Capital its character and setting.
- Respect for the key elements of Walter Burley Griffin's formally adopted plan for Canberra.
- Creation, preservation and enhancement of fitting sites, approaches and backdrops for national institutions and ceremonies as well as National Capital Uses.
- The development of a city which both respects environmental values and reflects national concerns with the sustainability of Australia's urban areas.

But the evidence is that the NCA has failed on occasion even here, which is why a more contemporary interpretation of the ideas is needed.

Present limitations

The sale of piece of Ainslie Avenue for retail development is a case in point. Some time around the birth of the NCA, in one neat move, the Canberra Centre shopping mall severed the link from City Hill to Mt Ainslie. You do have to wonder who

profited so much from this development, because it so clearly butchered one of the key elements of the Burley Griffin plan – the land axes that connect the human with the hillside – that you would just presume it would never be done.

The symbolism is important. And here we have seen a shift away from the landscape to a focus on intense retail consumption. Clearly a failure of national capital planning.

Similarly the aesthetic commitment to irrigated grass verges in the National Capital Plan demonstrates all the wrong thinking, and has resulted in personal injury and an exorbitant use of water.

Northbourne Avenue doesn't need to be a verdant effusion of river peppermints; we should save that up for our creek beds and use dry grasses and a light rail instead. But the peppermints were chosen because the endemic Blakely's red gums were looking sick, and peppermints when irrigated were known to grow well in Canberra.

Unfortunately these trees, particularly under irrigation, are shallow rooted, and one blew onto a car in a storm, seriously injuring a woman last year. For her it is personal.

But the underlying cause of the problem is a commitment to an aesthetic of well watered grass and trees in approaches to the city; a kind of English colonial stamp upon the landscape. Instead we could be indigenous or republican or pragmatic and use naturally occurring water only. That would be both consistent with the Burley Griffin plan and forward looking.

Another event that raised real environmental questions, both symbolically and in practice, was the V8 car race. While the NCA clearly had an interest in the immediate environmental impact of the event, it failed to take a more holistic view. As an international stage Canberra would make a fine visual setting for any number of sport or technology events. The tunnel vision of filming V8 cars delivered nothing consistent with the landscape idea.

Finally, we can gain some insight into how the plan is applied by looking at the NCA's Gungahlin Drive analysis.

How we see the future of people and transport, how we measure the importance of cars and roads is a key question for modern Canberra. We need to factor in the social and environmental costs and benefits of our ideas of land use. But in forming the view that the road was necessary last year, NCA's orthodox analysis did not include those social and environmental costs. It didn't allow for innovation in

transport, alternative views such as Paul Mee's "At the Crossroads"[forwarded by mail] weren't considered, and Greenhouse gas emission was not mentioned.

Change the Plan

If the *city in the landscape* idea is to be something more than a few marks on a map, then the NCA needs to do more than protect the tops of the hills surrounding Canberra, preserve some control of lakeside development, and ensure a comfortable setting for the national institutions and monuments and of course the Australian Institute of Sport.

In other words, the approach of the NCA regarding management is neither appropriate to the climate of this country, nor to its future. It is failing in its duties. Given that changes to the National Capital Plan require support from both Houses of Parliament, then we should look at a plan that warrants such consideration.

The NCA should pursue a vision that champions a light ecological footprint, respect for the natural environment as its form, a distinctive Australian identity and which models equity and accessibility for its citizens. A project that expands on the ideas inherent in the original Canberra plan but which has real and renewed significance in today's world.

I would be happy to expand on these ideas further and to assist in revitalising the National Capital Plan and the NCA's mission at any time.

END