



Inner South Canberra Community Council



Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories
Parliament House
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Submission by the Inner South Community Council (ISCCC) to inquiry into ways to foster and promote the significance of Australia's National Capital

Recommendations

1. The ISCCC endorses the submission of our member group, the Yarralumla Residents' Association (YRA) that:

- a) The narrow and constricted funding of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) since self-government in 1988 has constrained the planning and development of the city and surrounds.
- b) The primary own source revenue for the ACT Government is land sales and related duties and taxes which is insufficient and unaligned to national responsibilities. Furthermore, an adjustment to the GST formula is needed.
- c) Tourism initiatives must include the revitalisation of Canberra's iconic lookouts.
- d) National institutions need ongoing indexed funding and certainty of funding.
- e) The cultural and political heritage of iconic national buildings must be recognised and protected.
- f) There should be collaboration across institutions in actively promoting, across the country and internationally, their national cultural, historic and democratic importance.

2. The ISCCC contends that the inherent qualities of our national (bush) capital include the “city in the landscape”, Garden City principles embodied in our original suburbs, the fine examples of mid-century modern architecture, and the various sites listed on the World, National and ACT Heritage Registers. The Committee is urged to consider whether the proposed new ACT planning framework protects those qualities. The Committee’s attention is drawn to over 400 published submissions in response to the new ACT Government planning framework. Many of these submissions raise valid concerns about the framework’s protection of the national capital’s inherent qualities.¹

3. The ISCCC encourages the Committee to consider whether the ACT Government’s management of ACT land, in introducing the proposed new ACT planning framework, complies with the object of the National Capital Plan, and other national objectives, including in responding to climate change. Even without overriding the ACT Planning Bill and Territory Plan (a power of the Federal Parliament under s.122 of the Constitution), the Federal Government has powers to moderate the ACT Government’s excessive deregulation of the planning system, disruption of the “city in the landscape”, Garden City principles, and poor proposed governance provisions for ACT planning.

4. The ISCCC recommends that the Committee seek more facts on why the ACT receives less than half the GST allocation of the Northern Territory and Tasmania.² For example, the Committee should consider the amount of tax and GST collected from ACT residents per capita compared to other states and territories.³ The Committee should also seek to be informed about the rising costs of living pressures in Canberra, the loss of public housing in recent years, increasing levels of homelessness and poverty, domestic violence numbers, hospital cost blowouts and waiting times etc. Note: recent ACTCOSS reports on aspects of life in Canberra⁴ paint a stark picture.

5. Do our National and Canberra centric institutions currently reflect the national story and the character, values and identity of Australia? Certainty of proper funding continuity, as recommended by the YRA, would enable them to work towards fulfilment of their mission. The Federal Government has taken steps to address this funding base in its April 2023 announcement of \$535.3 million to national institutions over four years in the 2023-24 Budget.

6. The ISCCC urges the Committee to acknowledge that, in order to maximise the potential of the National Capital, the ACT’s assets must be identified and nurtured and the risks to those assets must be mitigated. These assets include the territory’s diverse, multi-layered environmental and cultural heritage and the concentration of significant national institutions. Risks include the threat from the proposed new ACT Government planning framework that fails to acknowledge, identify and properly protect these assets. Risks also include the impacts of climate change. The ISCCC is concerned that implementation of the proposed ACT Government planning framework will reduce the ACT’s resilience in the face of climate change.

The Inner South Canberra Community Council (ISCCC)

The ISCCC is the peak body for residents’ groups in inner south Canberra.⁵ The inner south district is home to a number of the oldest suburbs in Canberra. The ISCCC’s overarching objective is to

¹ <https://yoursayconversations.act.gov.au/act-planning-review/planning-bill#:~:text=Submissions%20were%20open%20from%2021,will%20become%20the%20Planning%20Act.>

² In 2023 the ACT has an estimated population of 472,304. NT’s estimated population of 246,500 is about half of the ACT’s. Tasmania has an estimated population of 545,000 – only 73,000 more than the ACT.

³ The ATO used to publish tax collected by postcode.

⁴ E.g. see ACTCOSS Fact Sheet October 2022.

⁵ Old Narrabundah Community Council; Griffith Narrabundah Community Association; Yarralumla Residents Association Inc; Deakin Residents Association; Red Hill Residents Group; Kingston and Barton Residents Group; Oaks Estate Residents Association; Forrest Residents Association.

“preserve and improve the social, cultural, economic and environmental well-being of Inner South Canberra and the Inner South Canberra community.”

Canberra is known throughout the world as a planned national capital, a “city in the landscape”. *The older inner north and inner south suburbs of Canberra are perhaps the best examples of how the principles of the Garden City movement were applied in Australia.*⁶

Canberra's heritage is non-renewable capital whose tenets:

- help build community adaptability, cohesion and identity
- provide continuity and memory that aid the physical and mental health of individuals and society. Note: Positive health outcomes are associated with enculturation, personal and cultural identity, intergenerational continuity, and civic engagement.
- link natural and cultural heritage allowing broadening of the discussion of sustainability to better reflect on our inheritance and stewardship
- help build resilience
- assist tourism and tell the story of our nation's capital from its emergence and on into the future.

In inner south Canberra the heritage of Walter and Marion Burley Griffin's vision is evident in the street layouts, the treed verges, the built environment and the breathtaking vistas.⁷ The inspired work of John Sulman, Charles Weston and others is also on display. Their combined legacy has immeasurable significance locally, nationally and internationally, as a consequence of the meaning and values embodied in this legacy.⁸ These values include respect for the natural environment and the importance of 'green' space for recreation and mental health.⁹

The ISCCC surveyed inner south residents in 2019 and early 2020. Residents were asked what they valued in their suburbs and in the inner south more generally. When collated, it was apparent that more than five hundred and fifty survey responses aligned with what national and international visitors to Canberra report. Residents and visitors alike value, above all, the amenity provided by the urban forest complemented by the location and accessibility of open spaces. This includes:

- Streetscape (street trees, vegetation, gardens, width of streets) - 70.63%
- Open spaces (parks, ovals and bushland for recreation) – 69.01%¹⁰

ACT legislation, including the Urban Forest and Living Infrastructure provisions, must promote, and ensure protection of canopy trees on public and private land and ensure there is adequate plantable area on residential blocks throughout the city. Unfortunately, the proposed excessive deregulation of the ACT planning system threatens to undermine those provisions and has serious ramifications for Canberra as the nation's capital. ***The Object of the ACT Government's new Planning Bill does not even mention the national capital role of Canberra.***

⁶ ACT Chief Planning Executive CTPLA *Garden City Values Design Considerations for Residential Development in Inner North and Inner South Canberra* 2008 Foreword A

⁷ Griffith Neighbourhood Plan https://www.planning.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/890565/griffith-anp.pdf

⁸ Margarita Diaz-Andreu 'Heritage Values and the Public' <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/20518196.2016.1228213>

⁹ See the ISCCC recent submission to the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity inquiry into ACT Heritage Arrangements. See also 47 other submissions.

¹⁰ <https://www.isccc.org.au/isccc/wp-content/uploads/FINAL-Report-ISCCC-Survey-12May2020.pdf>, accessed 30 May 2022

The role of the Federal Government and Parliament

The ISCCC urges the Joint Parliamentary Committee to consider whether the proposed ACT Government planning framework is consistent with the Object of the National Capital Plan, which is "...to ensure that Canberra and the Territory are planned and developed in accordance with their national significance."

There were six National Capital cities, as observed by the YRA, which were built in the 20th century. All these National Capitals – with the exception of Canberra – remain under the control of their country's National Government.¹¹ When self-government was introduced to the ACT, insufficient attention was paid to the proper funding of the territory in light of the challenges of meeting national and local needs.

The Federal Government continues to occupy an important role in facilitating proper land management in the National Capital where all land is leased from the Commonwealth. However, the vexed issue of planning is not resolved, and, in 2023 remains a stain on the hands of governments, planners and developers.

The Federal Government, with the support of the Parliament, has two significant levers - funding and the environment – which directly influence planning in the national capital. The Committee is encouraged to consider the role of ACT funding, in this inquiry, as it relates to the capacity to achieve the outcomes referred to in the Terms of Reference.¹²

Urban development needs to achieve the twin objectives of meeting the increasing population's housing needs at the same time as retaining and increasing tree canopy cover and green spaces to reduce the heat island effect and other impacts of global warming. Development must be carefully managed, and informed by expert evidence such as temperature maps, to avoid the creation of heat islands. The worlds' scientists, including the CSIRO, have concluded that the Urban Heat Island effect will be the greatest threat to the life of city dwellers in coming decades.

Terms of Reference

1. Requirements for the National Institutions to convey a dynamic, representative national story

The ISCCC supports national institutions conveying a "dynamic, representative national story." and strongly rejects any implication that, if an institution is based in Canberra, it is challenged when imparting such a story.

Some of our members are employed/have been employed/ volunteer in national institutions. Many of our members were born, and/or have lived, interstate and overseas. Residents of Canberra have interstate and overseas links. The population of the territory increased fivefold between 1961 and 2021,¹³ mainly from interstate and overseas migration.¹⁴ The median age in Canberra is 35 which is

¹¹ 63.75% of eligible voters voted against self-government for the ACT in the referendum held in 1978: https://www.elections.act.gov.au/elections_and_voting/act_legislative_assembly_referendums/1978_referendum

¹² See for example, the Productivity Report Assessing Local Government Revenue Raising Capacity July 2007 <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/local-government/report/localgovernment.pdf> and the ACT government's submission to that inquiry https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/local-government/submissions/59_act_government/sub059.rtf

¹³ Census statistics:58,828 population in 1961 and 307,053 in 2021.

¹⁴ In 2016 32% of the ACT population was born overseas. Census.

the second youngest of any Australian capital city.¹⁵ Canberra is the intellectual capital of Australia because it has the highest educated population in Australia, the highest number of bachelor's degrees per head of population anywhere in Australia, and, the highest number of patents per capita anywhere in Australia. ¹⁶ 4.5% of Canberrans have a postgraduate degree compared with 1.8% nationally.

Canberra's young, educated and engaged, multicultural population understands the nature and importance of a dynamic and representative national story.

Most importantly, the national story is reflected in the National Capital Plan administered by the National Capital Authority (NCA). However, the accountability of the NCA through, for example, merits review of NCA decisions, is limited.

The national story is also impacted by decisions of federal departments that administer federal legislation that involve ACT land. For example, decisions under the federal *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) affect ACT land, including land in the National Triangle.

The proposed ACT Government planning framework places a limitation, on Commonwealth agencies, of 10 business days in which to advise the ACT Government of any issues.

The ACT Legislative Assembly Committee Report on its Inquiry into the Planning Bill¹⁷ made the following recommendation (17):

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government review the timeline in the Bill that allows 10 days for the Federal Minister for Environment to respond to ensure that this timeline matches the Federal Minister's practices and if not, that this timeline be reviewed.

The ACT Government agreed to only 13 of that Committee's 49 recommendations.¹⁸ It responded to recommendation 17 by saying:

The Government will review the timeline in the Bill to make sure it matches the Federal Minister for Environment's practices. Where there is conflict between the timelines provided in Commonwealth and ACT legislation, the timeframes provided in the Commonwealth legislation would apply.

The ISCCC draws the inadequacy of this response to the Committee's attention because it is not only the Federal Minister for the Environment's "practices" that need to be "matched".

It goes without saying that, as a matter of law, if there was conflict between Commonwealth and ACT legislation, Commonwealth legislation would prevail.

2. Maintaining the currency and vibrancy of Australia's national capital as a source of pride and international recognition

The ISCCC supports the maintenance of the currency and vibrancy of Canberra as Australia's national capital. As stated in the ISCCC submission in response to the ACT government's proposed new

¹⁵ 2021 census. Darwin has the youngest median age of 34 and Adelaide has the oldest at 39.

¹⁶ <https://canberra.com.au/business/why-canberra/intellectual-capital/#:~:text=With%20our%20knowledge%2Dbased%20economy,and%20development%20in%20our%20city.>

¹⁷ <https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/parliamentary-business/in-committees/committees/ptcs/inquiry-into-planning-bill-2022#tab2076068-6id>

¹⁸ https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/2211489/PTCS-12-Inquiry-into-Planning-Bill-2022-Government-Response-tabled-24-April-2023.pdf. It agreed "in part" to 13 and "in principle" to 13 and disagreed with 7.

planning framework, this is achieved through proper consultation, consistency and certainty (including in planning laws) and governance with integrity, transparency and accountability.

Canberra, the nation's capital, already has significant building blocks for achieving this outcome including a young, well educated population, a strong cultural and environmental heritage and an active civil society. What is sorely needed is a governance structure and funding model that recognises and acknowledges the unique circumstances of this 'city state', due, in particular, to the complexities arising from the two layers of government.

3. Raising the profile of Australia's national capital and its symbolic importance in reflecting the character, values and identity of Australia

The ISCCC supports the raising of Canberra's profile as an internationally renowned planned capital city, the symbolism of which cannot be over emphasised. The ISCCC suggests that the governance of our national capital demands a genuine commitment to federal oversight and responsive local administrative arrangements. Good governance, including proper oversight of the planning system at all levels, is critical to ensure that what sets the national capital apart is protected and enhanced as the city evolves. Government commitment must include secure, adequate on-going funding of the national capital while acknowledging the complexities of its dual role. The very character of this "city in the landscape" is at stake.

ACT residents have a deeply felt understanding of the unique character of the national capital as it reflects the character, values and identity of Australia. Many express the view that they feel like custodians of this place. Many stand ready to assist in raising the profile of the national capital.

4. Consider the importance of Australia's national capital in highlighting our sporting, cultural and tourism potential

The ISCCC supports highlighting Canberra's sporting, cultural and tourism potential and many elements are already in place including a community which acknowledges their potential.

The features of a city that attract tourists include culture, architecture, gastronomy, infrastructure, landscape, events and shopping. Canberra exhibits all of these features. The inner south's contribution to this list is recognised in internet travel guides; the inner south heritage "vibe" is a feature of the yearly ACT Heritage Festival; the inner south is home to a number of high profile cultural and political facilities. Indeed, the Australian Parliament is located in the heart of the inner south.

The ISCCC recognises the importance of Inner South sporting facilities including Manuka oval, Manuka pool, Boomanulla oval, the Narrabundah velodrome and the Royal Canberra, Federal and Narrabundah golf clubs.

The ISCCC values the outstanding cultural facilities in the Inner South, including the National Gallery, National Portrait Gallery, National Library, Questacon, the Museum of Australian Democracy, the National Archives and many other venues.

5. The needs of existing infrastructure and identifying future infrastructure needs to facilitate 1), 2), 3) and 4) above

The ISCCC endorses the need for appropriate recognition of, and funding for, the ACT thereby acknowledging this place as Australia's National Capital, a city designed to embody the ideals of democracy in a uniquely Australian setting.

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