

Submission by the Yarralumla Residents Association to the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories Inquiry into fostering and promoting the significance of Australia's National Capital

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Terms of Reference

The Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories will inquire into and report on ways to foster and promote the significance of Australia's National Capital, including:

1. Requirements for the National Institutions to convey a dynamic, representative national story;
2. Maintaining the currency and vibrancy of Australia's national capital as a source of pride and international recognition;
3. Raising the profile of Australia's national capital and its symbolic importance in reflecting the character, values and identity of Australia;
4. Consider the importance of Australia's national capital in highlighting our sporting, cultural and tourism potential; and
5. The needs of existing infrastructure and identifying future infrastructure needs to facilitate a), b), c) and d) above.

SUBMISSION

Maintaining Australia's national capital as a source of pride and international recognition; increasing sporting, cultural and tourism potential; and infrastructure requirements

Canberra and the Territory are no longer planned and developed in accordance with their national significance. This is mainly a consequence of the narrow and constrained structure of the ACT funding base following self government in 1988.

The National Capital has moved from planning regulation and the garden city -bush capital approach, to high rise high density development through urban infill. This trajectory will be increased with the proposed implementation of the ACT Governments proposed New Planning Framework which is for 70% of all new housing to be through high density high rise urban infill of existing suburbs.

The ACT Governments proposed New Planning Framework should not be implemented in its current form and should be paused and assessed as to its fitness for purpose "*to ensure Canberra and the Territory are planned and developed in accordance with their national significance*" in accordance with the object of the National Capital Plan as set out in the *Planning and Land Management Act (Cwth)1988*.

There are six planned National Capital Cities that have been built in the 20th Century of which Canberra, which became the national capital in 1927, is the earliest. All of these except Canberra have remained under the control of the country's Federal Government.

1927 Canberra Australia	1991 Abuja Nigeria
1960 Brasilia Brazil	1996 Dodoma Tanzania
1960 Islamabad Pakistan	1997 Astana Kazakhstan

Canberra was formally established in 1913; however it was not until 1927, with the relocation of federal parliament, that it was designated as the capital. The design for Canberra is that of Walter Burley Griffin, and in 1925 the Federal Government gazetted the final 1917 Griffin Plan for Canberra (called 'Statutory Plan for Canberra') so that no changes could be made without the approval of the Commonwealth Parliament. This system of governance remained in effect up until the *Australian Capital Territory (Self-Government) Act 1988* brought self-government to the ACT and planning and development for the Territory now resides primarily with the ACT Government. Provision for the ACT being the National Capital was addressed through the National Capital Plan which is the responsibility of the Commonwealth National Capital Authority under the Planning and Land Management Act (Cwth) 1988 (PALM Act). The PALM Act states *“The object of the Plan is to ensure that Canberra and the Territory are planned and developed in accordance with their national significance.”*

The move to self government of the ACT has created a major conflict between ensuring the city remains iconic, symbolic and a source of pride as the National Capital, seat of government and home of national institutions, and the operational and economic management of a city of some 400,000 people.

The primary source of “Own Source Revenue” for the ACT Government is from land sales for housing and commercial buildings, stamp duty, land tax and rates and payroll tax. Unlike all other States and Territories the ACT does not have any industries or a resource sector to provide income for the development and maintenance of the city and its infrastructure. The ACT cannot raise any revenue from mining royalties, compared with a national average of \$1,000 per person. Hence densification through high rise apartments, increasing the rates of land tax and a higher population are the sole path to increase revenue.

Thus, the PALM Act notwithstanding, since the introduction self government there has been a progressive move from planning regulation and the garden city-bush capital approach, to high rise high density development through urban infill. The ACT Government’s proposed New Planning Framework intended for implementation in 2023 is for 70% of all new housing to be through high density high rise urban infill of existing suburbs. This will change the character and face of the heart of Canberra, in particular the older suburbs adjacent to the Parliamentary Triangle that form part of the Griffin Plan for Canberra.

The Griffin vistas from Mt Ainslie, Black Mountain and Red Hill will become high rise apartment towers with loss of urban forest. The routes considered to be of national significance under the National Capital Plan, namely the Main Avenue and Approach Routes through the heart of the City, and from Parliament House past the Embassy Precinct and the Lodge to Government House, will no longer have the landscape setting and panoramic views of the Brindabella Ranges – but become a drive through office blocks and apartments. The major arterial expressways are proposed to be redeveloped to suburban streets with the loss of expressways for movement across the city.

The ACT Governments proposed New Planning Framework should not be implemented in its current form and should be paused and assessed as to its fitness for purpose in ensuring that Australia’s

National Capital is planned and maintained in accordance with its national significance and is a source of pride and international recognition.

Planned National Capital, Self-Government and Funding Base

The primary source of “Own Source Revenue” for the ACT Government is from land sales for housing and commercial buildings, stamp duty, land tax and rates and payroll tax. The ACT does not have any major industries or a resource sector to draw on, whereas the national annual average revenue from mining royalties is \$1,000 per person. Hence the current funding base for the ACT is highly constrained.

The funding base is not sufficient for major capital investment in new facilities and infrastructure and for maintenance of existing services and infrastructure.

The funding base needs to be addressed and one means of addressing this would be through an adjustment to the GST formula to increase the ACT Government’s share in recognition of the role of being the National Capital and the absence of any other sources of funding.

All of the six planned National Capital Cities built in the 20th Century have remained under the control of the country’s Federal Government and been federally funded – that is except for Canberra.

The longer term consequences of the constrained nature of the funding base for Canberra post self government are now becoming clear. The impact is not only high levels of densification and the loss of a planned National Capital, but also a reduction in the ability to maintain the city and provide for essential infrastructure. General Sector Government Revenue for 2022-23 is budgeted at \$7bn of which 35% is own source taxation, 24% GST and 18% Commonwealth Grants. The allocation of GST is undertaken by the Grants Commission applying essentially a per capita methodology. The total expenses for the ACT in 2021-22 were \$8.3bn, the Net Operating Loss \$1bn and Net Debt \$5bn.

The ACT has a high debt burden and in order to invest in major community, transport and national capital infrastructure requires major reductions in all other areas, and taking on off-budget debt. One example is the need for investment in key public transport infrastructure. The Light Rail Stage 1 in Canberra which went live in 2019 (Canberra City to Gungahlin) cost \$679m and Stage 2 Canberra City to Woden) is estimated to cost \$3bn, with at least a further 3 Stages required. Thus given the ACT’s constrained budget capabilities major infrastructure projects such as public transport require curtailing expenditure in health, education, community infrastructure, maintenance of roads and signage, public spaces, and the removal of litter and graffiti (see Attachment 1).

Thus over the last decade there has been reduced maintenance of the services and infrastructure in Canberra and little capacity for a range of territory-building infrastructure projects, such as community sporting infrastructure, a new national convention centre, a stadium and giving our growing multicultural communities places to gather, celebrate and commune.

As a consequence the National Capital is no longer a source of pride but run down and neglected. There is a need for major capital investment in new facilities and infrastructure and sufficient funding for maintenance to address these shortcomings. This is not possible from the current funding base. One means of addressing this would be through an adjustment to the GST formula to increase the ACT Government’s share in recognition of the role of being the National Capital and the absence of other sources of funding.



Investing in Iconic Landmarks

The iconic Canberra mountain lookouts should have well maintained facilities that are an attraction for tourists and residents and provide for the panoramic views to be enjoyed. For Black Mountain and Red Hill all such facilities have closed over the last decade. The provision and the ongoing operation of café, souvenir and restaurant facilities at these sites should be ensured. The mechanisms to do so could be through the terms of the leases and may include support by Government.

The panoramic views of Walter Burley Griffin's Parliamentary Triangle from Black Mountain, Red Hill and Mt Ainslie have long been a drawcard for tourism and a recreational destination for residents of Canberra. The views of Parliament House on Capitol Hill, Old Parliament House, Anzac Parade, the Australian War Memorial and Lake Burley Griffin are spectacular - but there are no longer any operating tourist or visitor facilities at these locations all having closed over the last decade.

The Black Mountain communications tower (Telstra Tower), which rises 195 m above the summit, opened in 1977 with an observation deck, cafe and souvenir shop, together with a high quality restaurant whose slow rotation provided majestic night-time views. The restaurant closed in 2013 and the café and observation deck in mid 2021 with no date for future operations – this had been attracting 430,000 visitors a year.

The Red Hill Carousel was built in 1963 and provided a cafe and souvenir shop, together with a high quality restaurant with 360° views of the city through panoramic floor to ceiling windows. The restaurant and café closed in 2021 and remains closed encircled by high wire mesh security barriers to prevent access- no longer a drawcard in the Nation's Capital (see Attachment 1).

Black Mountain and Red Hill lookouts should have café, souvenir and restaurant facilities for tourists and residents that operate on an ongoing basis, are well maintained and provide for the enjoyment of the panoramic views. This could be achieved through the leases and could include Government support.

Requirements for the National Institutions

National Institutions that are funded by the Federal Government require:

- Permanent building infrastructure, facilities and associated land with certainty of ongoing indexed funding for their maintenance, operations and capital investment for upgrades.
- Certainty of ongoing indexed funding for business operations, employment of long term staff and the purchase, storage and display of collections.
- Recognition and protection of the cultural and political heritage of iconic national buildings in the Central Area of Canberra and retention of ownership by the Commonwealth. Historic buildings such as the National Archives, John Gorton Building and Treasury Building in Parkes and Geoscience Australia Building in Symonston should not be sold to the private sector. The benefit could be demonstrated through a socio-economic analysis.
- Collaboration across institutions in actively promoting, across the country and internationally, their national cultural, historic and democratic importance.

As the seat of the Government of Australia, Canberra is home to many important institutions of the federal government including defence institutions and social and cultural institutions of national

significance. These institutions are funded by the Federal Government. The Capital is also the location for foreign embassies to Australia; national universities; as well as regional headquarters of many international organisations, not-for-profit groups, lobbying groups and professional associations.

Federal, Defence, Social and Cultural Institutions of the National Capital	
Parliament House	National Museum
Old Parliament House (Museum of Australian Democracy)	National Library
Government House	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)
The Lodge	National Electoral Education Centre
Australian Government Agencies Headquarters	National Botanic Gardens
The High Court of Australia	Royal Military College Duntroon
National Archives of Australia	Australian Defence Force Academy
National Film and Sound Archive	Australian Institute of Sport
Australian War Memorial	Questacon*
Royal Australian Mint	Australian National University*
National Gallery	National Arboretum*
National Portrait Gallery	
<i>*some Federal Government funding</i>	

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.

ATTACHMENT 1

Iconic 1964 Red Hill Lookout Carousel - Café and Restaurant closed since 2021



Red Hill Lookout Panoramic Views from Restaurant and Cafe





Panoramic Views from Black Mountain Tower Revolving Restaurant (5 April 2010) – closed 2013



Panoramic Views from Black Mountain Tower Viewing Platform – closed 2021

23 April 2023

Red Hill Lookout Graffiti adjacent to Lookout Plinth



Faded, Blistering, Dilapidated Street Signs on Arterial Roads – Yarra Glen





*Faded, Blistering, Dilapidated Street Signs to Institutions and Historic Buildings
The Australian Mint, Government House and Calthorpe's House*



