

Inquiry into Canberra's national institutions

I am making a submission to this inquiry as an independent person. I am currently chair of the ACT Tourism Industry Advisory Council and the ACT Tourism Leaders Forum, and have been associated with the national capital's tourism sector since 1988, serving as the Territory's Tourism Commissioner from 1994-2000.

Your terms of reference state in part:

The Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories will inquire into and report on the range of innovative strategies that Canberra's national institutions are using to maintain viability and relevance to sustainably grow their profile, visitor numbers, and revenue.

The essence of my submission focuses on one critical aspect of the management of the Parliamentary Triangle Zone and the institutions within this precinct.

The Federal Government has an absolute responsibility to fund our national institutions, and to the maintenance and growth of Australia's national collections. This is the responsibility a Government has as an obligation to its citizens to preserve the records and stories of a nation's history.

For too long the wellbeing of our national institutions and the Parliamentary Precinct itself has been eroded by successive Governments reducing budgets to the National Capital Authority and imposing efficiency dividends on our most treasured institutions who are the custodians of Australia's most precious historical collections.

The impact of the efficiency dividends on institutions has seen a reduction in curatorial staff, and the reduction of many institutions' outreach and travelling exhibitions programs, denying rural communities across the country with access to these programs.

Secondly a Federal Government has an obligation to ensure each generation of children have the opportunity to view these growing collections as part of their educational journey. This doesn't mean thought the filter of a computer screen, but in seeing for themselves firsthand the documents, records, artefacts, objects, articles and major displays that have shaped our national identity.

The Recommendation:

There needs to be an independent high-level body responsible for the overarching management of the Parliamentary precinct in all its forms. There needs to be a well-considered strategic approach to this most important space, one that takes into full account the national significance of the Parliamentary Triangle and the entire nation's cultural institutions.

My recommendation, as the key component of this submission, is for The Parliament of Australia to establish and appoint an 'Eminent Persons Group' to bring an independent view to the planning and development of the Parliamentary Triangle, and ensure the

national institutions charged with the responsibility of preserving our country's national collections are funded appropriately and expanded for the benefit of future generations.

The 'eminent persons' could be former Prime Ministers', Governors-General or Chief Justices of the High Court of Australia, appointed without political affiliations, and totally independent of day to day political pressures. It must have the influence to protect the Parliamentary precinct to ensure its long-term preservation and in turn the viability and expansion of our national institutions housing the nations collections.

It should provide independent advice to the Parliament on the preservation of this precinct, as a showcase to Australians and the world that this area is of immense importance to the Australian story, the centre of Australian democracy and the home to our most valuable national collections.

I would be happy to appear before the inquiry.



Dr David Marshall AM