

SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AND EXTERNAL TERRITORIES

INQUIRY INTO THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AUTHORITY

PURPOSE

The purpose of this submission is to bring to the attention of the Committee the broader context within which the future role of the NCA should be considered.

CONTEXT

The planning and the development of the National Capital is the result of the following significant and long ranging decisions:

- at the beginning of the 20th C. the initial decision to create a new capital city which led to the selection of the site, the design competition and ultimately to the plan by Walter Burley Griffin;
- some 50 years later in the 1950's the decision to establish the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) to 'plan, develop and construct Canberra as the national capital'. At the time the population of Canberra-Queanbeyan was some 50,000;
- in the 1980's the establishment of self-government for the ACT and the establishment of then NCPA now NCA.

Now at the beginning of the 21st. C. we have the opportunity to make another significant long ranging decision on the future of the National Capital, looking ahead a further 50 years. At the present time the population of Canberra-Queanbeyan is some 350,000.

The broader context within which this decision should be taken is that of:

- the present single settlement pattern of Canberra-Queanbeyan and the regional population north of Canberra;
- the likely combined population in a further 50 years;
- the likely strategic plan of that single settlement and region in 50 years;
- and the environmental challenges that will face the area and which do not observe administrative boundaries.

THE PRESENT & FUTURE SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

Administratively Canberra and Queanbeyan and the adjacent Shires involve separate governments. Canberra involves the Commonwealth Government and the ACT Government. Queanbeyan and the relevant Shires involve the New South Wales Government, the Queanbeyan City Council and the Shire Councils.

We tend to view these areas on separate plans contained by their administrative boundaries. However for the moment lets rub out these boundaries and recognise that

the settlement and its functions are interconnected and interdependent. Further note that Queanbeyan is closer to the Central Area of the National Capital than is Tuggeranong.

In 50 years the population of this combined settlement, even allowing for possible constraints through the availability of water, is likely to be approaching 500,000. Clearly it is vital that this future settlement is subject to a single strategic plan to ensure its efficiency, its economy and its environmental sustainability are optimal.

The future environmental sustainability is critical given the warnings that abound of future problems with water supply, increasing temperatures and the significant issues on energy that could impact on this future settlement pattern and its operation.

Therefore it is essential to see the future development within the ACT and that across the border as development of a single integrated settlement pattern of which Canberra continues the regional centre as well as the National Capital.

CURRENT CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE NCA AND THE ACT PLANNING AUTHORITY

The NCA is currently responsible for 'matters of national significance'. This most obviously is of the Strategic Plan, the Parliamentary Zone, Lake Burley Griffin, Government House, Anzac Parade and the War Memorial. However the NCA also has a very important role in the protection of significant areas of the National Capital Open Space System and other areas.

The ACT Planning Authority (ACTPLA) is basically responsible for the rest of the ACT.

However efficient and effective the consultation between these two authorities they are two separate authorities and if one looks forward 50 years to a settlement pattern with significant development in NSW, the role of all authorities and all governments will require greater consultation.

This future development across the border will be particularly increased if at some time a Sydney-Canberra fast rail is introduced generating a development corridor north east of Canberra.

It is in this context that the future of the NCA should be considered.

SIMPLE PRINCIPLES

The planning, development and urban management of the National Capital and the settlement across the border requires a simple structure of responsibility.

That structure of responsibility must ensure:

- that the total settlement of Canberra-Queanbeyan and region operates within a single agreed strategic plan;
- that 'matters of national significance' are properly planned, promoted and protected by the Commonwealth Government;

- that the ACT Government continues as the major centre of the region providing the significant employment, services and facilities to the region;
- that planning advice to governments be as independent as possible.

POSSIBLE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE FOR THE NEXT 50 YEARS

Now at the beginning of the 21st C. it is appropriate that the Joint Committee considers these matters in the context of the next 50 years while addressing the future role of the NCA.

It is suggested that with respect to a strategic plan:

- the future single settlement pattern of Canberra, Queanbeyan and adjacent Shires be the subject of a single strategic plan;
- that this strategic plan be prepared jointly by the planning authority within the ACT and the planning authority outside the ACT in NSW;
- that this strategic plan be jointly submitted to a properly constituted advisory body consisting of representatives of the Commonwealth Government, the ACT Government, the NSW Government, Queanbeyan City Council and of the Shire Councils;
- that the strategic plan and the recommendations of this advisory body be submitted to the Commonwealth Government and the NSW Government for approval while recognising that neither government ultimately has power over the others domain.

With respect to planning within the ACT:

- that the distinction between ‘matters of national significance’ and the greater part of the ACT be retained but that it not require two separate planning authorities;
- that there be one statutory planning authority for the whole of the ACT and that it be responsible to the Commonwealth Government (through a relevant parliamentary committee or advisory body) for ‘matters of national significance’;
- that the same statutory planning authority be responsible to the ACT Government for all other planning matters within the ACT;
- that the cost of this authority be born by the Commonwealth and the ACT Governments;
- that this statutory planning authority prepare the strategic plan jointly with the NSW planning authority across the border.

With respect to these suggestions for consideration it should be noted that:

- the development of structures and spaces of 'national significance' will continue for the life of the National Capital, however an increasing percentage of work will be matters of maintenance and improvements over the next 50 years;
- meanwhile the development of the Canberra section of the single settlement pattern will increasingly demand and will require upgrading of infrastructure and the urban areas and there will be increasing pressure on limited land;
- further given the likelihood of increased urban development across the border and its integration and dependency on employment opportunities, health and education services, recreation and leisure facilities within the ACT, negotiations with NSW will be a significant factor. In this context it is preferable that there be a single planning authority in the ACT;
- that this planning authority requires statutory powers so that its ability to advise the Commonwealth Government and the ACT Government on what at times may be conflicting requirements, is kept independent and free of fear or favour;
- that this planning authority has the responsibility to participate in the joint exercise to prepare the strategic plan and to bring it to the advisory body;
- and similarly the NSW Government be encouraged to establish a single planning authority for its part of the single settlement pattern and to determine that it participates in the joint exercise to prepare a strategic plan and to bring it to the advisory body.

Geoff Campbell.
11.4.2008