

**The Canberra Region Tourism Leaders Forum (Leaders Forum) is the ACT and region's peak tourism and events industry representative organisation.**

The Leaders Forum is a not-for-profit representative body advocating for the ACT tourism and associated industry sectors in the National Capital and surrounding Canberra Region. The Leaders Forum's focus is on promoting the value of these sectors to the ACT visitor economy and acting as a 'think tank' and policy generator.

The Leaders Forum comprises heads of representatives of the leading tourism, business, sports, arts, cultural, aviation and educational sectors in the ACT, along with representation from Destination Southern New South Wales. A list of Board Members is available in the [appendix](#).

**Executive summary**

This submission sets out the Canberra Region Tourism Leaders Forum's views and proposals for consideration in setting the ACT Government's 2024-25 Budget.

We understand the ACT Government is not well placed to further invest in major capital works, so this submission advocates for initiatives to prepare for significant investment in the future.

The ACT Government has demonstrated its forward thinking and commitment to investment in city growth. The challenge is to match this with action, through the development and implementation of a comprehensive investment strategy.

**The Leaders Forum recommends action across five policy areas:**

1. Becoming a 'global city' with increased focus on development and planning.
2. High class meeting and convention facilities.
3. Investment in tourism marketing.
4. Investment in existing major events.
5. An action plan to address the deterioration of the city centre and surrounding region's appearance.

**The Leaders Forum would like to actively participate in key policy development by leading industry consultation exercises in the development of the 2024-2025 ACT Budget.**



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# 1. An increased focus on development and planning is essential to Canberra becoming a ‘global city’.

In the [2030 Tourism Strategy Discussion Paper](#) ACT Chief Minister, Andrew Barr, outlined three missions for the city. The third is to ‘prioritise the further knowledge-based economic growth – positioning Canberra as a global destination’.

Canberra does not match the ambition of global cities like Singapore. It’s at odds to its Australian counterparts like Adelaide, as Canberra has no overarching vision to become one. Setting this vision and creating the mechanism to achieve it should be a priority alongside improvements to simplifying government to business interactions.

The ACT Government must act to:

- Insist on new developments aspiring to excellence in design.
- Implement a streamlined but rigorous planning system (considering the industry and other stakeholder comments on the recent review of the Planning Act).
- Ensure a more outcome-focussed, collaborative approach to business from ACT Directorates.
- Develop a better decision-making framework for planning and industry development, to encourage businesses to invest in the National Capital.

## RECOMMENDATION 1

Further review the ACT Planning system to raise the quality of developments across the Territory and encourage business investment.

Implement the outcomes of the [Better Regulation Report](#) regarding ‘simplification of government to business interactions’.



## 2. Canberra must create high class meeting and convention facilities to capitalise on the business events sector.

Every ‘global city’ has first class meeting and convention facilities. Canberra has neglected one of the most important symbols of what makes a city a truly international destination:

- The business events sector in Canberra is significantly constrained by a lack of infrastructure.
- The Convention Centre is already operating at pre-pandemic levels, turning away business from Canberra due to lack of size and flexibility.
- The Canberra Convention Bureau has identified \$126 million in business that cannot be held in Canberra due to exhibition, meeting, or gala dinner capacity constraints.

As a ‘needs analysis’ is being undertaken on building a new Convention Centre and Entertainment Pavilion, we urge the Government to also immediately complete a business case in partnership with industry.

The business case will facilitate an approach to the Commonwealth Government for infrastructure funding. The Commonwealth Government will not provide funding without a business case.

### Proposed temporary extension

As an interim measure, the Forum supports the current proposal for a temporary extension to the existing Convention Centre.

- In the absence of a new Centre, the proposed extension offers a short-term solution, one which is modestly priced, cost effective and a useful addition to the existing centre.
- This temporary extension will add capability and capacity to the Centre and allow the NCC to bid for larger and more diverse events and exhibitions more effectively prior to development of a new centre.

## RECOMMENDATION 2

Complete the business case for a new National Convention Centre.

As an interim measure, the Forum supports the current proposal for a temporary extension to the existing Convention Centre.



### 3. Investment in tourism marketing will drive broader economic recovery and growth.

The 2030 ACT Tourism Strategy identified the visitor economy as a ‘critical enabler of the ACT’s broader economic recovery and growth’.

#### Economic goals in the Strategy include:

Reaching \$3.1b in visitor expenditure and employing 19,640 people by 2025.



and

Reaching \$4b in visitor expenditure and employing 22,750 people by 2030.



Modelling also shows international visitor levels to the ACT are expected to rebound to 2019 levels by 2026 and increase by 363,000 visitors per year by 2030.



The Leaders Forum believes these goals will only be realised if there is:

#### 1. Increased and ongoing investment in marketing and promotion.

The intense competition for visitors between the ACT, other states and the Northern Territory must be met with well targeted marketing campaigns. Tourism injected \$3.66 billion in the year to September 2023 into the ACT visitor economy, an increase in investment will only grow that contribution.

Where the ACT’s tourism marketing budget is around \$10 million annually, our closest competitor Tasmania invests \$40 million. Using Tasmania as our benchmark illustrates the current shortcomings in marketing and product development.

#### 2. A focus on developing new events, attractions, and experiences.

Planned scheduling of new and collaborative events increases the opportunities to extend stays and bring in new visitors. This matters because the average stay in the ACT is one day shorter than the national average.

Bringing the ACT up to the national average length of stay could add 40% to domestic overnight spend each year.

### 3. Investment in tourism marketing will drive broader economic recovery and growth.

3. A commitment to excellence in service levels.
4. A more positive approach to enticing investors and developers to choose Canberra above other Australian and international destinations.

How are developers and operators going to secure staff to service planned development with rental accommodation availability and cost the worst in Australia?

#### RECOMMENDATION 3

Increase marketing investment in Visit Canberra to \$40 million annually, matching the Tasmanian Government.

#### Strengthening links with the surrounding Canberra Region

There is a strong collaborative relationship between Southern NSW and the ACT in marketing the Canberra Region. The broader Region's tourism assets complement the ACT's attractions, providing a more diverse and attractive product offering.

The partnerships between ACT Government, Destination Southern NSW, Destination NSW, and the NSW Government are working well. The Leaders Forum strongly supports further capacity building, product development and joint marketing.





## 4. With additional funding, Canberra's major events can reach their full potential.

Floriade, Enlighten, the Multicultural Festival, Design Canberra Festival and the National Folk Festival have experienced limited investment in recent years and have languished as a result.

The ACT Government must act to address:

- **Floriade** needs a permanent site with satellite locations, beyond the current location at Commonwealth Park. The Leaders Forum recommends a review of current budget allocation and increased investment in the event's infrastructure development and running costs. The event is mature but has potential to be an event of national and international significance.
- **The Major Events Fund** has been successful and needs to be reviewed and increased to maximise the economic return to the Territory. In 2022 \$1.5 million was invested - this should be increased to \$3 million and committed to for a minimum of three years.
- **The ACT Events Development Fund** provides a strong incentive for event managers but suffers from a limited budget. As a result, dozens of applications are denied funding each year. This should be reviewed immediately and funding doubled to \$1 million annually. Development of emerging events is a critical and proven generator of tourism growth and increased visitor expenditure.
- **The Cooperative Marketing Fund and Tourism Product Development Fund** encourage attractions and events to apply for grants which are matched by the industry. The Tourism Product Development Fund has \$500,000 to invest in 2024 and this should be expanded to at least \$750,000 to \$1 million per annum and confirmed for three years.
- **Reviewing hiring charges placed on events that lift visitations to the ACT.** For example, the Kanga Cup receives \$30,000 from the Government to assist running the event, but then charges more than this to hire ACT Government facilities. Support must include exemptions from such fees and charges.

To reinvigorate, strategically plan and coordinate events, Canberra would benefit from the appointment of an experienced, industry-leading creative festival director.

### RECOMMENDATION 4

Increase funding for ACT Events.

Appoint an experienced 'Canberra Festival and Events Creative Director' to deliver outstanding experiences for both Canberrans and visitors.



## 5. The amenity of facilities and environment is critical to the visitor experience and needs urgent action.

There has been a noticeable deterioration in the maintenance and upkeep of the city. Canberra should be the showcase of the nation.

The Leaders Forum recommends the City Renewal Authority be provided with sufficient funds to revitalise the appearance of the city centre. The overall cleanliness of the precinct needs attention, pavers are old and present trip hazards and the deteriorating concrete features need attention.

The Garema Place and City Walk upgrade is welcome and will be closely watched as further work is undertaken to beautify this area.

In the broader region, rubbish discarded on major road links, weeds on roadway gutters and fading and peeling directional signs reflects badly on Canberra's National Capital status. This also undermines the pride which the ACT Government is keen to engender among Canberra's growing population.

The ACT Government must act to:

- Remove accumulated rubbish along all major roads leading into and within the ACT, and adequately fund additional on-going service for this.
- Clean graffiti across the city and suburbs; e.g. 300 metres of hoardings on Northbourne Av.
- Urgently replace or repair visitor signs on key city approaches.
- Schedule an annual review and improvement program of priority wayfinding signs by City Services.
- Deal with the growth of weeds along roadways and footpaths.

### RECOMMENDATION 5

Fund the City Renewal Authority to revitalise the city centre's degraded appearance.

Address the rubbish, graffiti, damaged signage and overgrowth on major road links, roadways, and footpaths.

# Appendix 1: 2024 Canberra Region Tourism Leaders Forum Members

MEMBER	POSITION
Dot Barclay	President SKAL ACT & Proprietor Forrest Hotel & Apartments
Sally Barnes	CE National Capital Authority
Vanessa Brettell	Proprietor Café Stepping Up representing Social Enterprises
Michael Capezio	Chair Australian Hotels Association ACT
Greg Harford	CEO Canberra Business Chamber
Rachael Coghlan	Assist Secretary Parliamentary Engagement Parliament House
Richard Everson	General Manager Destination Southern NSW
Tristan Hoffmeister	President National Capital Attractions Association
Jonathan Kobus	Director Visit Canberra
Noel Langdon	Tourism Australia Cultural Signature Series and Sec. CRTLF
David Marshall	Chair Canberra Region Tourism Leaders Forum
Michael Matthews	CEO Canberra Convention Bureau
Michael Milton	Australian Paralympic skier and tourism business owner
Gordon Ramsay	CEO Cultural Facilities Corporation
Dash Rumble	Owner Pilot Restaurant representing the restaurant/cafe sector
Katie Russell	CEO Australian Museum and Galleries Association/Deputy Chair TLF
Emma Shaw	Piquenique Wine representing Canberra District wine industry
Gary Stewart	General Manager, The Canberra Centre
Rob Stefanic	Secretary Parliamentary Services Parliament House/ Chair NCETP
Michael Thomson	Head of Aviation Canberra Airport
Olivia Thornton	CEO Cricket ACT representing sporting associations
Brian Weir	Assistant Prof Tourism Program Canberra Business School UC
Stephen Wood	General Manager National Convention Centre Canberra