

**The Joint Standing Committee on the National
Capital and External Territories**

**Submission by the
Canberra Region Tourism Leaders Forum**

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The Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories Canberra Region Tourism Leaders Forum

Introduction

This submission sets out the Canberra Region Tourism Leaders Forum's views and proposals in response to the Joint Standing Committee's inquiry.

Canberra Region Tourism Leaders Forum Background

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 and representatives of the leading tourism, hospitality, 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 at Appendix 1.

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:

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

This submission will deal with each of the five points above.

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

Our National Institutions are the custodians of the Australian story, reflecting on our Indigenous heritage dating back 60,000 years through to our founding constitutional documents, historical records, and how Australia has developed into one of the most dynamic and desirable countries in the world.

Whilst the Federal Government clearly has an absolute responsibility to fund our national institutions, the executive of the institutions must embrace new innovative ways to maintain, grow and promote Australia's national collections.

The Federal Government has an obligation to its citizens to invest taxpayers' money prudently and to preserve the records and stories of our nation's history. This obligation ensures each generation of Australians has the opportunity to view these growing collections as part of their educational journey and school curriculum. This doesn't mean through the filter of a computer screen, but in seeing for themselves firsthand the documents, records, artefacts, objects, articles and major displays of those things that shape and have shaped our national identity.

Previous governments have imposed budget cuts and efficiency dividends that have eroded these irreplaceable collections. There are signs this Labor Government is serious about growing the National Institution's ability to maintain and expand their permanent collections.

Most importantly it is how the national icons work more collaboratively to achieve significant cost benefits and marketing efficiencies. The commercial driver is more visitations and increased earned revenue from special events supported by effective national and international tourism campaigns in our source markets. This strategy would focus on the school education market and holiday makers and business tourism generally.

The National Institutions need ongoing **guaranteed Federal Government funding** to grow their collections, maintain their current buildings appropriately and expand their footprint to showcase more of their priceless treasures.

Australians are proud of their heritage, and our history must be brought to life through a very innovative approach to how our Institutions tell the Australian Story. This takes financial investment and expertise. The Federal Government has an obligation to provide the funding necessary to achieve this objective.

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

Every Australian should be proud of its National Capital. Unfortunately, some politicians, for purely political purposes, continue to denigrate Canberra and by association the role and importance of the Capital. It has been difficult in the past to engender pride in the Capital if the Prime Minister does not reside at the Lodge. It is most appropriate Australia's current Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, does live in Canberra.

When former Prime Minister John Howard decided to remain in his home city of Sydney, the Dean of the National Capital Diplomatic Community at the time expressed his dismay at this decision. The Dean suggested if it was good enough for Embassies and High Commissions to be located in Canberra, along with their High Commissioners and Ambassadors, it should be good enough for Australia's Prime Minister.

Most countries are proud of their National Capitals. Whilst visiting the USA many Americans will openly encourage you to go to Washington.

Many Australians who visit Canberra on school visits will return with their own children. There is pride in the city, particularly among those who have visited Canberra before. 35% of visitors to Canberra are here to visit friends and relatives, and local Canberrans act as tour guides, reinforcing their pride in the city.

Canberra does not have a high profile internationally as the capital of Australia. This can only be changed by improved destination marketing, compelling world class national attractions and effective and ongoing promotion in our key tourism markets, Visit Canberra's very low marketing budget does not allow for extensive overseas campaigns. Direct international flights into Canberra will however assist in this awareness.

The role of the National Capital Authority (NCA) is vital in assisting to promote Canberra and what it represents as the home of Australian democracy. The Federal Government should devote marketing funding to the NCA to raise the awareness of Canberra as the heart of Australia's Government and all it represents. The NCA takes this role seriously through the programs it delivers at the National Capital Exhibition for free and independent travellers and school visit and the coordination of information and links to all national cultural institutions through its website and soon to be rolled out signage program.

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

The raising of the importance of the National Capital is critical. This responsibility falls heavily on Visit Canberra, the ACT's tourism marketing arm. Every Australian and visitors to our country should be fully aware of the role of Canberra as the home of Australia's Parliament, the judiciary, our defence and security agencies and our national iconic cultural institutions.

The NCA was once resourced with promoting the National Capital to all Australians:

The Australian Capital Territory (Planning and Land Management) Act 1988 (the PALM Act) provides that one of the key functions of the National Capital Authority (NCA) is to ... 'foster an awareness of Canberra as the national capital.'

The NCA outlined its role of promotion of Canberra as the national capital of Australia and provided that it: *...takes a strategic approach to fostering an awareness of the capital through research; by encouraging participation, appreciation and celebration in the national capital; by information and education about the capital; and by promoting the attributes of Canberra that are of national significance.*

A Federal Government Inquiry into the Role of the NCA in 2008 found:

The committee concurs with the general view that the NCA has an important role promoting the national capital icons, which reside primarily within the central national area of Canberra. The committee strongly believes that as assets of the whole nation, the Commonwealth has a deep and abiding responsibility not just to make the National Institutions and icons accessible to all citizens of Australia, but also to promote their presence and seek out engagement in an active way.

The NCA's Corporate Plan outlines its willingness and interest in undertaking this responsibility but it needs to be appropriately funded and resourced.

The NCA is the perfect agency to handle this vital promotional role. Over the past five years the NCA has significantly improved and increased visitor experiences in the National Triangle and on the shore of Lake Burley Griffin, the area it directly manages. It has attracted new partners such as the Aqua Park, Van Gogh Alive and Tuff Nutterz that add vibrancy and fun to a visit to Canberra for locals and visitors alike. It has successfully promoted new events such as Lights on the Lake in January 2023 and a series of concerts and community events at Stage 88.

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

The competition among Australian States and the Northern Territory to secure sporting, cultural and entertainment events is ferocious. The cost of sports rights and upgrades to facilities can be prohibitive. As an example Perth is hosting five 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup games and is investing \$35m to upgrade the Perth rectangular stadium to FIFA standards. The ACT didn't submit a proposal to host any fixtures.

The National Capital has fallen well behind other States and the NT in upgrading and building new facilities to meet the demand of a growing population. Canberra's sports infrastructure has even been overtaken by many regional NSW towns that have far superior facilities. These regional centres are reaping the economic benefits flowing from hosting national sporting events and securing national and international music concerts, and the subsequent lift in tourism.

The Commonwealth has been generous in contributing to venue development in Townsville, Geelong and now in Hobart where the Federal Government has committed \$240m towards the estimated \$750 million cost to build a new stadium to host an AFL team. An additional \$65m was also announced by the Prime Minister to upgrade Launceston's York Park.

It is understood the ACT Government is responsible for the city's sporting, cultural and entertainment venues, but they have not kept pace with what is required to compete with quality infrastructure across the rest of Australia.

It is hoped the Federal Government will seriously consider supporting the construction of a new National Convention Centre in Canberra. This should be the most secure meeting facility in Australia, able to host major international forums and visits by world leaders and delegations.

The National Cultural Institutions have been given a lifeline through the allocation of \$535m from the Federal Government over the next four years to deal with chronic under-funding that has led to staff reductions, cuts to essential works on their permanent collections and the significant deterioration of their buildings.

It is critically important the National Capital should have modern and fit for purpose cultural, sporting, entertainment and meeting facilities. It should also ensure the city centre and its surrounds are reflective of its status as the National Capital. At present it falls well short of this aspiration, and its desire to be considered a 'Global City'.

e) The needs of existing infrastructure and identifying future infrastructure needs to facilitate a), b) and c) above

Not since 2008, when the National Portrait Gallery opened has there been another National institution opened nor commissioned in Canberra.

In The Guardian on 5 January 2022 however, Chief Political Correspondent Sarah Martin, reported on the proposed new Indigenous cultural precinct in Canberra unveiled by the Morrison Government:

The Federal Government has pledged \$316.5m for a new Indigenous cultural precinct in Canberra that would include a long-awaited national resting place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancestral remains.

The proposed centre, to be called Ngurra, which means home, country or place of belonging in different Aboriginal languages, will incorporate a learning and knowledge centre and the relocated Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS). It will be built on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin on Ngunnawal country in Canberra within the parliamentary triangle that includes other prominent National Institutions.

The prime minister, Scott Morrison, said the centre would become a “place of national pride and significance” and hailed its proposed location as demonstrating the “importance and reverence this institution should hold”. “Ngurra is the realisation of a long-held desire to have a home for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories at the heart of our nation,” Morrison said. “It will be a national landmark of the highest order, standing proudly for us all to celebrate, educate, reflect and commemorate.”

A national resting place for ancestral remains was formally recommended to government in 2014 when an advisory committee for Indigenous repatriation completed the national resting place consultation report. Two parliamentary committees have since endorsed the recommendation.

This news was greeted enthusiastically by the ACT business community and tourism sector. We are hopeful the Labor Government will honour the commitment made by the Morrison Government to construct this new National Institution.

There should also be other National Institutions considered as part of a masterplan for the Parliamentary Precinct. When compared with the Smithsonian Institution, the world's largest museum, education, and research complex, our National Capital has a number of the same institutions, with others however that could be replicated in Canberra:

The Smithsonian Museum precinct includes the:

- National Museum of Natural History
- National Air and Space Museum
- National Air and Space Museum's Steven F Udvar-Hazy Centre
- National Museum of American History
- National Zoo
- National Museum of African American History and Culture
- American Art Museum and Renwick Gallery
- Smithsonian Institution Building (The Castle)
- National Museum of the American Indian
- Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden
- National Portrait Gallery
- National Museum of Asian Art
- National Postal Museum
- National Museum of African Art
- Anacostia Community Museum

Canberra's new Museums

Canberra has three small museums currently under development or consideration:

- A new AFP National Police Museum to be located next to the National Museum of Australia on Acton Peninsula
- A new National Spy Museum, its location to be decided (The Tourism Leaders Chair has been personally championing this attraction for a number of years). There are only two others in the world: Washington and Berlin
- A holocaust museum on the grounds of the National Jewish Memorial Centre at 31 National Circuit in Forrest. In January 2021 the Morrison Government committed \$750,000 towards the establishment of this museum and education centre in the nation's capital

Other plans

- Concept plans were drawn up for a new National Archives of Australia (NAA) building many years ago, and a display model of the proposed complex is housed at the current NAA building in East Block.
- The National Film and Sound Archives were discussing a move to the location next to the National Museum of Australian four years ago.
- Discussions were held on the establishment of an 'air and space museum' to be located in front of Questacon 15 years ago!
- National Gallery and National Museum expansion plans should progress.

Washington, DC claims to be one of the most accessible cities in the world, and the city's hospitality industry stands ready to welcome visitors with special needs. The following institutions are promoted as being the most assessable in the USA:

- Hillwood Museum & Gardens
- International Spy Museum
- John F. Kennedy Centre for the Performing Arts
- Library of Congress
- National Gallery of Art
- Shakespeare Theatre Company Harman Centre for the Arts
- Smithsonian Institution
- Washington National Cathedral
- White House
- Woolly Mammoth Theatre

The National Capital should also be a leader in accessibility in all of its cultural institutions.

Support for Light Rail

A significant infrastructure issue with regard to the National Capital Authority is to continue to work with the ACT Government to improve visitor access to and through the Parliamentary Zone.

This includes improvements along Commonwealth Avenue, new pedestrian and cyclist approach routes to Commonwealth Ave Bridge, widening of the footpath over the bridge and support to secure the expansion of the Canberra Light Rail through the Parliamentary Zone and then on to Woden.

These initiatives will provide much needed improvements to public transport and accessibility for tourists and visiting friends and relatives. The success of the Gungahlin to Civic line has resulted in reduced commuter times, fewer cars on the roads, and improved environmental responsibility.

The NCA should continue to collaborate with the ACT Government to ensure the most effective public transport light rail system is delivered, supporting access to National Institutions in the Parliamentary Zone, while upholding the design values of this significant urban space.

Summary and Recommendation

To reiterate, in regard to future infrastructure needs in the National Capital, we make the following recommendation.

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 the Commonwealth 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 a significant resourcing reduction to the NCA pre 2010 and the imposition of efficiency dividends on our most treasured institutions who are the custodians of Australia's most precious historical collections. The lack of vital capital expenditure has seen the deterioration of many of our institution's buildings. Coupled with this issue is the necessary expansion of our institutions to showcase more of their collections, something that has been neglected, apart from the Australian War Memorial.

As mentioned previously 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.

As such we would recommend 'The Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories' strongly supports the restoration of appropriate funding to our National Institutions on an ongoing basis to maintain and grow their permanent collections. We also recommended additional capital works funding be allocated to allow these Institutions to expand their current gallery and exhibition space to allow for greater access to their precious collections for all visitors to enjoy.

For further information

The Leaders Forum would be happy to provide additional information and to be called before the Inquiry.

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Appendix 1

Canberra Region Tourism Leaders Forum 2023 Board Members

Member	Position
Richie Alan	Representing the Traditional Owners
Dot Barclay	President SKAL ACT & Proprietor Forrest Hotel & Apartments
Sally Barnes	CEO National Capital Authority
Vanessa Brettell	Owner Café Stepping Up representing social enterprise
James Hawketts	General Manager Australian Hotels Association ACT
Graham Catt	CEO Canberra Business Chamber
Rachael Coghlan	Assist Sec Parliamentary Engagement Parliament House
Richard Beere	Chair Destination Southern NSW
Russell Jackson	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
Gordon Ramsay	CEO Canberra Museum and Gallery
Dash Rumble	Owner Operator Pilot and Such and Such Restaurants
Katie Russell	CEO Australian Museum and Galleries Association
Emma Shaw	Piquenique Wine representing Canberra District Wines
Gary Stewart	General Manager Canberra Centre
Rob Stefanic	Secretary Parliamentary Services Parliament House/NCETP
Michael Thomson	Head of Aviation Canberra Airport
Olivia Thornton	CEO Cricket ACT representing sporting associations
Marg Wade	Head Canberra Tour Operators Alliance & ATEC Chair
Brian Weir	Lecturer, UC Tourism Program, representing education sector
Stephen Wood	General Manager National Convention Centre