

*Chairman's Remarks at the opening of the Second NCA Public Forum  
29 April 2010*

I welcome you all to this, the second NCA Public Forum. As we said in November, we wanted you to help shape the evening with your suggestions for topics, and the first section tonight will deal with those topics. You may have noted that we have two new Authority members, who sit on our Board. Shelley Penn is an architect from Victoria, who has served as Associate Government Architect for that State, which gives her a particular insight into the design needs of the national capital. Christine Storry has a wide portfolio of experience in architecture and landscape architecture, and has studied the evolution of the national capital in her university work. Peter Core joined us in the middle of last year, as did Gary Rake, our Chief Executive. Like me, they were present at the last Forum. I'll ask Gary Rake to introduce our senior staff who have places on the platform....

Given that my own substantive appointment only began late last year, you will appreciate that we are a new body, and that helps to explain why we are approaching our task in a new way. This public engagement is part of that new approach, as is the consultation protocol that we will talk about later this evening. But most of all, the new approach is a recognition that the national capital is not finished and decided. Yes, it has a new Parliament House, the lake is full, the refurbished Anzac Parade served its purpose again last Sunday, and there is a thriving and productive city. There are those who see that is the end of the Burley Griffin story, as though nothing further needs to be done, as though the Parliament, the Lake and the National Triangle are really what the national capital is — the rest simply being a large inland city.

But there is no reason to suppose that the city of Canberra will stop growing. If it did, that would be the strangest thing, because over the last century it is cities that have been the centre of population growth in all countries, and Australia has not been an exception. I lived in this city when it had 15,000 inhabitants; it now has more than 350,000, a vastly larger number than Walter Burley Griffin ever seemed to have in mind. Australia's own population has grown steadily, and shows no sign of slowing down, let alone of declining. If Australia grows to 35 million people, Canberra will have around 600,000, even if it only grows as fast as the nation as a whole. If Australia reaches 50 million, the population of its national capital will be climbing towards a million.

I make this point to ask you to think about such a future, and what it implies for the national capital. Because one great beauty of the national capital is that we usually are in a position to plan for the future. We do not, as every other city has to do sometimes, have to retrofit a badly needed contemporary structure or service onto an overcrowded and expensive urban setting. Given that the overwhelming likelihood is that our national capital will continue to grow, what do we need to do

now, and in the near future, to ensure that those who come after us are grateful for the foresight and planning that made their national capital as attractive and agreeable as ours?

Let me make it clear that we in the NCA do not have all of the answers, but we think we have at least isolated some of the questions. And they are there tonight also, in the agenda. You will know that most of the easily developed land in the ACT has already been built on, or is being developed right now. If Canberra is to have 500,000 people, let alone a million, where will they all live? We have some long established principles that govern building in the ACT. One of them is the principle of open space as everyone's amenity. A second is that we don't build on hills, ridges or buffers, because that would allow the built form to dominate, and Canberra was designed from the beginning as a city in which there was to be a harmonious integration of the built and the natural environments. A third, one that follows from the second, is that we don't build higher than a certain level.

We would like you to help us open up these principles for contemporary discussion, so that we can continue to build a beautiful national capital. I repeat, we do not have the answers, but we know that we have to talk about our future, and that means looking at what we have done and what we may need to do. The consultation we are thinking of in these areas will take considerable time, and tonight we will only start the process. And it is a process that must include the ACT Government. We think it is time to start, so we are developing a 50-year forward look for the national capital, one that is built around the National Capital Plan, and is revised every ten years. That will be one outcome of the consultation process. Let us start the evening!