



Sarah Norgrove




The Committee Secretary Standing Committee on Inquiry into Billboards

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To the Standing Committee,

I write to you regarding my concerns about the prospects for billboards in Canberra. I also contact you with concerns for the manner in which this Inquiry has been opened to the community. To my knowledge, the Ngunawal people have not been approached for communication and consultation on this issue – this is concerning given the long-standing pattern of dispossession and marginalisation of First Nations peoples. The broader community are also, to my knowledge, largely unaware of the ACT Government’s review of its position on billboards – as a worker in the community sector, I can attest that none of my clients or co-workers understand that this issue has been reopened.

It wasn’t until I was advised about this Inquiry that I realised how peaceful a city we have in Canberra without the interference of large-scale advertising in our mental and physical spaces. Compared to Sydney and Melbourne, which, granted have larger populations, Canberra allows for an appreciation of its beautiful surroundings – the ‘bush’ capital with real access to the open spaces and mountains surrounding it. Many visitors whom I have spoken to come away from the city with an appreciation for how un-metropolis it is like – and feel a sense of peace and cohesion which is often broken up by large scale advertisements in other cities.

My concerns go beyond aesthetic issues. There is evidence to suggest that advertising impacts negatively on mental health. This is part of the reason why larger cities like Sao Paulo and Grenoble have taken a successfully restrictive stance on billboard advertising.

There is also evidence that advertising, particularly on such a grand scale, makes us consume more. Relaxing the laws regarding billboards would likely lead to more of them, meaning an upswing in consumption which is, generally, a blow to a sustainable society for our children. It would also crowd our brains and our children’s brains with more commercial content at a time when we are exposed to more advertising in more mediums than ever before.

I would like to make some recommendations to the committee to which I am happy to vouch for in person at a hearing, namely to:

- extend the terms of reference, including the deadline for submissions, until the wider community, including the Ngunawal people, has been adequately informed and consulted – the 31 August 2017
- Amend existing legislation, or enrich the regulation of existing provisions on billboard and large-scale advertising, and look to include bus stop 'wrap advertising and developers' advertising on buildings and sites, as a statutory restriction
- make provisions regarding the proposal, including the definition of 'billboard', more accessible to the public before closing submission intake.

As mentioned above, I am prepared to attend any hearing in person on request.

Kind regards,

Sarah Norgrove