



Mr Shane Rattenbury MLA  
Speaker  
Legislative Assembly  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Rattenbury

With the impending centenary of Canberra as the national capital in 2012 and the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of self government for the ACT in 2014, there is an understandable focus on Canberra as a symbol of the nation and the centre of a vibrant, successful local economy. The city of Canberra is now a well established community with its own clear identity and a confident political discourse. It is time therefore for Canberra to give full expression to that maturity.

The ACT Branch of the Australian Republican Movement (ARM) is aware that the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure in the ACT Legislative Assembly is currently conducting a review of the Australian Capital Territory (Self-Government) Act 1988. That enquiry will determine and make recommendations on whether the Act should be changed to reflect the experience of nearly 25 years of self government and to ensure that the Act remains relevant to the citizens of the ACT.

Such an enquiry is appropriate, however the ACT Branch of the ARM believes that there are other issues of identity and civic symbolism that fall outside the strict terms of the enquiry but which should at this time be addressed by the body politic of the ACT. It is about these matters, summarised below, that the ARM is therefore writing to all party leaders and the Speaker of the Assembly, to urge concerted attention and change.

### **ACT Coat of Arms**

The current ACT Coat of Arms is an anachronism for today's Canberra. It evokes a different time and ethos to the contemporary Canberra. It is replete with the trappings of English gentry and privilege. It contains representations of swords/mace (crossed), a castle, the crown and the portcullis of the House of Commons. It also features a pair of swans (one black and one white, apparently to represent the white and black races!). It also contains other items/symbols that frankly are not readily discernible or understandable to the average person.

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In brief the Coat of Arms does no justice to the city that Canberra has become. We are the national capital, Australia's bush capital, not a place known for castles and old world trappings. Rather than featuring an image of the House of Commons, it may be more appropriate to feature the graceful Giugola façade of our own national Parliament. Our fauna emblem is the gang gang cockatoo, not the swan. There is no representation of our floral emblem, the native bluebell.

The whole armorial array is therefore irrelevant to the modern Canberra, indeed arguably it demeans what the city and its residents believe, live and aspire to. It is in need of replacement and the impending anniversaries provide the obvious opportunity to rectify this matter.

### **ACT Motto**

The current motto or inscription on the Coat of Arms states: For the Queen, the law and the People. It would be more appropriate, given the republican sentiment of the ACT to simply replace 'the Queen' with 'the City'. It is significant that the population of the ACT voted Yes at the Republic referendum. It is also the case that the vast bulk of current members of the ACT Legislative Assembly, across all parties, are declared republican supporters. Clearly a change to the motto along the lines suggested would more closely accord with the views of the vast bulk of Canberrans. Equally there are probably other better ideas.

### **ACT Flag**

The current flag was one tangible outcome of the self-government process. Its selection through a public poll in the early years of self-rule, produced a flag that was refreshingly different from the standard state flags, which still strongly feature the union jack. At the time of that public plebiscite, there were several models of flags put up for public consideration. Two featured (and were quite similar in design) stylised renderings of the Brindabella mountains. In the end the current design was judged to have scored the largest number of votes, however the two 'Brindabella' versions taken together outpolled that model.

It is time that our flag clearly and uniquely reflected the people of this city and the landscape in which we live. A simple image, rather than one that features a Coat of Arms (even if amended) will better represent and express our city, its setting and our commitment to it. The Northern Territory flag is a good example of the impact and application of design simplicity.

The ACT branch of the ARM believes that the three matters outlined above need updating if they are to serve the purpose for which they are intended. It is important to the relevance and respect of democratic institutions that their symbols and signage are meaningful to the people they represent. By any measure this is not currently the case and, as a community, we can do much better.

We suggest that the reform of these civic symbols could be undertaken as a community engagement project, particularly one that involves the school children of the ACT. A community program that sought suggestions and input from schools and other community groups would enliven the sort of community engagement with government that is the mark of a vibrant democracy and society. It is the sort of thing that Canberra does well.

The ARM therefore encourages the ACT Government to work collaboratively with the Opposition and The ACT Greens, to embark on such a reform project as a fitting element to the review of 25 years of self-government, our status as a 100 year old national capital and a reflection of our well educated, mature polity and community.

We are writing to the Chief Minister, the Opposition Leader and Leader of The ACT Greens in similar terms.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Justin Ryan', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Justin Ryan  
ACT Convenor  
Australian Republican Movement  
5 April 2012