


**Submission to the standing committee into the inquiry on billboards in the ACT**

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To the standing committee into the inquiry into billboards in the ACT,

My name is Liam Lilly, I am the Executive Officer at SEE-Change, a community based organisation focused on building a sustainable and desirable Canberra. I was quite dismayed to hear the news that Andrew Barr was open to reducing the restrictions on billboard advertisements in the ACT.

Canberra is a great city; beautiful people, vibrant communities, and natural bushland. The beauty of Canberra is also enhanced by something it doesn't have: billboards. Advertising in public spaces, and advertising in general, raises enormous ethical questions. Billboards are absent in Canberra due to a 1937 ordinance which prohibited unauthorised signs on Commonwealth Property and we have been fortunate to reap what at the time would have been unintended benefits.

I would like to outline to you the numerous reasons why billboards should continue to be illegal in the ACT, and why further restrictions on public advertising should be enacted.

First of all, the traditional owners of this land have not been consulted on this proposal to further vandalise their land.

Canberra is a forward thinking city, as proved by our 100% renewable energy target, and our carbon neutral target. There are several examples of cities that have listened to public opinion, and have begun to place further restrictions on advertising, not reduce restrictions. Allowing billboards into the ACT would be a big step backwards for our territory. It is already embarrassing enough that the first thing people see as they arrive at Canberra Airport is advertisements for war machines and weapons manufacturers.

As individuals, communities, and the environment are already feeling the ill-effects of the results of advertising, we should have less ads in our city, not more. A lot of people and companies already cheat on our advertising restrictions, with little enforcement of the rules.

Public advertising is an affront to democracy. Citizens of Canberra should be able to traverse through public space without being bombarded with advertisements telling them how inadequate they are. We should have the right to not have public space handed over to corporations in order for them to sell more products.

Proponents of advertising claim that ads offer us more choice (in what we consume); but the choice that is taken away from us by public advertising is whether or not we get to see or hear these ads. If

we turn on the tv, commercial radio, or use commercial internet sites we expect to see ads, and take this into consideration. Advertising in public spaces offers no such choice.

Just because something has the potential to raise revenue (without internalising the costs of its adverse effects) doesn't mean it should be implemented. Personally, I don't want our city to raise funds through advertising.

There is also the pollution to take into account. The visual and in some cases audio pollution from advertising is obvious. These public advertisements also invite vandalism (further visual pollution) which comes at a cost to the government. Furthermore there is the carbon pollution embedded in the greater amount of consumer goods that advertising encourages us to purchase.

Canberra has the biggest ecological footprint in Australia; the main cause which separates us from other Australians is our larger average disposable incomes, which invariably goes directly to consumer products. We don't need more advertising to promote mindless consumerism and convince us to buy more things. As Tyler Durden puts it 'advertising has us chasing cars and clothes, working jobs we hate so we can buy shit we don't need.' Advertising is the fuel of the consumer economy; and it has a direct link to rising material aspirations, environmental destruction, consumer debt, and the number of hours we work.

Advertising companies actively target neurology graduates to work at their firms. Huge amounts have been spent on studying how advertising affects the brain, or to put it bluntly, how advertising can be used to make us buy more stuff. When we are subject to repeated adverts we begin to process the information passively, and therefore the messages contained in ads begin to slip-by our conscious mind, while we still take in the messages (to buy more stuff). Advertising firms will also seek an emotional response from their work, persuading us that we are inadequate failures with unmet needs. Emotive advertising is particularly affective on children.

Advertising also contributes to the deterioration of social capital. Our values can be broken down into those that are intrinsic and those that are extrinsic. When focused on intrinsic values such as concern for others, personal relationships, and the environment, people tend to be more cooperative, empathetic and caring. Advertising, however, explicitly promotes extrinsic values, the pursuit of which undermines our wellbeing. Research shows that messages we receive from our environment affect our values. So when our direct environment is constantly telling us that we're inadequate unless we consume more, it has an adverse effect on our values; they become more extrinsic. Taking this into account, there is no way that more advertising will 'enliven' our public spaces. If you want to enliven public spaces make people feel happy, confident, and part of a community. Encourage, art, music, murals, food sharing; get people to slow down and engage with each other.

Advertising also has adverse effects on the health of individuals. Here are some quotes by two advertising experts: "Advertising at its best is making people feel that, without their product, you're a loser." Nancy Shaley, ad executive.

"Of course advertising makes us unhappy." Jonathan Trimble, ad executive.

Effective advertising makes us feel inadequate, further adding to rates of depression, anxiety, and mental illness.

We're already exposed to 100's of commercial messages per day. Our environment and climate are on the brink of collapse, we work too much, our wellbeing is not improving, and our anxiety levels are through the roof. We don't need more ads in our lives, we need less.

Protect our public space from further visual pollution, and in doing so protect our wellbeing, our community, and our environment. Please, help us move beyond consumption and keep Canberra as the Bush Capital, not the consumption capital.

Recommendations:

- Ban billboards in the ACT
- Implement existing restrictions on public advertising
- Place further bans on private advertising in public space ie bus shelters, buses, trailer advertisements, mobile billboards
- Implement procedures to ensure thorough notification of the Canberra public with instructions on how to lodge a submission
- Extend the of terms of reference until eight weeks after there is full public notification
- Fund and investigate ways to build social capital, and encourage public ownership and participation of the spaces that will surround the new light-rail line.

Finally, I am willing to appear at a public hearing on this matter.

Thank you,

Liam Lilly