

From: Nataschja Budel - [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, 20 June 2017 5:00 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Submission to inquiry into Billboards by Nataschja Budel
Attachments: Inquiry into Billboards, Nataschja Budel 20062017.pdf

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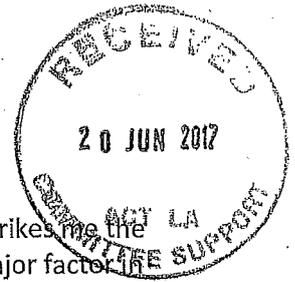
Please find my submission in the attached file.

Kind Regards,
Nataschja Budel



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SUBMISSION NUMBER	93
DATE AUTH'D FOR PUBLICATION	27/6/17

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Inquiry into Billboards

Driving around Canberra is a delight. I recently moved to Canberra and what strikes me the most is the 'stress-free' environment. No billboards alongside the roads is a major factor in this.

Now there are plans for changing the regulations. And the committee is asking Canberrens to submit their point of view on this possible change. Since I value democracy highly, I take it as my duty to respond to your inquiry.

So what do I think about the possibility changing the regulations? And, when I force myself to go beyond my initial response, why do I have this opinion? Going even further, if I think about it a bit more, will it change my point of view?

What do I think of this possibility to change regulations and why do I have this opinion?

I oppose to any change of the regulations. Canberra is named numerous times as the most liveable city of the world (1) and in my point of view, strict regulations concerning outdoor advertisement is a significant contributor to that. In public spaces I have no choice that to be influenced by these advertisements. As I value individual choice over commercial gain it is clear, NO billboards!

Lets think about it a bit more....

'The why' of the proposed change

Let's start with the why. Why would we want to change existing regulations? Searching for information about this why I found some interesting quotes from the Chief Minister.

"Mr Barr said the relaxing on laws would mean that the Government would not have to be the "final arbiter" on what advertisements were shown in the territory. " (2)

So just because the government doesn't want to make decisions, it should be permitted? Lets take this argument and apply it to other subjects, for example gun control. What if tomorrow the government doesn't want to be the final arbiter on the question what guns are and aren't allowed in the ACT. Should we then just relax on gun control laws? In my opinion, unwillingness from the government to take a stand on issues is not a good reason to 'relax on the law'.

"Mr Barr said a review into the policy was overdue as current rules were being "stretched" "There are many examples of outdoor advertising, such as billboards on trucks, utes and motorbikes - both parked and being driven around the city - and large banners draped from buildings, that stretch the current regulations..... "It may be that establishing a small number of designated areas for such outdoor advertising might reduce the proliferation of questionable outdoor advertising material occurring across the city right now." (3)

'Because it is done, it should be permitted', is the message the Chief Minister is sending. When applying this line of reasoning to other areas, it shows the magnitude of this statement.

Drugs: 'Some people are using drugs, so because of that we should permit the use of drugs'.

Drinking and driving: 'Some people are drinking and driving, so because of that we should permit drinking and driving'.

I can't imagine that any reasonable person would agree with this way of thinking, I certainly don't.

The science

Thinking about the proposed change I worry about the effect on wellbeing and the effect on road safety. What does science say about billboards and their effect?

Effect on wellbeing

In my search I found the following article: THE VIEW FROM THE ROAD: IMPLICATIONS FOR STRESS RECOVERY AND IMMUNIZATION

The abstract states:

Overall, it was anticipated that participants who viewed artifact-dominated drives, relative to participants who viewed nature-dominated drives, would show greater autonomic activity indicative of stress (e.g. elevated blood pressure and electrodermal activity), as well as show altered somatic activity indicative of greater negative affect (e.g. elevated electromyographic (EMG) activity over the brow region and decreased activity over the cheek region). In addition, it was expected that participants who viewed nature-dominated drives would experience quicker recovery from stress and greater immunization to subsequent stress than participants who viewed artifact-dominated drives.(4)

In short, there seems to be proof that billboards alongside of the road have a negative effect on wellbeing.

Effect on road safety

Reading a few articles the main conclusion is as follows.

Decades of research on the effects of advertising billboards on road accident rates, driver performance, and driver visual scanning behavior, has produced no conclusive findings. We suggest that road safety researchers should shift their focus and attempt to identify the billboard characteristics that are most distracting to drivers. This line of research may produce concrete guidelines for permissible billboards that would be likely to reduce the influence of the billboards on road safety. (5)

So no conclusive evidence, and a recommendation to further studies. Which raises the question, if we don't know the effect on road safety, why take the risk of putting up billboards?

Digging further I found the website of the OMA, the Outdoor Media Association. On their website It states that their research shows that outdoor media advertisement has a significant impact on consumer spending, 'OOH is high impact'. In short, when we're outside we're highly likely to be influenced by cues and therefore for the impact of advertisements. In a way that we are twice as likely to act than to advertisements inside the home through screen time. (6)

And then I worry, I can choose to engage in advertisements 'on screen'. But when advertisements are outdoors, there is no way in escaping them. I can not NOT see them. What about my rights not to be influenced when I'm walking the streets?

Other inquiries

Are there any other inquiries on this subject and what can we learn from them?

In 2011 the Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs conducted an Inquiry into the regulation of billboard and outdoor advertising commissioned by House of Representatives. In the introduction of the report, Mr Graham Perrett MP Chair states: *"Public spaces are for the use of all members of the community—men, women and children—and the right to enjoy the amenity of a space should not be compromised by an advertiser's array of inappropriate images. This report has listened to the Australian community and, on behalf of the Australian community, it says enough is enough. It is time to reclaim our public spaces."*(7)

This committee talks about reclaiming public spaces from advertisements. The ACT is fortunate enough to not be in a place where we would need to reclaim public spaces. So why would the ACT government want to go the opposite way? The rational thing would be to learn from other states, and avoid making the same mistakes.

Will my research change my point of view?

What were my findings again?

- no valid argument from the government;
- research shows negative effects on wellbeing and possible negative effects on road safety;
- a association that shows through research that people are unconsciously and involuntary affected by advertisement, and twice as much by outdoor advertisement;
- an inquiry that states that 'public spaces need to be reclaimed from advertisement'.

So my answer is clear and simple. I do not change my point of view. I do NOT support a change in regulations. I don't want any billboards and more than that, I expect the government to enforce the current regulations.

Kind regards,
Nataschja Budel

Note: Please remember, I'm not implying I found all relevant research. Doing non-biased research on the effects of the proposed change should be task of the government. So please see the quoted articles as the starting point of a thorough research done by government or committee.

- (1) <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-29531850/>
<https://www.numbeo.com/quality-of-life/rankings.jsp/>
<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/canberra-named-the-best-place-in-the-worldagain-20141006-10r5sp.html>
- (2) <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-01-25/billboard-policy-shake-up-in-canberra/8210290>
- (3) <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/act-may-relax-its-ban-on-billboards-20170125-gtyc7g.html>
- (4) <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S027249449890086X>
- (5) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28535478>
- (6) <http://www.oma.org.au/using-oooh/research-and-insights>
- (7) http://www.aphref.aph.gov.au/_house_committee_spla_outdoor_advertising_report_fullreport.pdf