



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES
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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into a Territory Coat of Arms

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Australian Monarchist League

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Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services,
Legislative Assembly for the ACT
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Dear Committee:

Inquiry into Territory Coat of Arms

Introduction

The Australian Monarchist League is Australia's largest membership-based monarchist organisation. We are active in every State and the Australian Capital Territory (the **ACT**). We are dedicated to upholding Australia's system of constitutional monarchy.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to your consideration of a separate Territory Coat of Arms.

The current arms are the arms of the ACT

We do not agree that the ACT does not have a coat of arms.

We understand that the arms (the **current arms**) the ACT has used for decades were granted in 1928 to the Federal Capital Commissioners (not to the "City of Canberra" as such). It has never been usual to grant coats of arms to Commonwealth Government entities or officers, but arms were granted to the commissioners because the Commission's role was comparable to that of a State or municipality. With the coming of self-government the ACT Government, as the entity with municipal responsibility for the Territory, is the Commission's successor in the most significant and relevant sense.

The principal purpose of a coat of arms is to represent a person or entity. Since self-government, the ACT Government, sporting teams and community groups have used the current arms without causing any confusion as to what the arms represent. By using the arms so frequently and for so long the ACT Government has adopted them as its own. Whatever happened in 1928, the current arms now undeniably represent *de facto* the ACT. Indeed, the arms are possibly our best-recognised symbol. Anyone who sees the arms, whether on the Legislative Assembly building, on a Transport Canberra bus or on government communication, knows that it is the ACT that is being symbolised by the use of the arms. For example, no-one has ever received a speeding ticket with the current arms on the envelope and been confused that he or she had to pay the ticket to the City of Canberra and not to the Australian Capital Territory.

For the purpose of the coat of arms and other symbols, the distinction between the City of Canberra and the Australian Capital Territory is arcane, pedantic and irrelevant. It is not a distinction of which the majority of Territorians, or Australians more generally, would be aware; they certainly would not consider it important. Unlike the ACT, the City of Canberra is not a legal entity, has no officers, performs no functions and does not have a common seal. It has no need to be represented by a symbol such as a coat of arms. The distinction between the Territory and the City is relevant for cartography and town planning and nothing else. The ACT Government itself usually ignores the distinction, as evidenced by the naming of government entities such as Transport Canberra.

If for some reason it were necessary to tidy up the 1928 paper work, this could be done very simply by either the Governor-General or the Legislative Assembly assigning the arms to the Territory. We do not discern any practical benefit in doing this; we mention it simply to show that the 1928 documents in no way warrant the adoption of new arms for the Territory.

The current arms are very appropriate for the ACT

The ACT was created entirely for the purposes of the seat of government of the Commonwealth. The people of the ACT are very proud of this. We are no ordinary community; unlike the States, where government is an incidental matter, we exist to serve the nation or, as the current arms' motto states, we exist "For the Queen, the law and the people" of the Commonwealth.

The design of the current arms represents this purpose well. The crown, mace and sword boast that we host the nation's Parliament and (through her representative the Governor General) its monarch. Our history is also fittingly referenced, with the portcullis reminding us of the Commonwealth Parliament's Westminster inheritance and the white rose representing the Duke of York (later King George VI), who opened the provisional Parliament House.

The royal elements in the arms are particularly important. The Crown is at the heart of our system of constitutional, democratic government. Under the Commonwealth Constitution the Queen is a constituent element of the Commonwealth Parliament. All Commonwealth parliamentarians swear or affirm their loyalty to the Queen, as do our judges, the Australian Defence Force and the Australian Federal Police. The loyalty they express is the loyalty all Australians owe to the Queen of Australia. The Executive Power of the Commonwealth is vested in the Queen; her representative, the Governor General, necessarily resides in the ACT. Commonwealth and ACT criminal prosecutions are brought in the name of the Queen. The Queen is particularly honoured by the Australian Defence Force, who have a prominent and valued presence in the ACT. Under the Self-Government Act the ACT is a "body politic under the Crown".

A new coat of arms is likely to be divisive. It would not be possible to express in a coat of arms everything that each ACT individual and group believes is important. Many people will be disappointed by the new arms; that is inevitable. Were new arms not to refer to the monarchy, the arms would be particularly controversial: in the minds of many people adoption of such arms would be considered to be an ideological attack on our national history and our present constitutional arrangements. If the ACT were to adopt a new coat of arms, the new arms should prominently feature a crown or some other element representing our monarchy.

The cost of changing to a new coat of arms is likely to be controversial, particularly if the justification given for the change depends on anything as ephemeral as the distinction between the City of Canberra and the Australian Capital Territory.

Conclusion

The Australian Monarchist League believes that the current arms, the arms which the ACT has been using for decades, can rightly be considered to be *the* coat of arms of the Australian Capital Territory. They are entirely appropriate to the ACT. There is no reason to adopt a new coat of arms.

Yours sincerely,

MATTHEW R SAIT
Chairman, ACT & District Branch
Australian Monarchist League