



Legislative Assembly for the
Australian Capital Territory

Standing Committee on Environment
and Planning

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the use of controlled activity orders

Submission number: 003

Submitter: Neighbourhood Watch Hawker and Weetangera

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Submission to the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning Inquiry into the Use of Controlled Activity Orders — E-Petition 008-26 and Petition 030-26: Hawker Tennis Centre

Submitted by: Melissa Ricketts.

1. INTRODUCTION

I am a long-term Hawker resident and the Coordinator of Hawker/Weetangera Neighbourhood Watch. I make this submission in support of E-Petition 008-26 and Petition 030-26, which together attracted 1,265 signatures from ACT residents, and call on the ACT Government to terminate the Crown lease for the former Hawker Tennis Centre site.

The site has not operated as a tennis centre for many years and has become a persistent and highly visible concern for local residents. Following a formal complaint lodged by me in December 2025, Access Canberra inspected the site and subsequently issued a Show Cause Notice to make a Controlled Activity Order on 23 February 2026. The notice related to the failure to use the land continuously for more than one year for the purpose for which the lease was granted. Decisive action is now needed to restore the site to safe, active and community-focused sport and recreation use.

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Hawker Tennis Centre was established on Block 9, Section 3, Hawker in 1977. Petition material before the ACT Legislative Assembly states that the centre served the community until 2012. Since then, residents have seen a valued local sporting facility decline into a derelict and largely unused site, with no apparent benefit to the community.

Key concerns raised by residents include:

- Structural decay and broken fencing;
- Unsafe structures and potential hazards on the site;
- Repeated vandalism and graffiti;
- Antisocial behaviour, particularly at night, including resident reports of suspected drug-related activity;
- Rubbish dumping and discarded materials; and
- Lack of visible ongoing use consistent with the lease purpose clause.

The recent petitions demonstrate broad and sustained community concern. E-Petition 008-26 received 507 signatures and Petition 030-26 received 758 signatures, for a combined total of 1,265 signatures. This level of support shows that residents are not simply seeking cosmetic improvements; they are asking for meaningful action to resolve a long-standing failure of use, maintenance and accountability.

2.1 Media Coverage

The condition and future of the site have been reported in local media, including Region Media, *The Canberra Times*, ABC Canberra and 2CC (details provided below). The petitions were tabled in the ACT Legislative Assembly on 25 March 2026.

Region Media (12 February 2026) Coleman, J. *Another Big Splash situation has been quietly unfolding in Belconnen – and locals have had enough.* <https://region.com.au/story/another-big-splash-situation-has-been-quietly-unfolding-in-belconnen/> ([region.com.au in Bing](https://region.com.au/story/another-big-splash-situation-has-been-quietly-unfolding-in-belconnen/))

The Canberra Times (12 February 2026) Doherty, M. *Hawker tennis centre decay sparks community action.* <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/8625942/hawker-tennis-centre-decay-sparks-community-action/> ([canberratimes.com.au in Bing](https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/8625942/hawker-tennis-centre-decay-sparks-community-action/))

The Canberra Times (26 March 2026) Dinjaski, M. *'Big Splash ... but worse': Canberra sports call for urgent action on iconic facilities.* <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/8695104/big-splash-but-worse-canberra-sports-call-for-urgent-action-on-iconic-facilities/> ([canberratimes.com.au in Bing](https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/8695104/big-splash-but-worse-canberra-sports-call-for-urgent-action-on-iconic-facilities/))

ABC Canberra (Radio) *Radio news bulletin covering community concerns and petition regarding the Hawker Tennis Centre.* Broadcast approx. 12 February 2026. (No written article, transcript, or social media post available.)

3. COMMUNITY IMPACT

Through my role as the Coordinator of Hawker/Weetangera Neighbourhood Watch, I receive ongoing feedback from residents about how the condition of the former tennis centre affects daily life in the local area. The concern is not merely that the site is unused; it is that its deterioration has turned a former community asset into a visible and practical burden for nearby residents, pedestrians, families and community groups. For example:

- Parents and carers are concerned that children and young people may enter unsafe structures or damaged areas;
- Nearby residents report unease about late-night activity, fires, vandalism and suspected illicit behaviour around the site;
- Damaged fencing and unsecured access points reduce community confidence that the site is being safely managed; and
- Rubbish dumping, graffiti and overgrown areas affect neighbourhood amenity and reinforce perceptions of abandonment.

The impact is felt in everyday ways. Residents have raised concerns about walking past the site during the day and after dark, the effect on the appearance and reputation of the suburb, and the loss of a local place where people previously gathered for sport, lessons and informal social connection.

This concern is heightened by the adjoining pathway behind the Hawker Bowling Club, a main thoroughfare for students and parents travelling to and from local schools. The condition and perceived safety of the former tennis centre therefore affect not only nearby residents, but also families and school students who regularly pass the site as part of their daily routine.

The site's condition also places a burden on residents, who are left to report hazards, raise concerns and advocate for action on land that should be maintained and used consistently with its lease purpose. Over time, this has contributed to a loss of confidence that long-term non-compliance will be addressed promptly.

The community's message is clear: the land should once again serve a safe, active and genuinely public purpose.

4. GOVERNANCE AND COMPLIANCE FAILURES

ACT Government material identifies the relevant Crown lease purpose, at clause 3(c), as use of the premises only for “a tennis centre, the sale and hire of tennis equipment and subsidiary thereto a single unit private dwelling house.” The Government response states that the site has not been used for that purpose and that Access Canberra treated the matter as a controlled activity under Schedule 4, Item 10 of the *Planning Act 2023*. This is a clear compliance issue with direct consequences for the surrounding community.

Key governance concerns include:

- Insufficient visible resolution of community concerns about safety, maintenance and site condition;
- Failure to restore the facility to a functioning sport and recreation use despite its original community purpose; and
- The need for transparent and timely enforcement action where Crown lease conditions have not being met for a prolonged period of time.

The Committee’s terms of reference also identify other ACT sites, including Big Splash, Gungahlin Cinema, Phillip Swimming Pool and Ice-Skating Centre and other sites subject to controlled activity orders. This places the Hawker Tennis Centre within a broader and important policy question: whether Crown lease conditions are being enforced effectively, consistently and early enough to protect local assets from long-term neglect or land banking.

The community expects consistent, transparent and timely enforcement of Crown lease conditions across ACT Government-leased sites.

5. REQUESTED ACTIONS

I respectfully request that the Committee recommend the following practical and enforceable actions in relation to the Hawker Tennis Centre site:

1. Take decisive lease compliance action

Recommend that the ACT Government use available statutory mechanisms, including termination of the Crown lease if warranted, in response to prolonged and documented non-use of the site for its intended Crown lease purpose.

2. Secure the site for public-interest use

Ensure that future management or stewardship of the site is directed to community need, public benefit and the original intent of providing local sport and recreation facilities.

3. Commit the land to sport and recreation

Commit the site to genuine sport and recreation use and guard against future redevelopment that would permanently remove this community purpose.

4. Conduct Genuine Community Consultation

Engage residents, sporting groups, youth organisations and other local groups in determining the future design and purpose of the site, so that any future use reflects local needs rather than a decision made without meaningful community input.

5. Prioritise Safe, Accessible, Year-Round Recreation

Support a future facility that provides:

- Youth sport
- Social recreation
- Community wellbeing
- Safe public space
- Inclusive access for older residents and families.

The community is asking for the land to be restored to a safe, active and accessible role that reflects the needs of Hawker and the surrounding area.

A restored sport and recreation facility would also provide young people with a constructive place to gather, participate and direct their energy into positive activities. Safe, accessible and locally available recreation can support youth wellbeing, strengthen community connection and reduce the conditions that may contribute to antisocial behaviour.

6. CONCLUSION

The petitions represent a clear, reasonable and sustained community voice. The former Hawker Tennis Centre has been neglected for too long, and the consequences of prolonged inaction are visible to residents, damaging to neighbourhood confidence and inconsistent with the public purpose of the lease.

Canberra residents have a reasonable expectation that the elected government will act when a leased community asset is left unused, unsafe and inconsistent with its stated purpose. Supporting these petitions would demonstrate that long-term community concerns are being heard and that Crown lease obligations matter.

The Committee has an opportunity to recommend practical, timely and transparent action that restores the Hawker Tennis Centre land to safe, meaningful and public-interest use. I urge the Committee to support the petitions and recommend action that gives people confidence that Crown lease conditions will be enforced and community assets will be protected.

I would welcome the opportunity to provide further information or appear at a public hearing if required.

Yours sincerely,

Melissa Ricketts