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Mr Hamish Finlay
Secretary
Standing Committee on Economic Development and Tourism

Email: committees@parliament.act.gov.au

Dear Mr Finlay

Canberra Airport Submission: Inquiry into a New Convention Centre for Canberra

Thank you for providing Canberra Airport with the opportunity to present a submission to the Inquiry into a New Convention Centre for Canberra.

1. Preamble

Canberra Airport supports the opportunity of an appropriate new Convention Centre for Canberra on the basis of Canberra being able to compete with other Australian cities with established and appropriate Convention Centres such as Cairns, the Gold Coast and Adelaide.

The current Canberra Convention Centre is inadequate and challenged in terms of its small size. The facility is not in keeping with developing Canberra with infrastructure befitting Canberra's role as the national capital and an emerging international city.

2. Response to Terms of Reference

a) The level of demand from business and clients for a new centre and the likely economic impact of a new Centre on Canberra

Cities around the world are in competition with one another, as are nations, to capture export trade, including inbound tourism and business visitation.

Successful convention centres that are able to compete for national and international events have a far-reaching catalytic impact in that their economic activity covers many other industrial sectors, from tourism, hotels, transport and the local based demand for goods and services generally. These catalytic impacts have far wider economic activities occurring beyond the conference facility, including jobs growth and prosperity for Canberra and the broader region.

Canberra Airport has not undertaken research in regard to the level of demand for a new Convention Centre, however the question must be asked: What will be the value of the missed opportunities and the disadvantage to Canberra and the broader region of not having a competitive Convention Centre now and into the future?

b) Whether the "Australia Forum" proposal has the support of stakeholders

Canberra Airport supports the concept of auditoria and convention facilities proposed by the "Australia Forum", however Canberra Airport believes the building should have a development cost cap of $400 million so as to be affordable.

The Canberra and broader regional community would be well-served by the ACT and Commonwealth Governments, together with the private sector, joining forces to finalise the planning and construction of a facility that is modern, purpose built and flexible in nature. A new Convention Centre would need to meet the requirements of a well-considered and functional brief that delivers on the future needs of business and government events through ample exhibition halls, ballrooms, theatrettes, plenary halls and breakout spaces such as:

- Plenary Hall – with flexible seating for 2,500
- Exhibition Halls – 4 halls of 2,000sq m for 3-4 meetings of 600-7800 patrons
- Ballroom – divisible and flexible and able to host 2,000 guests for dinner
- Meeting Rooms – various sizes to meet the educational break-out sessions of 2,500 patrons in sizes from 20-1800 patrons
- Theatrettes – to accommodate 250-500 patrons
- Welcome Reception spaces for meetings
- Business Active Frontages – comprising food and beverage and retail opportunities optimising the street frontage for seven day operations, not constrained for convention days only.
- Public Car Parking – open for operating seven days per week servicing a vibrant and growing Civic

c) The amount of work required to take the proposal to an investment ready stage

Canberra Airport believes that nothing will happen about a new Convention Centre unless the planning work is rigorously undertaken and an affordable cost-plan cap is set in the order of $400 million.

d) The appropriate source of funding (federal, territory or private sector) for each stage of the project

As noted in 2(b), Canberra Airport believes that the ACT and Commonwealth Governments and the private sector should investigate and determine the appropriate sources of funding and development rights.

The ACT Government's portion of funding could, in lieu of cash, be an offset by the conditional granting of development rights on land nearby. For instance, residential development rights to seed the "City to the Lake" project may be a viable approach for the ACT Government to limit the seed capital required from it to a maximum of $100 million of alternate site development.

e) The level of priority that should be given to a new Convention Centre in relation to other infrastructure projects in the ACT

Canberra Airport would support the development of a new Convention Centre as a high priority. The opportunity of including a new Convention Centre in a "City Deal" with the Commonwealth Government should also be considered a high priority.

Canberra Airport wishes the Standing Committee well in completing this Inquiry.

Please contact Noel McCann, Director of Planning and Government Relations (6275 2255 or n.mccann@canberraairport.com.au) should there be any questions in relation to this submission.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Byron
Managing Director