



Uri Pierre Burmester

19 June 2017

Inquiry into Billboards | Standing Committee on Planning and Urban Renewal

To the Committee Secretary,

I would like to express my opposition to the relaxation of laws governing billboard advertising in the ACT. I am also concerned with the intrusive nature of the advertising currently owned by local businesses which circumvents the existing billboard laws by 'piggybacking' on existing infrastructure such as busses and bus shelters.

My reasons for opposing more lax advertising laws are as follows:

1. They are unnecessary given the other modes of advertising available
2. Intrusive advertising is anathema to the 'garden city' vision proposed by Walter Burley Griffin and maintained by Canberrans today
3. Canberra has been mostly free from intrusive advertising in its lifetime and the environment of the city has greatly benefitted from the uncommercial atmosphere. Changing the laws which have made this possible sets a bad precedent.

Unnecessary Advertising:

Advertising on billboards and bus shelters is a mostly irrelevant exercise in the modern world. Ads are welcome on the television screen both directly and indirectly through corporate sponsorship, through direct marketing in the post and through pre-roll and pop up ads online and in email. Ads are found on fliers, on the sides of shopping bags and in newspapers.

To suggest that there aren't existing avenues for companies to promote their products is demonstrably ridiculous. And in a world that is rapidly shifting towards online media, where ads can be tailored to consumers via their browsing habits and IP address, covering the skyline with a big "BUY ME" sign is just an exercise in futility.

Garden City:

Among the Australian Capital cities, Canberra is unique in that so much pain has been taken to preserve its natural beauty. The 1975 court case over the proposed construction of Telstra Tower (Johnson v Kent) is evidence that the Canberra community cares deeply about maintaining a city that blends into its natural surroundings. Similarly, height restrictions exist on Canberra buildings to ensure that the skyline is not compromised by the presence of industry. An interruption of the natural skyline is exactly the threat posed by gaudy billboard advertising.

A Bad Precedent:

Lastly, it's important to remember that the enforcement of existing billboard laws is not ironclad as it is, which has allowed pseudo-billboards so spring up on the sides of buses and bus shelters. Advertisers have not kept to the spirit of the law in buying an advertisement on the side of the bus and arguing that it is billboard-sized but not a billboard.

Recommendations:

I would recommend an expansion of the definition of billboard to include (for example) bus- and bus-shelter-based advertisements. I would support legislation that further limits the permissible size of advertisements in urban areas and forbids them in suburban areas.

Thank you for your consideration,

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