

Attn: The Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Inquiry into Billboards

Michael Priest



Hello,

I'd like to make a comment on the proposal to possibly relax billboard advertising guidelines to permit more billboards in public spaces in the ACT.

I think it's a terrible idea.

I can think of no place in the world where the areas aesthetics or community fabric are improved by the presence of billboards. They are dominated by multinationals with no tie to the area they are visually intruding on, and despite their large size rarely present more than a fleeting sound bite of information. They are informationally and economically inefficient and intrusive, an unwanted elbowing into your attention of a commercial entity in what should be public, not privately-controlled space.

Australia already seems to show far more incidental advertising than virtually every other country I've been to, and that includes the US, the home of the billboard. The ACT should be proud of the fact that it's a relative oasis in this sea of unwanted, intrusive commerciality, and strive to keep it this way or better for as long as possible.

I am sure you'll receive this quote from English artist Banksy in quite a few submissions, but here it is again:

"People are taking the piss out of you everyday. They butt into your life, take a cheap shot at you and then disappear. They leer at you from tall buildings and make you feel small. They make flippant comments from buses that imply you're not sexy enough and that all the fun is happening somewhere else. They are on TV making your girlfriend feel inadequate. They have access to the most sophisticated technology the world has ever seen and they bully you with it. They are The Advertisers and they are laughing at you.

"You, however, are forbidden to touch them. Trademarks, intellectual property rights and copyright law mean advertisers can say what they like wherever they like with total impunity.

"Fuck that. Any advert in a public space that gives you no choice whether you see it or not is yours. It's yours to take, re-arrange and re-use. You can do whatever you like with it. Asking for permission is like asking to keep a rock someone just threw at your head.

"You owe the companies nothing. Less than nothing, you especially don't owe them any courtesy. They owe you. They have re-arranged the world to put themselves in front of you. They never asked for your permission, don't even start asking for theirs."
— banksy

I'm not about to start vandalising billboards, but I do agree with his sentiments and analysis of the motives and methods of advertisers.

Please, look beyond what slight economic gain Council might make and consider the longer term liveability for the city.

Regards,

Michael Priest

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