



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES  
Ms Suzanne Orr MLA (Chair), Miss Candice Burch MLA (Deputy Chair), Mr James Milligan MLA

## Submission Cover Sheet

### Inquiry into a Territory Coat of Arms

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**Submission to**

**Inquiry by the Standing Committee on Environment, Transport and  
City Services**

**into**

**Territory Coat of Arms**

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The Committee has sought specific input from the ACT community on the following two questions.

### **Should there be an ACT Coat of Arms?**

The answer to this question is a clear Yes. The reasons for that response are as follows:

The ACT is the only jurisdiction in Australia that does not have its own Coat of Arms. At Self-Government the ACT Government appropriated to itself the Coat of Arms of the city of Canberra. This was an understandable step as it seemed an easy solution to a matter that was not high on the priorities at that time. The emphasis was on more practical and mechanical aspects of the move to Self-Government. This error however has locked Canberra and the ACT into a set of symbols that are clearly at odds with the values of the community and the environment in which we live.

Furthermore, the move then led to a bastardised version of the Canberra Coat of Arms being incorporated into the design of an ACT flag that was a very disappointing outcome.

The appropriation of the Canberra Coat of Arms by the ACT Government is contrary to accepted heraldic protocol and procedures. Heritage experts in the ACT have consistently pointed to the inappropriateness of the use of that Coat of Arms by the ACT Government.

It is equally clear that the values and temper of the ACT community, especially as expressed in the Republican referendum, do not align with the English, monarchical and heraldic symbolism that overwhelms the Canberra Coat of Arms. Consultations undertaken by this group in the past seven years have revealed a consistent surprise and dissatisfaction with the symbolism used in the Canberra Coat of Arms. Most often people would say that they had never really focussed on the symbolism that is used but once they do look at it and understand its content, there is a strong view expressed that it is virtually irrelevant and out of step with the character of the city and certainly the ACT more broadly. "We should do something about this" is the typical sentiment.

Consultations with various community groups have revealed that the simplest and most appropriate way to rectify this matter is to move to introduce and adopt a fresh design for an ACT Coat of Arms, especially as there is currently a lack of one. This would ensure that the strong feelings that the Naval Association have expressed in relation to the Canberra Coat of Arms would be respected and not disturbed.

For these reasons, but particularly to ensure that we have symbolism in our civic affairs that is relevant and meaningful to people, it is important that a Coat of Arms for the ACT is designed and adopted which speaks to and of this place and its people. It is especially important that the Territory designated as Australia's national capital has symbolism that is identifiably Australian. This is a necessary and important expression of democracy.

### **What symbols might be included in the design of the ACT Coat of Arms?**

The fundamental principle to be used in determining the content and symbols of an ACT Coat of Arms is that: ***It should speak of and to People and Place.*** A further expansion of his statement is that the design of an ACT Coat of Arms should express the creativity, vitality and values of the ACT community. Simplicity and good design principles should also distinguish the content and format of an ACT Coat of Arms.

In advancing consideration of the design, it is important that it express in design terms the locus of the ACT as the setting in which the community lives and give expression to its values as a modern

and progressive Australian community. This means that it reflects the fact that the ACT is a unique part of Australia positioned close to the coast and the mountains. This also includes the spirit, occupation and care of this land by the Ngunnawal people for more than 60,000 years. Today's Australia and especially the ACT, is a community that wants to recognise and honour Aboriginal prior ownership of this land and their custody of it over millennia.

Each of these considerations highlights the inadequacies and deficiencies of the current Canberra Coat of Arms as reflective of Australia and today's Australians living in the ACT. This is therefore an opportunity that we are compelled to take.

There will be a range of views in the ACT community as to the type of symbols that could be used in an ACT Coat of Arms. That is as it should be. It is the task of the Committee and it is to be hoped that the input of submissions from across the community will start to give clarity to this task. Some suggestions follow:

As residents of the ACT we live our lives against the background of the Brindabella Range. This is the context of our lives. We love those hills and the way they frame our city and our lives. They are the backdrop to our lives and in part define us. It would be distinctive and appropriate for the Brindabella Range to feature as a dominant element of the design of a Coat of Arms, just as it is in our natural world.

The ACT's Aboriginal communities would have some suggestions for symbolism and imagery that would appropriately express their part in our overall story and their close identity with the land of this place in which we all live.

Other emblems, as currently and recently adopted by and for the ACT, such as the floral emblem, could be appropriate features in the design. That doesn't mean that all other symbols must be incorporated in the Coat of Arms design, but it is imperative that it be authentically and unmistakably Australian and represent our part of the country.

It is the view of this group that heraldic principles and design rules should not predetermine the shape or outline of the Coat of Arms. It is appropriate that these be part of the considerations, but they should not 'drive' the design process. The design brief should ensure that there is appropriate scope for the ACT design and creative community to respond to the challenge of producing a final design that elegantly reflects the place and people of the ACT.

Although the Canberra Coat of Arms has a motto, it is not considered essential that any design of an ACT Coat of Arms has such a feature. Were it is thought essential that it include a motto, then something which expresses the supremacy of the people could be appropriate.

## **Conclusion**

In advocating for an ACT Coat of Arms over a long period of time, this informal group has produced several iterations of a document entitled: Pathway to an ACT Coat of Arms. The most recent version of this document has been provided separately to the Committee at an earlier stage. It is now submitted as an attachment to this submission. The document outlines options for proceeding to design a Coat of Arms which would engage with the ACT community and especially the very talented ACT Design and Craft community.

Signed

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Terry Fewtrell

## Pathway to a Coat of Arms for the ACT

### The Issue

The Canberra Coat of Arms has little connection or relevance to the city and community that we have become in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With the exception of the two swans, its imagery and symbolism have no discernible connection to Australia or Canberra's unique environmental setting. Apart from representations of sword/mace which have some parliamentary links, it includes a castle, two crowns and a portcullis, along with other items that are not readily discernible to the average person. Ostensibly it contains a gum tree, but this is largely unrecognisable and effectively hidden behind other heraldic symbols.

The 1928 Canberra Coat of Arms was commissioned by the then Federal Capital Commission, initially in response to a request from the Royal Australian Navy, for the city to have a Coat of Arms that could be used on a soon to be commissioned warship that would bear the city's name. One of the first uses of the Coat of Arms, following its granting by the College of Arms in England, was on HMAS Canberra. The designer, CR Wylie, is quoted at the time as saying he used largely European and British symbols and avoided local fauna and flora as these 'lacked dignity'.

At best the Canberra Coat of Arms is a lost opportunity. At worst it arguably demeans the city and community we have created. It speaks neither of us nor to us. Proposals for changing the Coat of Arms have emerged in the past, most notably at the time of the Centenary of Canberra. There is an obvious and strong case to replace the existing Coat of Arms with one that is more inclusive and has relevance and meaning for the whole ACT community.

### Relevant Current Factors

The recently concluded Legislative Assembly Inquiry into a possible mammal emblem for the ACT has again prompted a focus on the inappropriateness of many of the current ACT symbols, particularly the Canberra Coat of Arms and the ACT flag, which features a 'bastardised' version of the Coat of Arms. The inquiry has served to highlight the importance of having symbols that are relevant to the geography, history and people of the ACT. In recommending the adoption of a mammal emblem, the committee also highlighted the potential for the ACT Government to consider the design of a Coat of Arms for the ACT and the possible redesign of the ACT flag. The recommendations were endorsed by all members of the committee, drawn from all parties represented in the Assembly.

Recent ACT Labor Party Conferences have seen consistent interest and support for changes to ACT symbols to ensure they are relevant to and reflect the values of the broader Canberra community. The 2018 Conference passed the following motion, which is now incorporated in the ACT Labor Platform: *"Support replacing the existing coat of arms with insignia that more accurately reflects our contemporary identity and cultural diversity."* Such initiatives would ensure that there is greater alignment with the ACT Government's **CBR** promotion of Canberra as a vibrant, modern Australian city and community.

The adoption of authentically Australian symbolism for an ACT Coat of Arms and the ACT flag, would be a bold and confident statement that the ACT community fully embraces its own sense of geographic place, in the foothills of the Brindabellas, with a long history of Aboriginal presence and care of the land, its fauna and flora. It is from this frame that our symbols most powerfully emerge. Such symbolism would also align with the demonstrated republican temper of the ACT community.

### **A proposed Way Forward to an ACT Coat of Arms**

Historically Canberra/ACT symbols are a mixture of inappropriate imagery, inappropriately used. This applies to both the English heraldic symbolism of the Canberra Coat of Arms and the Australian Commonwealth livery, which although relevant to Canberra's national capital role, fails to respect the distinctiveness of the ACT as a jurisdiction and community. The Canberra Coat of Arms has been wrongly used as a de-facto ACT Coat of Arms and was clumsily incorporated into the ACT flag in a crude simplified form, as part of a political compromise at the time of self-government.

The historical oversight of not having an ACT specific Coat of Arms provides an opportunity to achieve an outcome on these matters that addresses the inappropriate imagery of the Canberra Coat of Arms. It would also allow that Coat of Arms to remain and be used in more tightly prescribed circumstances, consistent with the original intent. This would also mitigate concerns of those who link the Canberra Coat of Arms with HMAS Canberra which subsequently sank in World War II, with the loss of 84 lives. See Attachment A for background.

An ACT Coat of Arms would mark the developments that have occurred in the 100+ years since the jurisdiction of the ACT was inaugurated. Development of a specific Coat of Arms for the ACT would result in symbolism that is more inclusive of all citizens of the Territory. It would also provide the opportunity remove from the ACT flag its current English/heraldic symbolism. Such initiatives would be markers of our growth and development as both city and Territory.

Development of a specific ACT Coat of Arms would involve issues of design and authorisation, along with a great opportunity to engage the vibrant design capabilities in the ACT and the wider community. It would be appropriate that there is a suitable mechanism for the ACT community to have some form of input into the design process. This could be undertaken in several ways. It would also be important for the process to be driven effectively by the Chief Minister's Department, as occurred with the NT Coat of Arms project.

The NT Coat of Arms was developed in the period leading to self-government (1978) and formally approved by the College of Arms in England. Since the passage of the Australia Act (1986) it is understood that the College of Arms no longer has jurisdiction in Australia, although neither is there an Heraldic Authority to perform such a role in Australia. The matter of the formal authorisation of any ACT Coat of Arms is therefore unclear in technical terms, however, it is understood that there would be scope for the ACT to 'assume' its own arms without reference to any other Heraldic Authority. Accordingly, the ACT Legislative

Assembly could simply adopt an agreed design for an ACT Coat of Arms by passing a resolution by simple majority of the Assembly.

The adoption of an ACT Coat of Arms, links logically to the revision of the design of the ACT flag. To make one change and not the other would make little sense. The designer of the flag has long expressed his dissatisfaction and disappointment with its current content and style, resulting as it did from a process outside of his control. The adoption of a flag which features a simple stylised version of the floral emblem, as advocated by the original designer, would certainly ensure that all of Canberra's symbols are indigenous to the place they represent. Adoption of a new flag, in administrative terms, simply requires the passing of an appropriate motion by the ACT Legislative Assembly.

### **Next Steps to an ACT Coat of Arms – An indicative Program**

The steps involved in achieving a Coat of Arms for the ACT will take some time, perhaps 12 to 15 months. It is important that the process is not rushed and is clearly defined, ideally with overall responsibility vested in one person or functional area, with timelines and thresholds. It would also be beneficial that the design task be undertaken by a designer(s) familiar with the protocol and requirements (including the scope for creative expression) of heraldic design principles. This may involve providing education and guidelines for designers.

The government may wish to confirm that it is not bound to comply with the strict design rules of the London College of Arms or to seek approval of the design from that organisation. It may be desirable, however, to follow broadly the established guidelines for the design of coats of arms. For the purpose of outlining a possible timeline below, it has been assumed that the ACT Assembly would have authority to authorise and adopt the preferred design. It is suggested the process involve three stages.

#### Stage 1 - Initial Announcement

1. An announcement could be made of the intent to proceed with the development and adoption of a specific Coat of Arms for the ACT. This could occur at the time the Government responds formally to the recent report of the ACT Assembly Committee that inquired into the adoption of a mammal emblem for the ACT (November/December 2018);
2. The announcement would also include the intention to establish an Expert Panel to review designs and oversee the process (Ideally 3 or 5 members);
3. At the time of the announcement the public could be invited to suggest/submit ideas or concepts appropriate for inclusion in an ACT Coat of Arms. A period of public comment/input would follow, during which ACT citizens could submit ideas via a website set up to facilitate the project. It would also be possible to support this process by using other ACT Government website platforms. The process could also be augmented by encouraging local media to facilitate public discussion and ideas generation. The ACT Education system could encourage schoolchildren to suggest ideas during the first

month of the 2019 school year;

### Stage Two – Selection

4. Following the period of public input (say until end February 2019), a draft design brief would be prepared. This could be released for public exposure in March 2019. The design brief could include an outline of principles/guidelines for designers.
5. A final design brief would need to be settled for release in May 2019;

The method of obtaining a suitable design can be achieved by either a closed or a more open process. There are positives and negatives for each and examples are outlined below.

**A Closed Process** – The government undertakes a search for design service providers who meet broad requirements relating to knowledge/experience/expertise in heraldic style design tasks. The design brief would be released to one or more pre-qualified design artists requiring the development and submission of design sketches, which would be reviewed collaboratively with the Expert Panel. This stage of the process could involve identification of one or more preferred design sketch outlines, to be taken to final design development stage and submitted to the Panel (September 2019);

**An Open Process** – This process would give greater recognition and opportunity to the ACT's highly skilled professional design community, including the dedicated graphic design school at UC and the nationally recognised Canberra School of Art at the ANU.

While some design practitioners may be unfamiliar with 'heraldic design principles', it may be unfair to exclude them because of this lack of knowledge, prompting criticism from local designers and artists. To suggest that 'heraldic design principles' are a secret knowledge does not make sense in the modern world. Professional designers are trained to work to a strict design brief – it just needs to be clear.

The Expert Panel could produce a document and organise a seminar for registered participants to provide something of an introduction to heraldic design principles and an analysis of coats of arms currently in use in Australia and around the world. It would be expected that most educated designers would 'get it' quickly.

A larger number of interested designers would then be able to submit designs to the Expert Panel (August 2019). The designers of one or more preferred design sketch outlines would then be invited to submit final developed designs to the Panel (September 2019);

6. The panel would then review the final design submissions and select/endorse the preferred design for the ACT Coat of Arms. Briefing for senior Government and Opposition party representatives (October 2019);

### Stage Three – Implementation

7. Public Release of selected design for ACT Coat of Arms (late October 2019);
8. Adoption by Legislative Assembly Resolution (November/December 2019); and
9. Progressive application and implementation of the ACT Coat of Arms, consistent with prudent budget and administrative provisions (January 2020 and on-going). An appropriate first installation of the ACT Coat of Arms would be as the major design feature envisaged for the entrance to the new ACT Supreme Court complex.

An outline of key talking points and rebuttal of arguments against the proposed changes is at Attachment B.

Terry Fewtrell

David Headon

19 November 2018

## Background to Coat of Arms change initiatives

Proposals to revise or change the Canberra Coat of Arms and replace it with more meaningful symbolism have occurred sporadically during the past 10 years. Consultations with relevant interest groups across the ACT have revealed the following:

- The Coat of Arms of the City of Canberra is just that. It is not the Coat of Arms of the ACT. According to representatives of the Heraldry and Genealogy Society of Canberra (HAGSOC), the Canberra arms were designed and granted to the city based on it being the home of the Federal Parliament. It is neither appropriate nor technically correct for those arms to be used as applying to or representing the ACT. The fact that there is no Coat of Arms for the ACT makes it unique among Australian jurisdictions in not having a dedicated Coat of Arms. The HAGSOC acknowledges the Canberra Coat of Arms is not appropriate to apply to the broader city that Canberra has become and supports the development of a specific Coat of Arms for the ACT.
- The Naval Association of the ACT is strongly supportive of the Canberra Coat of Arms and would resist any move to remove or change it. There is understandable sensitivity around any perception of downgrading the Canberra Coat of Arms, given the 84 lives that were lost in the sinking of the HMAS Canberra. Development of an ACT Coat of Arms provides an opportunity to manage and to some degree mitigate that sensitivity. It is usual for there to be separate coats of arms for a jurisdiction and for the capital city of that jurisdiction.
- The Northern Territory applied for and was granted a Coat of Arms on its establishment as a self-governing jurisdiction in 1978. This project was the initiative of the first Chief Minister, Paul Everingham. The NT Coat of Arms uses distinctively Australian, especially indigenous symbolism, to convey a powerful statement of identity, based on expressing people and place. The NT arms were designed by noted Australian artist and author Robert Ingpen, based on a brief developed by NT authorities. Robert Ingpen has expressed interest in a possible ACT Coat of Arms project.
- Consultations undertaken in recent years by a group of Canberra citizens advocating for a change in the Coat of Arms, have revealed an encouraging level of interest in the issue. When the nature of the current Canberra Coat of Arms is drawn to people's attention there is a general sense of surprise and a view that we can and should do better. When made aware of the NT Coat of Arms that view strengthens to one that is more emphatic about rectifying the situation.
- The construction of the new ACT Supreme Court building has again aroused interest in the Coat of Arms issue, with provision for a major rendering of a Coat of Arms at the entrance to the building. Advocates for a change in the Coat of Arms had earlier suggested that in the absence of a new Coat of Arms, it would be preferable that the site for the feature in the new building be left vacant, and the commissioning of any artistic representation of a Coat of Arms postponed to a later time when an ACT Coat of Arms has been adopted.

## Key Talking Points

1. The ACT needs its own Coat of Arms with appropriate imagery and symbols to reflect the community that we have become.
2. Much of the imagery in current Canberra symbols is English, not Australian. This is an anomaly that needs to be corrected.
3. This is about our own identity, which is and should be seen to be essentially Australian.
4. The existing Coat of Arms is for the City of Canberra – not the ACT. All other States and Territories have separate coats of arms for its major city and the jurisdiction.
5. This is about us writing our own history – we are a vibrant community, confident in its future and connected to its place and history.
6. The ACT has a expert design community that would respond well to this unique challenge.

### Common Arguments against the Change and Rebuttals

Argument: There is no need to change – we already have a Coat of Arms.

Rebuttal: The city of Canberra has a Coat of Arms, which while historic, does not contain symbols appropriate to or representative of the wider ACT, its people, Aboriginal history, geography, fauna and flora.

Argument: We have so little history – we have to keep what we have.

Rebuttal: We are a young community and need to write our own history. A new Coat of Arms would not diminish the history that we already have.

Argument: To make a change would be a disrespectful to the servicemen who died on HMAS Canberra in World War II.

Rebuttal: This is not disrespectful. The Coat of Arms for the city Canberra will remain.