

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

***THE ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL AND
FINANCIAL IMPACT OF GRAFFITI IN
CANBERRA AND THE APPROPRIATE MEANS OF
PREVENTING GRAFFITI DAMAGE***

REPORT NO.9

OF THE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT

MARCH 1996

Resolution of appointment of the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment:

[that] a Standing Committee on Planning and Environment [be established] to examine matters related to planning, land management, transport, commercial development, industrial and residential development, infrastructure and capital works, science and technology, the environment, conservation, heritage, energy and resources...

[And that the committee] inquire into and report on matters referred to [it] by the Assembly or matters that are considered by the committee to be of concern to the community.

Minutes of Proceedings (Third Assembly) No.1 - 9 March 1995, amended 22 June 1995

Terms of reference for the inquiry that is the subject of this report:

To inquire into and report on the environmental, social and financial impact of graffiti in the A.C.T. and the appropriate means of preventing graffiti damage, having regard to (i) education programs (ii) policing aspects (iii) clean-up arrangements, and (iv) any other related matters.

Minutes of Proceedings (Standing Committee on Planning and Environment) - 1 August 1995

Committee Membership

Mr Michael Moore MLA (Chair)
Mr Wayne Berry MLA (Deputy Chair)
Ms Lucy Horodny MLA
Mr Trevor Kaine MLA

Secretary: Mr Rod Power

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LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS (with relevant paragraph number)

The committee recommends that:

- *the Government identify appropriate areas for the practise and display of street art (para 73)*
- *the Government provide funding for at least one youth arts outreach officer, one of whose duties would be to facilitate the legal expression of street art (para 76)*
- *the Government's Public Arts Program provide for input from young people and/or people interested in undertaking lawful street art (para 80)*
- *the Government develop a coordinated approach and policy to the use of urban public spaces, and make a statement to the Assembly on this matter (para 93)*
- *the ACT Government report to the Legislative Assembly on the operation of its graffiti clean-up squad (para 60)*
- *the Government direct its graffiti clean-up squad to also remove inappropriate billboards and posters and the Government provide space for billboards in appropriate public places such as shopping centres (para 91)*
- *the Government advise the Assembly of the results of its review of whether to change the legislation covering graffiti vandalism and whether to introduce a voluntary code of conduct for the display of spray paints (para 62)*
- *the ACT Government broaden its graffiti strategy to include a strong educative element (para 65)*

Inquiry into the impact of graffiti

- *the Department of Education and Training establish suitable procedures to enable it to estimate the cost of graffiti vandalism in schools (para 69)*
- *the Department of Education and Training liaise with school principals and School Boards about their experience with graffiti in order to sharpen an appropriate educative response (para 70)*
- *penalties for defacing directional signs be reviewed in order to stress the danger to the public of this sort of behaviour (para 82)*
- *the Administration raise directional signs that have been defaced by graffiti (para 84)*
- *the Administration's Capital Works Group review the use of appropriate building materials at the design and construction phase to take account of the possibility of graffiti damage, and examine the wider use of appropriate plantings on public assets to reduce the incidence of graffiti (para 88).*

THE ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL IMPACT OF GRAFFITI IN CANBERRA AND THE APPROPRIATE MEANS OF PREVENTING GRAFFITI DAMAGE

Background

1. On 1 August 1995 the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment resolved to 'inquire into and report on the environmental, social and financial impact of graffiti in the A.C.T. and the appropriate means of preventing graffiti damage, having regard to (i) education programs (ii) policing aspects (iii) clean-up arrangements, and (iv) any other related matters'.
2. The committee advertised its inquiry and called for public comment to be lodged by 1 September 1995. Thirty submissions were received by the committee, all of which were authorised for publication. The submissions are listed in Appendix One of this report.
3. The committee held public hearings on 5 September 1995 and 20 October 1995. The persons and organisations who appeared at these public hearings are listed in Appendix Two.

Evidence

4. In order to provide an overview of the range of opinion on the graffiti issue, the committee provides the following summary of all submissions. The summaries are indicative only and are not meant to be exhaustive. They are organised in alphabetical order. Quotations from the written submissions are not attributed; quotations from the Hansard transcript of proceedings of the public hearings are footnoted.
5. The **ACT Administration** submitted details of the Government's new strategy to address graffiti vandalism. The Government's strategy was announced on 15 August 1995 by the Minister for Urban Services (Mr Tony De Domenico MLA). The committee was told that:

The components of the strategy are a very quick clean-up to deal with the problem of graffiti in public places... [involving] the organisation of a graffiti squad of cleaners... who have been trained... in special removal techniques using solvents, occupational health and safety issues and so forth. In addition to that, we are looking at preventative measures in the longer term... [for example] anti-graffiti coatings on some of our public place assets and also some sacrificial coatings...

In addition to that, we are looking at a community art program...

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There also has been the development of a register of graffiti sites as part of our inspectorate function. The intention there is to try to keep an accurate record of what are the most likely sites to be attacked by graffiti, but also a photographic record of the tags that are used and to try to see whether there is some commonality there and provide some support for the Police. It also then allows us to put in place a proper prioritisation program for the removal of graffiti and to start to track out data on the extent of graffiti in Canberra and the location of graffiti...

In addition to that, we have been asked, together with the Attorney-General's Department community safety unit and so on, to look at the legislation associated with graffiti vandalism ... At the moment graffiti vandalism is a criminal offence, which limits the degree of discretion in terms of penalty application. The potential is there to look at it more in terms of a civil offence where there could be a broader range of discretionary options available, including the use of community service obligations or scales of fines and, most importantly, for the Government's point of view, introducing as soon as possible a voluntary code of conduct for the display of those sorts of items [such as spray cans] that are used in graffiti vandalism. A similar code of conduct is in place in Western Australia, and South Australia is in the process of implementing one. We are looking at preparing such a code in consultation with retailers within Canberra.

[Also we are examining the possibility of] a clean-up day in Canberra, to try to involve the community a bit more and again promote the sense that graffiti is everyone's problem.¹

6. A press release from the Minister for Urban Services (dated 15 August 1995) stated that 'at least \$100,000 was spent on removing graffiti last financial year'. The committee asked the Administration official responsible for coordinating the graffiti campaign when the Government's new strategy will be evaluated for its success. The reply was that the operation of the graffiti cleaners would be assessed by the end of 1995. The committee noted that the Minister had announced that the new strategy would be assessed over a twelve month period.²

7. Further to evidence presented by the ACT Administration, **the ACT Department of Education and Training** provided 'some general views', acknowledging its role 'in providing educational programs that reinforce the

¹ *Transcript* pp1-2 (Ms Pegrum, then General Manager of City Operations, Department of Urban Services, ACT Administration)

² *Transcript* p10; also, letter to the committee from Mr Tony De Domenico MLA (dated 31 August 1995)

responsibilities students have as citizens in a community to care for public property and to respect the rights of others’.

8. **The ACT Council of Social Service** lodged a submission in consultation with the Youth Accommodation Group and the Canberra Community Arts Front. The submission recommended that areas be set aside for young people to express themselves artistically ‘similar to areas where skateboarding is allowed’. The submission argued against ‘strong penalties for graffiti’.

9. In relation to education programs, the Council of Social Service distinguished between ‘education programs for young people who are caught’ and a more general education program. The ACTCOSS representatives commented about the latter:

An education program which involves young people in understanding why some members of the community perhaps find that offensive is an important part of that education program, but so an education program which acknowledges that graffiti and community arts can also be an important expression of people’s views.³

10. **An anonymous submission** advocated tougher penalties for graffiti artists, along with monetary rewards for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those doing graffiti.

11. **BCR Ceramic Panels** submitted that it produced ‘graffiti proof building panels for interior and exterior applications’ and that Government agencies tend not to stipulate the use of this product at the construction phase (due to its slightly higher costs than graffiti-prone surfaces), relying instead on combating graffiti and vandalism through maintenance budgets. The company observed:

While it is clearly necessary for government funded bodies to provide facilities at the best price, they are in fact wasting large amounts of public money in the long-term by opting for graffiti removal which is not cost effective, rather than prevention.

When viewed over a period of (say) ten to twenty years, the cost benefits of a significantly reduced maintenance program are obvious.

12. **Canberrans Against Graffiti (Mr T Bull)** stated that ‘the vast majority of graffiti in Canberra is tagging’ and that ‘the main graffiti on the [road] signs is that of tags,’ which reflects the wish of some young people ‘to mark their territory, mainly on gang boundaries - suburb boundaries and places like that’. Mr Bull recommended that road signs receiving graffiti be raised further above

³ *Transcript* p40 (Ms Morgan, Co-Director of ACTCOSS)

the ground, which would make it harder for them to be accessed as well as improving visibility to motorists.⁴

13. Mr Bull commented that the graffiti problem in Canberra is perceived to be 'a lot worse for the given amount of graffiti than in other cities because of the design of the city' - in that building development on Canberra's main streets 'is not very dense' and the most prominent structures adjacent to the road are bus shelters and street signs.⁵

14. Mr Bull thought that 'a voluntary code would be completely useless, a waste of time'. Also, he thought that banning the purchase of spray paint by under-18 year olds 'is not going to reduce graffiti by a great deal' in that the cans will still come into the possession of those wanting to graffiti.⁶

15. With reference to making graffiti vandalism a civil offence rather than a criminal offence, Mr Bull saw no merit in the proposal:

With a criminal offence, the judge has the authority to give out whatever penalty is relevant according to the law, and we are aware that can include community service. With regard to penalties, we think it would be a good idea if those who are caught are given community service, but the community service to be clearing up graffiti. We think that would be a good disincentive for graffiti artists. Moving it to a civil offence seems only to bring pity on the perpetrator. We do not think that is a good idea.⁷

16. Two **Canberra high school students** stated that, with reference to community murals:

we should bring in an artist and do the artwork in the main problem areas. People would respect that... most kids like [fantasy drawings]. I do not think people would graffiti over them. Tourists would not mind elderly people would not mind...

Murals and artwork with people in them always get graffitied. That cannot be avoided... something strange [such as fantasy drawings] would be a better idea.⁸

⁴ *Transcript* p27 and p25

⁵ *Transcript* p27

⁶ *Transcript* p28

⁷ *Transcript* p29

⁸ *Transcript* pp19-20 (Ms Eastwood and Ms Fraser)

17. The students considered that education programs would not be effective with youngsters unless they were ‘backed up with something positive’, such as:

there could be a competition between the schools. Each school could submit one entry on a large canvas or piece of white material. Between them, the schools could plan an education program so that kids could learn about the positive side and become involved in something like competitions rather than doing graffiti on walls.⁹

18. With reference to tagging, the students noted that setting aside specific sites for taggers might be a good idea but the sites ‘would have to be in an obvious spot because [taggers] want everyone to see their work’.¹⁰

19. The students suggested that ‘it would be really good if we could cover the [Belconnen] skate[board] park in writing, because that is just cement. It is patchy with graffiti at the moment. I reckon it would look really good all painted over’.¹¹

20. **Mr Flack** submitted that the number of road signs should be reduced (for example, by placing street signs on light poles wherever practicable) and their height raised; that no bus shelters be built in suburban streets; that textas and spray cans be banned ‘in all ACT schools and on the streets’; that public buildings have fewer flat surfaces and more ‘round columns and rough corrugated surfaces’; and that shopping centres should be made responsible for cleaning up their area (including the removal of graffiti).

21. **Ms Foskey** submitted that ‘graffiti should be seen as a symptom and an effect, rather than targeted alone’. She considers that young people should be asked ‘how they feel about graffiti... and about what kinds of facilities they need’. They should be involved in planning suitable facilities and greater liaison between ‘business people, parents, teachers [and] young people’ be encouraged ‘to work out reasons for the practice and devise strategies to prevent it (and/or legitimise it in approved areas)’. Ms Foskey cited an instance where graffiti and vandalism within a shopping centre decreased markedly when a youth worker was hired ‘to act as a link between young people and the management’, providing advice and support services to the young and helping them to participate in ‘youth-oriented projects such as graffiti art’.

22. **S Gadsby** recommended greater focus on Biblical teachings.

⁹ *Transcript* p24 (Ms Fraser)

¹⁰ *Transcript* p22 (Ms Fraser)

¹¹ *Transcript* p23 (Ms Fraser)

23. **Mr Gilchrist** recommended that it be:

an offence to carry on the person, or in a container, or in a vehicle, a container of aerosol spray paint between sunset and sunrise without lawful excuse; an offence to be in possession of such a container while within two meters of a bus stop or interchange without lawful excuse; an offence for any person or corporation or institution to give, lend or sell such a container to any person under the age of 18 without the written consent of a parent or guardian; a penalty for such an offence... [to be] a fine of not more than \$1,000 and/or the requirement to perform an appropriate number of hours of community service under supervision, preferably in the removal of graffiti and/or litter; the parent or guardian of the offender... [should] pay an appropriate portion of any fine so imposed; a person providing information leading to the apprehension and conviction of such an offender [shall receive as a reward] half the amount of any fine...

24. **Gungahlin Community Council Inc.** recommended that:

The public should be educated [about] the cost involved in the removal of graffiti and schools should provide information and educational material to students (perhaps when they are still in primary school).

Police should be given powers to fine graffiti artists/vandals on the spot (or escort them home in order to collect fine from parents). Fines should be \$200 upwards. Police should respond more actively to 'tip offs'.

Persons who are sentenced to complete hours of community work as punishment could be used to assist in the clean up of graffiti. Also graffiti vandals, if caught, should perform this task.

Community volunteers should also be able to assist in the clean up, through community councils.

Parents should be held responsible for the behaviour of their children, if they are under the age of 18 years.

25. **Ms Hallinswood** submitted that youngsters need 'space, space, space' in which to paint, meaning that large areas should be set aside for this purpose with children, parents, public servants and others encouraged to look and even award prizes. Ms Hallinswood noted that she greatly enjoyed scribbling 'in the years after 1919 to today 1995'!

26. **Ms Hosking** submitted that:

ugly, costly graffiti... is an affront to our senses and a disgraceful waste of taxpayer's money; it is evidence of a community with a wasteful, careless attitude and a Legislature which has allowed petty (however costly)

destruction to get out of control without proper accountability.

27. Ms Hosking considers there is a need 'to re-educate public figures such as politicians, police, journalists, TV interviewers and teachers to disassociate graffiti with street art and to actively discourage its acceptance'. She commented that 'police appear not to be interested in the problem', perhaps because 'they are somewhat frustrated that the courts do not deal adequately with offenders so it is a waste of police effort to do anything'. She recommended that people caught doing graffiti be 'issued with "on-the-spot" fines or court notices' and that 'vandals ... be dealt with under civil rather criminal law'. Contractors should clean up graffiti 'as well as teams of people doing community service'; community organisations should also 'be encouraged and assisted with cleaning agents and/or paint'.

28. **Lake Tuggeranong College Lakewatch Team** want to 'raise public awareness of the issue of aquatic vandalism which includes graffiti around the perimeter of Lake Tuggeranong'.

29. **J Maher** recommends that graffiti-prone walls 'be front-planted with hardy, low maintenance shrubs' including 'controllable wall creepers'. The same treatment should be applied to 'the planter boxes in Petrie Plaza and City Walk etc' which, when they had spill-over plants in the past, were not so affected by graffiti. M/s Maher suggests that 'the external walls of the concrete bus shelters located throughout the city' could be similarly treated. In short, s/he suggests 'a programmed "green" attack on graffiti'.

30. **A Moore** submitted that graffiti offenders should be made to do 'public painting' (such as of public housing, roads, flag poles, kerbs) under strictly supervised work orders.

31. **Pathways Information Service for Young People (Mr D Matthews, Coordinator) and the Community Information and Referral Service (Mr A Stankevicius, Acting Director)** stated that the graffiti issue 'has become a problem for the ACT community, and some action is needed to reduce' its incidence.¹² They saw the graffiti problem as 'a manifestation of a series of other social problems', especially relating 'to people's isolation'. They stated that 'young people are bored' and have 'a lack of recreational opportunities' particularly in Tuggeranong and Gungahlin.¹³ They believed that a "big stick" approach is not the one to take but, rather, that there is a need to draw together the many 'urban spaces issues' (such as skateboarding, in-line skates, public

¹² Transcript p49 (Mr Matthews, Coordinator of Pathways Information Service for Young People)

¹³ Transcript p50 (Mr Matthews)

gatherings, move-on powers) into ‘some form of policy’ - perhaps called a “Young people in urban spaces policy”:

We see that that would involve departments such as the Department of Education and Training, the Department of Urban Services, the Attorney-General’s Department and the Chief Minister’s Department.¹⁴

32. Mr Matthews called for funding of ‘skateboarding and in-line skate facilities in Civic and Tuggeranong’. He called for greater consultation with young people about the issues and stated:

We think that the coordination of some form of community-based youth forum to look at these and other issues would be appropriate. We believe that the funding of a youth arts outreach worker would be an effective solution... [and would assist in encouraging] graffiti artists in directions in which we would like them to go, as opposed to graffitiing on street signs and other places that may pose a safety risk to the community.¹⁵

33. **Ms Riding** called for education of children ‘from an early age to take pride in their environment’. She queried whether spray cans are really necessary. She suggested making areas available to graffiti painters, while using surveillance cameras in high risk areas. Those caught doing graffiti should be made to clean it off and ‘fines should be levelled at the parents also’.

34. **Rivett Primary School Board** noted that ‘the use of paint from spray cans and permanent ink textas causes us particular difficulties as our building was constructed with porous, white bricks [and] every little mark shows and is very difficult and expensive to remove’. The Board stated that ‘each year we spend thousands of dollars in Minor Maintenance money and staff hours investigating incidents of graffiti at the school and the removal of graffiti’.

35. The Rivett School Board stated it has tried to reduce graffiti vandalism by purchasing ‘high quality security lighting’, ‘sealing frequently abused areas to reduce the effect of graffiti’, asking police to undertake ‘more out of schools hours surveillance’ and ‘painting large brick areas (eg play ball walls) with patterns’. The Board has found that the “typical offender” is:

male, 14-16 years old, lives in a nearby suburb, attends school rarely or is a behaviour problem when at school, is ‘known to police’ and knows the police can do little if they are caught.

¹⁴ *Transcript* p51 (Mr Matthews)

¹⁵ *Transcript* p52 (Mr Matthews)

36. The Rivett School Board saw education as the ‘major means of overcoming the problem’:

We need to change the attitude and values of both young children and the older members of families. To support such [an education] program we would also recommend: (i) greater resourcing of literacy and numeracy in primary schools to help raise the self-esteem of children and reduce their need to ‘act out’ and become destructive within the community; and (ii) restrictions on the sale of paint and permanent textas would help reduce the opportunity and incidents of graffiti.

37. **Mr Scamp** recommends that people doing graffiti be encouraged to modify their behaviour, perhaps by appropriate advertisements featuring individuals he or she can relate to.

38. **C Stewart** opposed the provision of “creative outlets” to spray can graffitiists, instead recommending ‘heavy fines and/or community work for offenders’. He/she recommended ‘outlawing minors having possession of spray cans (unless for good reasons)’. In regard to road signs, he/she suggests they be raised in height and very quickly cleaned up.

39. **Mr Summers** ‘has worked with young people on the street doing various art programs over the last five years’.¹⁶ He feels that he has gained ‘the skills to actually translate’ what young people doing graffiti are saying. He sees graffiti as ‘a language... a non-violent language... [and] a symptom of a much larger and much more important problem’. This problem is the alienation of a significant section of young people, who feel ‘that their opportunities are very limited, and they are very frustrated’. In effect, these young people ‘are saying: “We want jobs. We want opportunities. We want stimulation”’.¹⁷

40. Mr Summers expressed concern at the incidence of youth suicide in Canberra, and called for ‘an organisation which is specifically designed to increase the opportunity for expression by young people’ - requiring ‘a lot of staff on the street’ (perhaps three or four in each major town centre).¹⁸ These staff would identify, and assist, the kids ‘who do not fit into the school system’. Their aim would be ‘to create projects and opportunities for those people to rebuild their self-esteem’.¹⁹ He suggests also that Canberra’s ‘fairly

¹⁶ Transcript p58 (Mr Summers)

¹⁷ Transcript p59

¹⁸ Transcript p63

¹⁹ Transcript p67

bland' architecture should be replaced by 'something that is stimulating, interesting, challenging or controversial'.²⁰

41. In addition, Mr Summers considers that 'we need to make school much more flexible' with greater opportunity to do diverse subjects. Further, Mr Summers considers that the parenting role should be greatly encouraged - and suggests that the federal government offer, say, \$200 per week to a parent who chooses to stay at home. This would demonstrate that the home-care role was valued and would have the supplementary benefit of increasing job opportunities for young people (in that 'nearly all of the recent increase in employment has been young mothers taking jobs' in order to help 'pay the mortgage' or pay for 'a few little extras').²¹

42. In terms of the murals he has prepared (averaging about 150 young people at a time)²², Mr Summers noted that:

the type of project I have been doing is so rare, is so minimally funded and lacks so much support that it is very hard for me to maintain the energy and the enthusiasm on a full-time basis.²³

43. **Mr J Tait** suggested that the height of road signs should be raised 'so that they are inaccessible' to taggers.²⁴ Also, he suggested that a protective film be put on some road signs and that some sites should be identified as 'legal graffiti sites'.²⁵ If necessary, Mr Tait thought that the community might support 'a levy on the rates' to provide sufficient funds to enable graffiti to be cleaned up properly.²⁶ He called for wider education programs and improved reporting of graffiti to police. He considered that some sites should be set aside for legal graffiti.

44. The **Torrens Primary School Board** advised that 'graffiti has not in any way interfered with the normal educational program in the school' and there were just four incidents of graffiti in 1994 and two in 1995.

45. **Dr Ward** submitted that 'the measures announced by the ACT Government recently, while steps in the right direction, run the risk of being seen by graffiti vandals as a challenge rather than a deterrent'. He recommended that:

²⁰ *Transcript p67*

²¹ *Transcript p65*

²² *Transcript p61*

²³ *Transcript p66*

²⁴ *Transcript p46*

²⁵ *Transcript p47*

²⁶ *Transcript p46*

Inquiry into the impact of graffiti

Specific anti-graffiti legislation be enacted providing for minimum compulsory custodial sentences, plus monetary penalties comprising the cost of the graffiti clean up and a substantial fine or deterrent proportions; and the name(s) of apprehended graffiti vandals be published, irrespective of age.

46. **Ms Wilson** advocates an education program in schools to tell young people the opportunity cost of cleaning up graffiti (in terms of, for example, building a new sporting facility), harsher penalties especially for defacing street signs, imposing an obligation on juveniles caught doing graffiti ‘to repair the damage they’ve caused’, and restricting the sale of spray cans to minors.

47. The **Woden Youth Centre (Ms K Sattler, Coordinator)** stated that community murals such as the snake pit mural and the mural at the Woden bus interchange are not graffitied because:

it is respected... by the subculture... involved in the design and [drawing]... It is seen as incredibly uncool to attack a piece like that... [as it has] a very large group ownership...²⁷

48. **Ms Sattler** stated that:

the tagging stuff is associated partly with gang activity, but it is also partly an apprenticeship system... [where learners practise]. It is actually quite hard to do spray painting. There is a lot of guessing and distance and perspective and all of that sort of stuff. They practise on any available spaces until they think they have finally got it down to a point where they can get up and mix it with the rest of the artists and do a piece on a wall. The artists will not let just anybody in. There is a lot of ownership around - who does what work where....

Most of the [taggers] move out of that fairly quickly. They do not stay with that sort of activity very long. I think raising [the height of] signs would probably be a great idea because most the them will be too short to reach them...

[Establishing] designated areas [to tag] is going to shift the emphasis away. It is also going to say to these young people, “Yes, you have a right to express yourself”. It is a very recognised avenue for their subculture to express themselves. No amount of banning or proscribing is going to stop them from doing it... I would suggest that the punitive approach has very little effect on the group. If you try to steer them towards creating more kudos attached to doing the artwork, you steer more and more of them away from the tagging. A percentage of tagging will still go on because the younger ones who are trying to break into that subculture are going to

²⁷ *Transcript p31*

first start establishing their mark by attacking public property...

Your best artists in Canberra started off as taggers and a very small percentage of them still tag.²⁸

49. Further to the issue of banning the purchase of spray cans, Ms Sattler observed that some 'young people are not using spray cans' but instead use the 'very large bright fluorescent pen' able to be purchased from newsagents.²⁹

50. Ms Sattler's submission stated that she had formed:

a register of spray artists whom we can contact regarding legal work as we are often contacted by retailers, festival promoters, venues and private individuals who wish to have a wall, hoarding, shop display, et cetera, spray painted... In order for young people to join this register, they must provide examples of their work, agree to come to meetings when required and to not engage in destructive vandalism and tagging behaviour... It is explained to these young people that if they continue with the illegal activity they will never be able to access the legal work and therefore will never graduate to developing their art form. In my experience over the last twenty years of working with young people, this type of approach has a much stronger chance of succeeding than the purely punitive approach...

When young people first begin spraying, they are inexperienced and they are often looking for practice spaces... The drains are popular because they are large clear spaces which are also isolated... [The artists] often regard these spaces as being less harmful to the community and they also believe that they contribute to the brightening up the walls without actually damaging anyone's property. So they believe that by choosing these locations they are actually exercising some discretion and responsibility. These drain walls represent their "Gallery" whereby they can display their work to public scrutiny... - these pieces are rarely the work of vandals...

51. Ms Sattler told the committee that most of the artists on her register 'are at school, most of them are very articulate and very talented'. She stated that it is their mothers whom she deals with when arranging bookings for the students. She said the students 'believe very strongly in it as an artform and they see their future career revolving around that type of work. They move on to airbrushing and developing the technique'.³⁰

²⁸ *Transcript* pp32-33

²⁹ *Transcript* p37

³⁰ *Transcript* p34

52. Ms Sattler considers that ‘an education campaign needs to be centred around... [emphasising] that legal work is the way to go’. This will demonstrate to the artists that ‘they have a [legal] right to express themselves’.³¹

53. Ms Sattler supports funding of a youth arts outreach officer:

By putting that artist with those young people you would be engaging them to lead the young people in a more positive direction... They would be harnessing all that energy and activity, identifying those who really have talent and creating a role model for other young people. You will attract the other young taggers whenever you have an art project. They come sniffing around and looking because that is where they learn. They can see a legal piece being done by a very talented artist. They get to stand and watch exactly how to perform that technique...

I believe that you can promote quite a lot of positive direction away from the vandalism and the tagging by promoting the talented work and steering young people in that direction. You give the younger ones spaces where they can practise so that they do not have to go round hitting street signs. They do not engage in that activity for very long at all, because it is pointless. You have a combination of cleaning up, giving designated spaces and promoting the quality work. You need to do all those things together in order to effect any great change in the particular group of young people.³²

54. In summary, Ms Sattler recommended three actions that she thought should be taken by authorities:

You would clean up certain areas and try to make them a little bit less accessible. You would provide designated areas for artwork and practice. You would have areas where the work could be changed. In addition, you would have pieces that remained in place. There would also need to be some acknowledgment that this kind of artform needs an outlet. These outlets would provide some validation for this work.³³

55. **Mr Wolfe** recommended a surcharge on spray paint cans (to be devoted to cleaning up graffiti) payable by purchasers over 21 years of age.

56. **Mr de Zilva** submitted that ‘money intended for education programs should go directly into removing graffiti promptly’. He stated:

³¹ *Transcript* p35

³² *Transcript* pp37-38

³³ *Transcript* p39

There should be more regular clean-ups along major streets, roundabouts and suburban streets, and vandalised directional signs should be replaced promptly as they can be a safety hazard.

57. Mr de Zilva also suggested that directional signs be erected 'a lot higher than they currently are'. He recommended a surcharge on hand-held spray cans and a register of who buys spray cans to be kept by the retailer. He considered 'there should be legislation for a custodial sentence' for offenders and 'parents should be held liable for the payment of compensation for their children's graffiti'.

58. Mr de Zilva called for the replacement of 'the current grey, unpainted street poles' by timber street signs which might include the Canberra coat of arms (as some Sydney Councils do).

View of the committee

59. The committee is pleased that the Government introduced, shortly after this committee's inquiry was announced, a broad-ranging strategy to combat graffiti vandalism. The committee notes that one important element of the strategy - the organisation of 'a graffiti squad of cleaners' to quickly clean up instances of graffiti - was to be evaluated at the end of 1995. The committee considers the evaluation should be publicly reported to the Legislative Assembly.

60. The committee recommends that:

the ACT Government report to the Legislative Assembly on the operation of its graffiti clean-up squad.

61. The committee notes that assessment of the strategy as a whole is scheduled for later this year. While agreeing that a full assessment of the strategy is appropriate at this time, the committee is concerned that a number of elements of the Government's strategy were not fleshed out at the time the committee took evidence. These elements include whether to develop a community art program, whether to change the legislation covering graffiti vandalism and whether to introduce a voluntary code of conduct for the display of spray paints. The committee has not been advised by Government of its decisions on these matters - yet they are vital ingredients of an overall approach.

62. The committee recommends that:

the Government advise the Assembly of the results of its review of whether to change the legislation covering graffiti vandalism and whether to introduce a voluntary code of conduct for the display of spray paints.

63. Further to this point about lack of detail on the Government's strategy, the committee was concerned and disappointed by the inadequate response of the Department of Education and Training to the graffiti issue. While acknowledging its role 'in providing educational programs that reinforce' the responsibility of students 'to care for public property', the Department did not lodge a detailed submission and did not take the opportunity to outline what instructions or guidance (if any) it offers to school principals and Boards about handling the graffiti issue.

64. The lack of detail provided by the Department of Education reinforces the committee's perception that the Government's overall strategy was heavily focused on cleaning up graffiti rather than treating graffiti in a broad social context. At a minimum, the committee considers a strategy designed to address the graffiti issue should have a strong educative role. This is missing to date.

65. The committee recommends that:

the ACT Government broaden its graffiti strategy to include a strong educative element.

66. The committee heard a range of opinion about the nature of such an educative program and where it should be directed. The committee acknowledges it has at least three components: schoolchildren, 'kids who do not fit into the school system' (as Mr Summers called them) and the public generally.

67. One element of the educative strategy is advising the community about the cost to the public purse of graffiti vandalism. Where local examples of graffiti vandalism and its clean-up costs can be identified - such as those cited by the Rivett Primary School Board - they should be used in order to facilitate an awareness by local schoolchildren, and parents, of the direct cost of this sort of graffiti to their own school.

68. It is reasonable to expect the Department of Education to be aware of the incidence and consequence of school vandalism, if only to factor this cost into its annual maintenance budget.

69. The committee recommends that:

the Department of Education and Training establish suitable procedures to enable it to estimate the cost of graffiti vandalism in schools.

70. The committee also recommends that:

the Department of Education and Training liaise with school principals and School Boards about their experience with graffiti in order to sharpen an appropriate educative response.

71. The committee was told that an educative strategy focussing exclusively on the problems caused by graffiti was not the optimal way to go - for example, two high school students suggested the Department of Education and Training sponsor 'a competition between the schools' to enable the development and display of graffiti-type art. While at first sight this may seem a surprising suggestion, it does recognise that legal graffiti artists are currently plying their trade and are in demand - and that this type of art-form is popular among some youngsters, adults and businesses. The evidence of Ms Sattler (Coordinator of the Woden Youth Centre) was highly relevant in this regard. In particular, she stressed the need for an education strategy to emphasise that 'legal work is the way to go'.

72. The committee accepts that there is a place for graffiti art - or what the committee prefers to call 'street art'. This being so, it is reasonable to find appropriate spaces where the art form can be expressed.

73. The committee recommends that:

the Government identify appropriate areas for the practise and display of street art.

74. In order to identify these areas, there is a need to consult with youth organisations and take into account their experience and that of individuals who have worked closely with Canberra youth in the past on artworks in public places. The committee was impressed with the unanimous comment by witnesses that certain types of graffiti art in certain types of locations have been respected by the public and have not been graffitied. This indicates that it is possible to 'steer young people' interested in graffiti toward legal and publicly accepted outlets.

75. It seems that a common feature of the graffiti artworks that are universally respected is that they are done under the watchful eye of a person with skills in this form of expression and with the skills to listen and assist the youngsters. The committee understands that Mr Summers has fulfilled this role admirably. The committee considers that part of the educative strategy for addressing the graffiti issue is the engagement of such persons by the Administration. In particular, the committee considers that these people provide a way of reaching the 'kids who do not fit into the school system' - who are frequently blamed for graffiti vandalism.

76. The committee recommends that:

the Government provide funding for at least one youth arts outreach officer, one of whose duties would be to facilitate the legal expression of street art.

77. The committee thinks it useful to mention here that the Government's 1996-1997 Draft Capital Works Program contains an item in the Arts and

Heritage area entitled 'Public Art Program', for which an amount of \$300,000 is sought. The Public Art Program is described in the following way:

With a growing recognition of a sense of place that is uniquely Canberra, a Public Art Program designed to express and celebrate that identity is an essential element of strategic planning to develop the local cultural landscape...

An ACT Public Art Consultative Committee with representatives from government agencies, the arts, professional groups and the business sector is being established to assist with the implementation of this Program.

78. In speaking to the Program, Government officials told the committee that this is the first time a program with this kind of 'strategic process' has been established in Canberra. The officials said that the program 'could range from site-specific commissioned works of art through to using an artist to work with the architect in the overall design of the building, through to such things as street furniture being works of art'.³⁴

79. The committee considers that young people should provide input to the Public Arts Program and that the knowledge of a youth arts outreach officer would be useful to the Program. The committee would be disappointed if the Government's capital budget made provision for public art while its recurrent budget failed to provide the means to identify and harness the input of young people and/or those interested in undertaking lawful graffiti.

80. The committee recommends that:

the Government's Public Arts Program provide for input from young people and/or people interested in undertaking lawful street art.

81. Implementing the series of recommendations outlined above would strongly indicate to youngsters and to the public generally that graffiti is accepted as a legitimate artform provided it is undertaken in designated areas. A natural consequence of this policy would be to emphasise that graffiti is not acceptable outside those designated areas. In particular, it seems to nearly all those who lodged a submission to the inquiry that graffiti of road signs and other public property having a safety aspect is unacceptable. The committee concurs with this view.

82. The committee recommends that:

penalties for defacing directional signs be reviewed in order to stress the danger to the public of this sort of behaviour.

³⁴ *Transcript of Proceedings* (unedited) of the committee's inquiry into the Government's 1996-1997 Draft Capital Works Program p178 (8 February 1996)

83. Also bearing on the matter of directional signs is the frequently expressed view that Canberra's road signs are unnecessarily low and thus make it easy for graffiti 'tagging'. The committee considers that it is appropriate to take measures to render such defacing of road signs harder.

84. The committee recommends that:

the Administration raise directional signs that have been defaced by graffiti.

85. The committee heard conflicting views about the desirability of banning the sale of spray paints and textas to young people. On balance, the committee considers the need for such action has not been satisfactorily established. The committee expects that the Government's update on its graffiti strategy would address this issue in coming to a view about the usefulness of a voluntary code of conduct.

86. The committee appreciates the points made by witnesses and submitters that it is desirable the Administration utilise suitable designs and materials to minimise the impact of graffiti (where the graffiti is plainly intended to deface a structure). Charged as it is with the task of reviewing the Government's draft capital works proposals, the committee is sensitive to the possibility that some government agencies might specify a lesser (and hence, cheaper) standard of material for their capital works than is ideal - and then factor in a somewhat higher level of maintenance funding to cope with any vandalism that might occur. This matter should be kept under review by the Capital Works Group of senior Administration officials, which is the body charged with scrutinising agency proposals for capital works.

87. A related matter is the possibility of reducing the incidence of defacing graffiti by the use of 'hardy, low maintenance shrubs' (as suggested by J Maher). The committee is attracted to the notion of 'a programmed "green" attack on graffiti' whereby a number of public assets such as planter boxes and bus shelters could be made more attractive by the careful use of selected plantings. Again, this seems to be a matter for consideration by the Capital Works Group.

88. The committee recommends that:

the Administration's Capital Works Group review the use of appropriate building materials at the design and construction phase to take account of the possibility of graffiti damage, and examine the wider use of appropriate plantings on public assets to reduce the incidence of graffiti.

89. On the matter of cleaning up graffiti once it has occurred, the committee sympathises with the call by several submitters for the Administration to involve community groups where possible. This should be one element of the overall strategy to address the graffiti issue.

90. In addition, the committee notes that various public assets are regularly defaced by posters, some of which are seen by some in our community as just another example of graffiti. The committee considers it would be sensible if the graffiti clean-up squad also removed such posters. The committee accepts that, in the public interest, some postering is appropriate and therefore provision for billboards should be made in appropriate public places (such as shopping centres).

91. The committee recommends that:

the Government direct its graffiti clean-up squad to also remove inappropriate billboards and posters and the Government provide space for billboards in appropriate public places such as shopping centres.

92. The committee accepts the point made by some witnesses that the way the graffiti issue is handled has a broader dimension than just whether and what penalties to apply, whether and what designated spaces should be set aside, and whether a youth arts outreach officer should be engaged. The committee accepts the view of the Pathways Information Service for Young People that it is desirable to draw together the many 'urban space issues' - such as graffiti areas, skateboarding, in-line skates and public gatherings. In calling for a 'young people in urban spaces policy', the Pathways Information Service suggested that several Government department would be involved - including the Department of Education and Training, the Department of Urban Services, the Attorney-General's Department and the Chief Minister's Department. The committee considers that the Canberra community would benefit from a coordinated approach to the use of urban public spaces.

93. The committee recommends that:

the Government develop a coordinated approach and policy to the use of urban public spaces, and make a statement to the Assembly on this matter.

Appreciation

94. The committee wishes to thank the persons and organisations who facilitated this inquiry. The committee hopes its report will enhance community understanding of the issues arising out of graffiti in the ACT.

Wayne Berry MLA

Standing Committee on Planning and Environment

Deputy Chair

1 March 1996

Appendix one - list of submissions

(Note that the list of submissions is in alphabetical order.)

ACT Council of Social Service Inc (ACTCOSS)

ACT Government: Department of Urban Services, and the Department of Education and Training

Anonymous

Canberrans Against Graffiti

Mr K Flack

Ms D Foskey

S Gadsby

Mr H Gilchrist

Gungahlin Community Council Inc.

Ms I Hallinswood

Ms R Hosking

Lake Tuggeranong College

J Maher

A Moore

Pathways Information Service for Young People

Ms S Riding

Rivett Primary School Board

Mr R Scamp

C Stewart

Mr N Summers

Students at a wester Belconnen high school (via Ms P Hartley)

Mr J Tait

Standing Committee on Planning and Environment

Torrens Primary School Board

Dr B Ward

Mr P Wheat

Ms V Wilson

Woden Youth Centre

Mr G Wolfe

Mr A de Zilva

Appendix two - list of witnesses at public hearings

Tuesday 5 September 1995

- *ACT Administration*: Ms A Pegrum (General Manager, City Operations)
- Ms A Eastwood and Ms J Fraser (students of Ginninderra High School)
- *Canberrans Against Graffiti*: Mr T Bull
- *Woden Youth Centre*: Ms K Sattler (Coordinator)
- *ACT Council of Social Service*: Ms E Morgan (Co-Director) and Ms L Stoljar (Project Worker)
- Mr J Tait
- *Community Information and Referral Service*: Mr A Stankevicius (Acting Director) and *Pathways (Information Service for Young People)*: Mr D Matthews (Coordinator)

Friday 20 October 1995

- Mr N Summers