

Meredith Hunter MLA

Chair

ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee

on Climate Change, Environment and Water

Civic Square

Canberra ACT

Dear Ms Hunter

On behalf of the Walter Burley Griffin Society Inc., I wish to tender the following submission to the **Inquiry into Current and Potential Ecotourism of the ACT and Region.**

The Walter Burley Griffin Society (WBGs) was formed in 1988 in Sydney to promote and conserve the planning, environmental and social ideals Walter and Marion fostered in their lives and works in Australia. The Society has several hundred members from various parts of Australia and the USA, including 40 or so current members in Canberra. Our annual Marion Mahony Griffin Lecture and the Institute of Architects' Walter Burley Griffin Memorial Lecture regularly attract large audiences in Canberra.

A principal objective of WBGs is working for the development and heritage conservation of Canberra as a sustainable city and a great National Capital. WBGs has in recent years been intensively involved in governance, planning, environmental and heritage issues regarding Canberra.

I submit that **ecotourism** should be broadly defined and understood. It is founded on natural resources, the natural world, ecosystems, life support systems and related science institutions, cultural heritage, social values and science-based interpretive materials.

For one hundred years Canberra has been a prime place for ecotourism, as broadly understood. The selection of the site for the National Capital and the criteria and accompanying illustrative materials for the design competition 1911-12 encompassed a wealth of natural resource assets and environmental and aesthetic values. Leading biologists, geologists, geographers and astronomers, followed soon after by botanists, arborists and a range of CSIRO scientists from the 1920s onwards converged on Canberra and most stayed to play key roles in the Territory's and city's development.

This unique Canberra phenomenon accumulated an abundant resource base. The purpose of this submission is to emphasise the potential and the management imperatives of the resource base.

In addition, the politics of heritage and ecologically sustainable development in Canberra require consideration, and indeed confrontation, as vitally relevant to the Inquiry's terms of reference, in the course of this Inquiry. The importance of this is underlined by the current power plays over nominations of Canberra to the National Heritage List and the regrettable experience of the Stanhope Government's failure to nominate the ACT as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 2007.

In each instance, there are widespread community and scientific calls for nominations, manifestly logical and overdue, supported by a wealth of data and documentation, with the prospective benefits and management implications thoroughly canvassed. In each instance we witness uncompromising resistance from business councils and the central ACT Government bureaucracy.

The former follow the usual line of freedom from Government interference and potential regulatory constraints. The latter adopts an increasingly obdurate resistance to any federal regulatory restraints and refusal to promulgate or implement strong heritage or sustainability legislation.

Canberra is presently beset by dysfunctional planning, weak heritage administration and resistance to radical sustainability policies. Developers and property owners enjoy this status quo and virtual leadership in economic, land use and resources development. Thus, the natural resource and cultural heritage asset base is comprehensively at risk. By contrast, if say Canberra was on the National Heritage List, and the ACT a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, we would have higher focussed goals and objectives with new opportunities to enhance the ecotourism resource base.

Examples of WBGS concerns, apart from the heritage nomination failures, are:-

- The continuing erosion and dismantling of what remains of Walter Burley Griffin's design for the National Capital: Constitution Avenue, City Hill, West Basin and both the Land and Water Axes and integrated vistas in the Central national Area and beyond
- The ACT Government's opposition to Canberra's nominations for registration on the National Heritage List
- The dubious National Capital Authority's Review of the National Capital Open Space System
- The loss of landscape vistas through ad hoc and insensitive agglomeration of City West buildings
- The threats to ecological and landscape values in the Molonglo River corridor
- The progressive loss of landscape, ecological and heritage values in the Majura Valley.

I would be pleased to elaborate and discuss these views, if the Committee wishes.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Brett Odgers

on behalf of the Walter Burley Griffin Society Inc.

19 April 2012