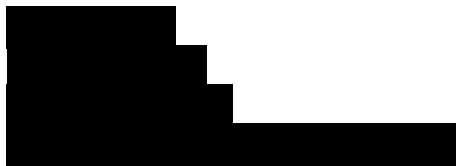




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## Expression of Interest re new Territory Plan Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services

The Green Institute Ltd  
Tim Hollo  
Executive Director



### **Re: regulation of billboards and other public space advertising**

TO the members of the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services,

Thank you for the opportunity to express interest in discussing with the committee the regulation of billboards and other public space advertising in Canberra as we move to the introduction and implementation of a new planning system.

Members of the Committee may be aware that this has long been a matter of great interest to me, both as a private resident of the ACT and as the Executive Director of The Green Institute, where I have done work on the adverse social, economic and environmental impact of public space advertising. Members may also be aware that, despite it often being dismissed as a distraction, this is also an issue of great public interest and concern.

Underpinning the issue is the fact that Canberra, as a designed city for the seat of government, has historically restricted billboards and other public space advertising in order to ensure that public space remains public. The regulation set out in the *Signs General Code* encapsulates limits on advertising in terms of “not compromis[ing] the role of the Territory as the setting of the National Capital and Seat of Government of the Commonwealth”.<sup>1</sup>

The *Signs General Code* will be superseded by the current reforms, and it is not at all clear whether the new Territory Plan, with its zones and layers, continues this approach of principle, clearly delineating public space for the public, and constraining its privatisation.

It is important to note that this has always been, and remains, a popular position.

Previous attempts to relax the regulatory control of public space advertising in the ACT have proven unpopular and led to successful public campaigns to keep them in place.

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<sup>1</sup> ACT Planning and Land Authority, *Signs General Code*, March 2008, 2.1 (d), <http://www.legislation.act.gov.au/ni/2008-27/copy/56699/pdf/2008-27.pdf>



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The 2017 Legislative Assembly Inquiry into Billboards,<sup>2</sup> stimulated by a suggestion by Chief Minister Andrew Barr that regulation could be streamlined, found immense public opposition to public space advertising, and led to agreement to clarify, but not weaken, the regulation. The inquiry received the largest number of submissions in the Territory's history, with a remarkable 155 of the 162 submissions opposed to any expansion of advertising in Canberra. Only one of the handful in favour was from a resident.

Following the inquiry, a poll conducted by Lonergan Research on behalf of The Green Institute found that 9 out of 10 Canberrans believe the amount of public space advertising in our city should either stay the same or be reduced, with a full 48% saying we already have too much. Substantial majorities believe that Canberra's advertising free environment makes it a more pleasant place to live, that advertising undermines our sense of community, reduces the quality of public space and benefits large corporations over small business.<sup>3</sup>

The encroachment of advertising – legal, illegal and grey – across the city despite existing regulation makes it obvious that this highly extractive industry will attempt to worm its way in, given any opportunity. So public policy needs to be very clear.

It would be deeply unfortunate if, after explicit proposals to relax the regulatory framework controlling public space advertising were successfully fought off, the new planning regime were to open the floodgates by omission.

My proposal is that the overarching Territory Plan and Design Guides should include clear statements that Canberra is and should remain an ad-free city, banning billboards and strictly limiting other forms of public space advertising, as a principle of good urban planning, emphasised by its specific role as the seat of government.

Thank you,



Executive Director  
The Green Institute Ltd

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<sup>2</sup> ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Planning and Urban Renewal, *Inquiry into Billboard*, October 2017, [https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0020/1121906/9th-PUR-02-Billboards.pdf](https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0020/1121906/9th-PUR-02-Billboards.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Full details of the poll here: <https://www.greeninstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Canberrans-want-Canberra-Ad-Free-release-190218.pdf>