

Deborah Cleland

19 June 2017

To Whom It May Concern:

Submission to the Inquiry into Billboards Standing Committee on Planning and Urban Renewal

Firstly, I wish to endorse the content and recommendations of the submissions by Dr Lisa Petheram, Liam Lily and Tim Hollo. As a lifetime Canberran I am very concerned about the potential social and environmental impacts of relaxing our billboard laws.

Secondly, I am willing to appear before a committee to discuss further.

For these reasons I will keep my submission brief, highlighting only my top concerns.


Firstly, this consultation process has been underwhelming in its reach and attempt to alert citizens to the proposed changes. Almost everyone I mentioned it to was surprised and had not heard about it. An admittedly self-selected survey has received 55 responses to date, with 95% saying they did not support relaxing the laws.

I would suggest that this process be followed up with a more comprehensive participatory engagement that can truly seek to incorporate the views of Canberrans. I also query whether Canberra's Indigenous / First Nations groups have been adequately consulted.

Secondly, as quoted in the ABC today¹, billboards are quite out of keeping with Canberra's design, obstructing the lines of sights to the natural environment that surrounds us. This is the original rationale for restricting billboard and remains just as relevant. Indeed, the exceptions that have been made, for example, in bus shelters, has already damaged the aesthetic values of our suburbs as well as contributing to the other pernicious effects of advertising, elaborated below and in the previously mentioned submissions of Dr Petheram and co.

¹ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/specials/curious-canberra/2017-06-19/why-doesnt-canberra-have-billboard-advertising/8622186>



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The only merit to billboards is a dubious raise in revenue for our government, one that may well be cancelled by the corresponding increase in graffiti. Further I would argue that 'enlivening' urban areas with billboards is a laughable claim. Areas are enlivened with cultural activity – art, sport, music, dance and community gatherings, not with images and slogans designed to make people feel inadequate with what they have and how they are.

As inescapable intrusions onto public space, billboards are a violation of democratic values. In particular, I am concerned about the gendered impacts of outdoor advertising, with well-known academic Lauren Rosewarne arguing that billboards contribute to the exclusion of women and masculine control of outdoor areas². The sexualised female faces and bodies that predominate in outdoor advertising would put Canberran women's ability to safely and comfortably enjoy public space.


Further, according to Lowery and colleagues³ literature review, outdoor advertising has been linked with

- problem drinking
- environmental pollution caused by intense light
- the obesity epidemic
- harassment of women

Limiting the environmental and aesthetic impact of billboards in Canberra would mean increasing limitations and regulation, not relaxing them. This includes, among other things, removal of advertising from bus shelters and buses.

Thank you for considering my submission, and looking forward to discussing these issues further.

Yours sincerely,


Deborah Cleland

² Rosewarne, Lauren. "The men's gallery: Outdoor advertising and public space: Gender, fear, and feminism." In *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 67-78. Pergamon, 2005.

³ Lowery, B. C., & Sloane, D. C. (2014). The prevalence of harmful content on outdoor advertising in Los Angeles: Land use, community characteristics, and the spatial inequality of a public health nuisance. *American Journal of Public Health*, 104(4), 658-664.