



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES
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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into a Territory Coat of Arms

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Inquiry into a Territory Coat of Arms

On the back of our new mammal emblem, the Southern Brush-Tailed Rock Wallaby, I commend the ACT Government for announcing an inquiry into a new ACT Coat of Arms. Having an official ACT Coat of Arms will positively raise the profile of our capital and add a layer to our rich history.

The ACT does not have an official coat of arms and is using the coat of arms of the City of Canberra, a symbol not designed for this purpose. The City of Canberra arms use very little local symbolism, and does not include the ACT floral emblem (the Royal Bluebell Flower), bird emblem (the Gang-Gang Cockatoo) or the new mammal emblem.

As the only self-governing State or Territory in Australia that does not have an official coat of arms, this is an excellent time to fix an anomaly in our symbols.

In doing so, we can ensure our symbols are well-designed and fully reflect the ideals and values of ACT residents. The ACT has already made great strides in becoming a modern, progressive territory. For instance, the CBR campaign and logo have increased pride in our Territory and given Canberra a more modern atmosphere.

An ACT Coat of Arms will align with our values in a way that the Canberra Coat of Arms doesn't. After all, does the motto "For the Queen, the Law, and the People", a portcullis or a castle, all on the Canberra Arms, really represent the ideas and aspirations of ACT residents today (particularly as the ACT voted strongly in favour of a republic in the 1999 Republic Referendum)?

As a part of this, the ACT Government should also take the adoption of an ACT Coat of Arms to its logical conclusion and use it to replace the Canberra Arms in its entirety.

What makes a good Coat of Arms?

- Make it timeless and use symbols that are not divisive. If a Coat of Arms uses symbols that are overly weighted to a particular era or politically charged, the Arms could quickly go out of date and no longer be used by the community. Indeed, a part of the reason for the Territory Arms inquiry is the datedness of many of the symbols in the Canberra City Arms. A good ACT Coat of Arms should be as embraced by the ACT community in 100 years as it is when it is launched.
- A coat of arms is not simply a logo. Logos tend to be simpler and less formal symbols designed for marketing or related purposes. As such, they generally go out of fashion as design and public tastes change. As such, greater care needs to be taken for a coat of arms design, as different expectations are needed.

What should the ACT Coat of Arms contain?

An ACT Coat of Arms will provide a great opportunity to showcase the ACT and its emblems. Therefore, the best symbols to use for the Arms would be symbols such as the faunal, floral and new mammal emblems. Schoolteachers could teach children about our civic emblems by showing the ACT Coat of Arms and saying "here is the Royal Bluebell, our floral emblem, here is the Gang-Gang Cockatoo, our faunal emblem..." and so on.

With some good planning, a new ACT Coat of Arms can help reconciliation too. As our country increasingly embraces the depth of its Indigenous history, there is an opportunity to include symbols

and motifs that evoke the many millennia of culture that has taken place here. The inclusion of Indigenous symbols (provided it is done with respect to Indigenous cultures) would add an extra layer of meaning.

If done properly, an ACT Coat of Arms will be a great statement of pride in our Territory, and put our unique culture and environment at the forefront of our symbols.

Why replace the City of Canberra Coat of Arms completely?

In my view, since self-government, Canberra as an entity distinct from the ACT no longer exists in any meaningful sense, with its role effectively being absorbed in the ACT Government that represents the whole territory. In the past, city coats of arms were granted to an entity that represented an area (for instance the City of Melbourne's Council is the entity which uses the Coat of Arms of the City of Melbourne). In the ACT's case, the Federal Capital Commission served as this entity, eventually passing to the ACT Government. As the ACT Government could soon have a Coat of Arms to represent the whole of its jurisdiction, the City Arms will effectively be made obsolete, making it appropriate to definitively replace it.

Furthermore, due to its motto, the Canberra Arms will require modification in the possibly near-medium term. The Canberra Arms' motto used by the ACT Government is "*For the Queen, the Law and the People*". In the event that Queen Elizabeth is no longer Queen, whether by Australia becoming a republic or the monarchy passing to Prince Charles, the design would need to change. In the latter case, all logos/materials/etc. with the Canberra City Arms on them will need to be changed to say "*For the King, the Law and the People*". And if you go further into the future, every time the British monarch changes, there is a 50% chance that the design will need to be changed to reflect the new monarch's gender. Not only would this be a recurring cost to the ACT Government, but an unpredictable one. Having the ACT Coat of Arms completely replace the City of Canberra Arms eliminates this problem.

My proposal



Proposal Elements

Blue and gold colours (A): The ACT's official colours. The colours are used in the scroll for the motto, along with the shield (and its elements).

Boomerangs (B): Traditionally associated with Indigenous Australia, but has adopted by the wider Australian community as an Australian cultural icon. The boomerangs crossing each other symbolise the interconnectedness of the ACT's many cultures and stories.

Commonwealth Star (C): Symbolises the ACT as Australia's seat of government and the ACT as a part of the Commonwealth of Australia. The position of the Commonwealth Star mirrors that of the Australian Coat of Arms.

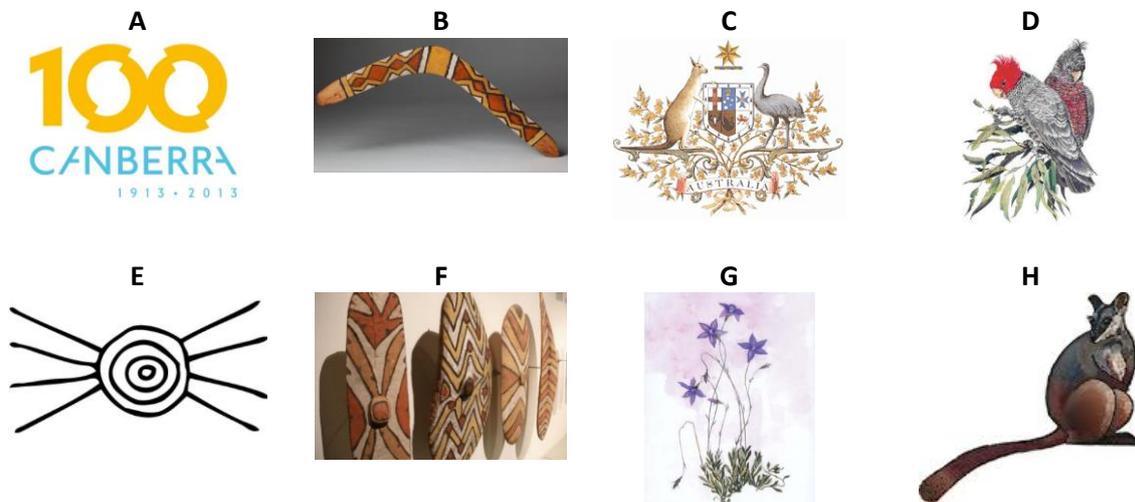
Gang-Gang Cockatoo (D): The ACT's official faunal emblem since 1997. Female (*left*) and male (*right*) versions are depicted. Along with the Commonwealth Star, forms the crest of the coat of arms.

Meeting place symbols (E): On the top and bottom of the shield, this symbol is used in Indigenous Australian cultures to symbolise an area where different groups meet. This alludes to the ACT's historical role as a meeting place for Indigenous corroborees, the meeting place of the newly-formed Australian Commonwealth, and now the meeting place for the many cultures that form our community.

Oval shield (F): Traditionally the centrepiece of a heraldic coat of arms, the oval shape in this design alludes to the shields used by warriors in Australian Indigenous societies.

Royal Bluebell Flower (G): The ACT's official floral emblem since 1982, forming two bunches at the bottom.

Southern Brush-Tailed Rock Wallaby (H): The ACT's official mammal emblem since 2018. Forms both of the supporters of the coat of arms.



Why this proposal

The proposal (designed by myself) would be a good coat of arms for the ACT, as it does the following:

- Balances heraldic rules with the expectations of relevant modern symbolism.
- Uses all of the ACT's official symbols and emblems. The only other Australian jurisdiction that has achieved this with their coat of arms is the Northern Territory.
- Avoids divisive or politically contentious symbols.
- Using timeless symbols that are unlikely to easily become dated or out of fashion. As previously stated, the Canberra City of Arms has often been criticised for not doing this.

Where this leads to

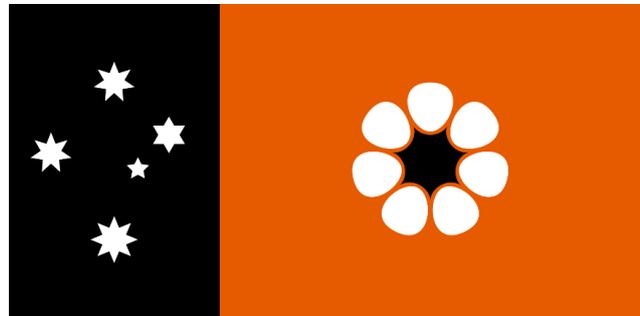
If done correctly, this process can achieve multiple goals, and lead to highly-designed symbols across the whole of the ACT Government. Below are areas where this process can lead.

ACT Flag

The ACT Flag already has most of the elements of a great flag in place. It uses the ACT colours blue and gold. It has the Southern Cross, a great symbol recognising the ACT as a part of the common Australian identity. However, the design has one mistake, which mars a potentially great symbol: The overly complex modified Canberra Coat of Arms. As adopting an ACT Coat of Arms will require a modification to the ACT Flag, this presents an opportunity to turn the ACT Flag into a well-loved and widely used symbol.

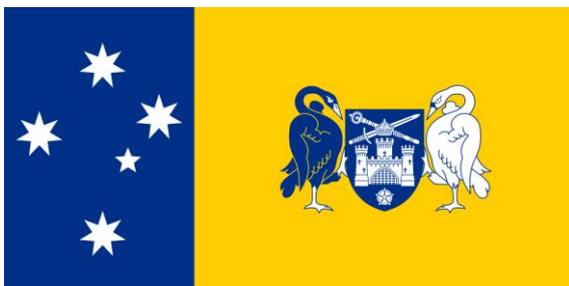
It is undeniable that civic symbols, such as flags, contribute to civic pride, and when the flag is a good design, the entire populace has a strong symbol to rally and bring the community together.

The Northern Territory flag (*right*) shows how a simple, well-defined flag can raise civic pride and awareness. The NT flag is highly recognisable because it uses simple and meaningful symbols, such as the Sturt's Desert Flower.

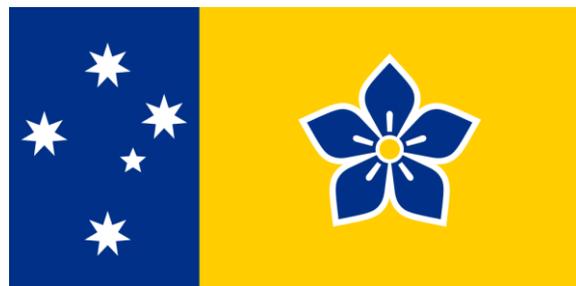


The ACT Flag's designer, Ivo Ostyn, publicly disagrees with the Canberra Coat of Arms being on the ACT Flag. Instead, Ivo advocates replacing the Coat of Arms it with a Royal Bluebell symbol (*proposal below-right*). The designer of the current flag's support for change, along with the Bluebell Blag already being promoted by some in the ACT community will help make transition smooth and straightforward.

Current ACT Flag



Ivo Ostyn's Proposal (Bluebell Flag)



Not once in the many years that I've lived in Canberra have I seen the ACT flag flown by members of the public in sports events, Canberra Day, or any other public event. This inquiry presents a great opportunity to refine the ACT Flag into an iconic Australian flag, loved and used by the ACT public.

This modification to the existing flag will produce greater civic pride, and create the beautiful, striking design that the designer intended.

ACT Government logo

The ACT Government Logo is one element that would also require change. The current logo, which uses the Canberra Coat of Arms, has several problems. These include:

- **Simplicity:** The logo should be simple and easily recognisable by the public. This is so that the public can easily remember the logo, but also so that the design can be easily recognised at a distance.
- **Versatility:** The logo should be able to be used in multiple contexts, including full colour applications. The current logo lacks this ability, due to the complexity of the Canberra City Arms.
- **Relevance:** The logo should use elements or have an element that has high public recognition. The New South Wales Government Logo (*below left*), which uses the Waratah (the NSW Floral Emblem) is a good example of this, along with the Northern Territory (*below centre*) and Tasmanian Government (*below right*) logos.



An example of two possible logos, using the Royal Bluebell flower, is compared below to the current design. When you look at both from a reasonable distance, it is the Bluebell that is clearly visible, while the Canberra Arms becomes a blur.



Proposal 1



Proposal 2



ACT agencies

The emblems of some ACT agencies have the Canberra City Arms, which would also require change during this process. While the City Arms could simply be replaced by a new Territory Arms, this is an opportunity to modify and refine these symbols into logos more fit for purpose to modern design. Below are design ideas for ACT Corrective Services and the ACT Emergency Services Agency (ESA) (please note that as the ACT Rural Fire Service does not use the City Arms in its emblem, no new emblem would be required).



A second option is to remove the independent logos for each of the ESA’s services and use the modified ESA logo exclusively. Compared to emergency services in most other Australian jurisdictions, the branches of the ACT ESA are already highly integrated (sharing a common commissioner and some joint emergency stations), resulting in the ACT’s emergency services (ACT Fire and Rescue, ACT Rural Fire Service, ACT State Emergency Service and ACT Ambulance Service) functioning as branches of the ESA. This would follow the existing practice of ACT Directorates not using unique logos and using the ACT Government logo exclusively.

These branches already have unique uniforms and identifying marks (such as the orange and white checker pattern for SES members), so this would not impact the public recognising which service a particular emergency responder is from. In addition, using the ESA logo exclusively would lead to cost savings for the ACT Government (consider the multiple large logos of each service manufactured for ACT emergency stations). Having patches that visibly identify staff members’ service may be useful in addition to the already unique uniforms and marks (*concept pictured below*).

Joint ESA patches



ACT Emergency Services Agency Flag

An addendum to this is that the ACT ESA does not appear to have a unique flag for itself, and public ceremonies involving the ESA tend to involve the flags of the multiple branches being displayed together. Having a single whole-of-agency flag (*proposal opposite*) to display would help simplify displaying the ESA “brand”. Alternatively each of the service flags can simply be modified to reflect their new logos (each flag has the respective service’s logo on it).



Uniform rank insignia

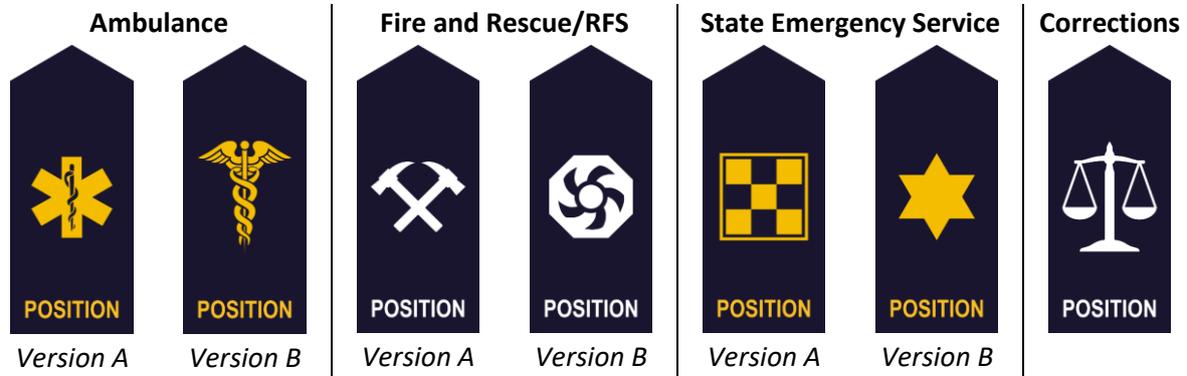
This is a less well-known area, but one that would need to be addressed in this process. This is because the ACT Emergency Services Commissioner (*pictured*) has the Canberra Arms as a rank symbol.

For emergency services, there is also an opportunity to use this to also simplify and make ranks more publicly accessible. Systems of pips and crowns are difficult for the everyday person to understand, and differ between services. A useful remedy is to change the system of the rank insignia to only display the position title in text (this is the method the SA Ambulance Service uses). A related method



is for all ranks to have a common symbol and the position title underneath (this is the method Ambulance Victoria uses).

Unified rank insignia templates



This could go one step further and use a common ACT symbol (like the Bluebell flower) for insignia across all ACT services (*example pictured right*).

Using a unified system of rank insignia would make it is easier for the public to understand (as the position is easy to identify).

While these aren't within the direct remit of the inquiry, this exploration into ACT symbols that started with the initial mammal emblem inquiry shows the opportunity not only for renewed emblems, but how to consolidate and create a clear simple set of highly recognisable symbols for the public.



Conclusion

Having an ACT Coat of Arms that uses our new mammal emblem will be far more embraced by the Canberra public, compared to the City of Canberra Arms the ACT Government currently uses.

A new ACT Coat of Arms will be a great step in the ongoing journey towards having a set of symbols that will represent and be cherished by the ACT people.

Image Sources

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