



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES  
Ms Suzanne Orr MLA (Chair), Miss Candice Burch MLA (Deputy Chair), Mr James Milligan MLA

## Submission Cover Sheet

### Inquiry into a Territory Coat of Arms

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## **Inquiry into Territory Coat of Arms**

Dear Committee members

I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to comment to the Inquiry into a Territory Coat of Arms.

### **A Distinction Without a Difference**

The City of Canberra and the Australian Capital Territory are, *and always have been*, effectively two names for the same thing. Therefore the contention that the ACT has no separate coat of arms, and that the coat of arms familiar to us all actually represents only the “City of Canberra”, is hair-splitting to an extreme degree.

- As far as I can determine, the “City of Canberra” has no defined boundaries, no officials, no Mayor, no Councillors. It is not a local government area; it is not treated as a separate entity from the ACT in any way, *including by the ACT Government itself*.
- For example, the ACT Government’s information portal is called “Access Canberra”, and used to be called “Canberra Connect”. It can be used by residents of everywhere in the ACT from Hall to Namadgi, despite not being in “Canberra”. The same applies to Canberra Hospital.
- The public transport system for the ACT is called “Transport Canberra”.
- The flag of the ACT incorporates design elements of the Coat of Arms, and has done so since it was created in 1993. The *ACT* flag, mind you – incorporating the “*Canberra*” Coat of Arms.
- On the rare occasions when the Freedom of the City of Canberra is granted, it is granted by the ACT Chief Minister. Before self-government the honour was granted by the Minister responsible for the whole territory.
- Indeed the Chief Minister himself, and his predecessor – both disparaging of the current Coat of Arms in the past – frequently refer to their responsibility to the people of “Canberra”. I doubt that the good folk of Hall, Pialligo and Tharwa feel excluded from that responsibility.

The stated purpose of the Chief Minister in referring the present Inquiry to the Committee could in any case be achieved by the Legislative Assembly simply declaring the current Coat of Arms to represent the “Australian Capital Territory and the City of Canberra”. Indeed to do anything else would be to waste the precious time of the Assembly over a non-existent

problem, when there are many more pressing matters to attend to, and more important things to spend public money on.

This is a clear case of making a distinction without any real difference existing.

### **The symbols on the current Coat of Arms**

At the time of the granting of the Arms, the elements contained in it were entirely appropriate for the new seat of the national Parliament, *and they remain so today*. The whole purpose of the ACT is to serve the Commonwealth as neutral territory separate from any State, by housing the national Parliament and Government. After their researches I am sure that members of the Committee are already aware of the symbolism of the various components, but they are worth restating:

The current symbols almost all represent the role of Parliament and Canberra in the life of the country, as they should. They include the crowns (an integral part of Parliament, and a symbol of political neutrality), the portcullis (an ancient representation of the two other components of Parliament under the Constitution), the white rose of York (representing the inauguration of Parliament in Canberra in 1927 by the Duke of York, and therefore the commencement of Canberra as the permanent capital). The black rod, mace and sword also symbolise Parliament.

The entire design is elegantly brought together by symbols of pre-and-post European settlement (the swans), and the three things that the elected representatives in Parliament should keep in mind: the Crown as a guarantor of neutrality, the law of the land (especially the Constitution), and the people of Australia.

The *only* reason for the existence of the ACT is the governance of the whole of Australia, to the point that the name of the Territory itself contains no geographical reference to *where* it is, much like the entirely neutral “District of Columbia” in the US, which is separate from, and makes no reference to, any State. Any attempt to incorporate “local” flavour and symbolism “significant to or representative of the people, history or landscape of the ACT” would be entirely inappropriate, and would undermine the role of the whole Territory from its very inception. Those aspects of living in the ACT that make it a unique and wonderful place to live can be, and are, frequently celebrated elsewhere.

### **The Questions**

The Committee asks that two questions should be considered particularly:

1. Whether there should be a Coat of Arms for the Australian Capital Territory (in addition to the Canberra City Coat of Arms).
2. What symbols might be included in the design of an ACT Coat of Arms.

The answers to these questions are:

1. No. The current Coat of Arms should simply be recognised as applying to the whole Territory; and
2. Nothing. The current Arms and their symbolism should remain unchanged.

Yours sincerely

(signed)  
Maurice Austin  
15 April 2019