

# Inquiry into Billboards

## Standing Committee on Planning and Urban Renewal

Submission by:

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	A.C.T. LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE OFFICE
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## **Response to terms of reference:**

### **1. Current rules and practises concerning billboard advertising including:**

#### **a) the rationale for existing regulations in the ACT**

The current restrictions on billboard advertising in the ACT has made a substantial contribution to the distinctive character of Canberra as a bush capital of open spaces and vistas with commercial activity deliberately restricted to designated 'light industrial areas'-Fyshwick and Mitchell. In canvassing friends and acquaintances we have found universal support for the current regime and, in fact, strong disquiet at the creeping violation of these regulations by a range of commercial bodies, action which seems to be tacitly endorsed (given the lack of enforcement) by the government.

Canberra currently is ranked near the top of the world's most liveable cities-number one on some lists<sup>1</sup>. The liveability of the city seems nowadays to be under constant attack, almost as if the government attaches no value to the qualities that brought long term residents of more than 45 years like us to Canberra and caused us to stay. A point of pride when we have shown friends from out of town or overseas around has been the absence of crass advertising.

#### **b) & c) the terms and effectiveness of the existing regulations in the ACT**

As noted above, there has been in the last two or three years especially, a steadily increasing number of violations of the ban on billboards. A popular ploy is a full size billboard on a truck that is then parked on a median strip next to a major highway such as the GDE. Construction sites are now de facto huge advertising hoardings, including the ACT government's light rail adverts. Real Estate Agents now advertise properties for sale on main highways, not in front yards. Advertising on the new bus stops is apparently condoned by (and raises revenue for) the government. No doubt that is also the rationale for suggesting that "establishing a small number of designated areas for such outdoor advertising might reduce the proliferation of questionable outdoor advertising."<sup>2</sup>

How about this as an alternative: actually enforce the existing regulations? Fining violators would also be a source of revenue. To use the fact that current violators are stretching the rules, presumably because they know they will not suffer any sanction, as a rationale for relaxing the rules seems to be totally perverse. Should we relax drink driving rules because many people violate them?

#### **d) a comparative analysis of billboard regulation in other jurisdictions;**

Since the absence of billboards in Canberra is one of the distinctive points of difference between our city and other municipalities, we fail to see what this would achieve. Is the proposal to compare the number of billboards on Canberra Ave with those on Parramatta Road and then to split the difference?

### **2. Community views on placement and construction of billboards;**

It is ironic that given the chief minister in his Canberra Times article of 20 May 2017, expressed a desire to make sure that the Government "reaches a representative sample of Canberrans" and that consultation is not just limited to those who can make submissions or attend public meetings, that we found out about this survey by accident.<sup>3</sup> It certainly was not widely advertised. Was the intention to change the regulations by stealth?

### **3a. Impact on business and community organisations**

Since general businesses in Canberra have managed perfectly well for 100 years without billboards, it is difficult to make a case for introducing this 1950's technology at a time when the standard recourse for people seeking information or for businesses seeking to advertise is the web and social media.

#### **3b. use of new billboard technology**

What is meant by "new billboard technology". Is this code for more eye catching electronic illuminated moving billboards? The arguments against standard billboards would apply to such devices with even more force with the added problem that they would constitute a greater distraction for drivers.

**3c. Potential to enliven urban areas**

I find this statement quite baffling. It is people interacting in parks, cafes, pubs, nightclubs, shops etc. that enlivens urban areas, not billboards.

**4. Ways in which elements of billboard advertising could be regulated in the ACT to limit environmental or aesthetic impact, including number, size, location, advertising periods and content**

Simply apply the existing regulations in a technology neutral way so that inspectors do not have to make judgments against the list of criteria above.

1 - <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/canberra-life/canberra-home-to-the-highest-quality-of-living-worldwide-website-numbeo-reports-20160721-gqb9gn.html>

2 - <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/act-may-relax-its-ban-on-billboards-20170125-gtyc7g.html>

3 - <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/andrew-barr-we-will-consult-and-hear-all-canberrans-not-just-the-noisy-20170519-gw8wnt.html>