

## **WOMEN for an Australian Republic**

[www.womenrep.org](http://www.womenrep.org)

Mr Shane Rattenbury MLA  
Speaker  
ACT Legislative Assembly  
GPO Box 1020  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Mr Rattenbury

Women for an Australian Republic (WfaAR) wishes to raise with you several matters about the most formal, official symbol of the City of Canberra, its coat of arms.

We think it is high time for the current the coat of arms to be reviewed and, ultimately, replaced because it is confusing and in urgent need of modernisation. In addition, the motto is seriously out-of-step with the expressed views of the republican ACT population by its reference to the monarch.

The ACT is the only State or Territory that does not have a coat of arms (see Attachment). The familiar one, that of the black and white swans, is the coat of arms of the City of Canberra developed by the College of Arms, *London*, and granted by King George V in 1928. Since self-government, the coat of arms of the City of Canberra has been used also as the identifier for the ACT by the ACT Government. This should now be reconsidered as the two entities are not the same. (The capital of Australia is the whole land area of the Australian Capital Territory under s 122 of the Constitution of the Commonwealth.)

The ACT Government presently uses a stylised version of the City of Canberra coat of arms as its identifier/logo on letterhead, websites etc. In contrast, the logo of the ACT Legislative Assembly is a stylised version of the ACT floral emblem, the Royal Bluebell, thus representing the Territory. The ACT Government governs the whole of the capital territory. Its responsibilities do not simply extend to the geographical limits of Canberra.

WfaAR also wishes to raise with you several matters concerning the "ACT coat of arms" used by the ACT Government in several forms. Firstly, as mentioned above, it is the coat of arms of the City of Canberra and heavily laden with symbols of the Crown and the United Kingdom - crown, mace, sword, castle, white rose of York and portcullis - the white rose is a connection to the British royal family and the portcullis specifically links the national capital with Westminster. The dominant crown represents the monarch, now the King or Queen of Australia.

We contend that these symbols do not represent our territory/city whose population is so republican in its inclinations, the ACT vote in favour of a republic at the 1999 referendum being 63.7%, a clear majority and the highest in the country. Other symbols, even to express the same concepts such as “the importance and grandeur of the city, national authority, law-making powers”<sup>1</sup> and the like can be found.

The motto of the City of Canberra coat of arms, “For the Queen, the Law and the People”, while accurate is less pleasing than the Latin original, the rhyming: “Pro rege, lege et grege”. We note that it will need to be changed to “For the King, the Law and the People” when Charles III ascends the United Kingdom throne. The sentiment, however, does not sit well with a population of confirmed republicans.

It appears that mottos are not obligatory as revealed by Western Australia, the Northern Territory and the City of Sydney. Alternatively, the motto could make no reference to the King or Queen of Australia, because it is unnecessary. Even “For the Law and the People”, dropping the reference to our monarch, would be preferable if the motto is not changed completely or dropped. The ACT should make every attempt to lead the nation in its attempts to create a republic, as it does on many matters of public importance and socially progressive reforms.

Secondly, the most recognisable symbol of our city represented in this coat of arms should be more prominent. The tree apparently representing “the bush capital” can hardly be seen in the upper background hidden behind the portcullis. We note that this interpretation of the tree is disputed and other sources contend that it represents “growth and progress”.<sup>2</sup> A new, modern, less obscure design is thus called for.

Thirdly, while WfaAR takes no issue with the concept of the “black and white races” - represented by the black and white swans - co-existing and cooperating on the land of the Territory, this could be more sensitively and clearly portrayed. Using a white swan, for instance, to represent Anglo-Celtic settlers in the 1928 design is out-of-date given the diverse origins of the ACT’s present population mix. It would, however, be highly appropriate to continue this visual representation out of respect for our Indigenous peoples - crucial for the coat of arms for the capital city/territory - and to maintain historical links with earlier designs for some Australian State and capital city coats of arms because a number of them have this feature. We refer you to the modernised emblem of the City of Sydney (1996) that is not only attractive in design and colour scheme but cleverly incorporates this particular symbol from its original coat of arms.

We suggest that for the Centenary of Canberra (“Celebrating the symbolism of Australia’s national capital and its qualities as a leading 21<sup>st</sup> century city” where “symbolism” is not only ambiguous but could become important), it would be highly desirable to review the coat of arms/logos representing the ACT and the City of

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<sup>1</sup> JL Bruce: *Flags and emblems of Australia*, Kangaroo Press, Kenthurst 1996

<sup>2</sup> Same work as cited in previous footnote

Canberra (should there be one or two?) and other representations used to depict the capital territory and the capital city. Alternatively, this review could be suitably included in the current inquiry into the self-government Act.

WfaAR notes that the ACT Government uses a range of additional logos such as “Building our City, Building our Community” on its publications and websites but these appear to be in the nature of *local government* program identifiers and intended for local use only. However, they only add to the array of symbols on view. Hence the confusion.

WfaAR also commends to you the imaginative logos used by the Tasmanian and Northern Territory Governments for administrative and tourism purposes – the Tasmanian tiger peering out of the long grass by the former, the encircled silhouette of a flying heron in the latter. Such a logo for the ACT (along with a more attractive, modern flag not employing any version of a coat of arms) will require imagination and artistic intent, things ACT citizens possess in abundance.

We have seen recent correspondence on these issues sent to you by the ACT Branch of the Australian Republican Movement and endorse its content and recommendations.

A copy of this letter has also been sent to all party leaders in the Legislative Assembly and to Ms Robyn Archer AO, Creative Director of Canberra 100.

Yours sincerely

*Sarah Brasch*

[signed for electronic release]

Sarah Brasch  
National Convenor  
26 June 2012