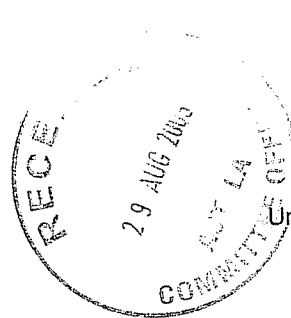


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The Secretary
Standing Committee on Planning and Environment
ACT Legislative Assembly
GPO Box 1020
CANBERRA CITY ACT 2601

Dear Ms Jaireth

Re: Inquiry into Proposed Nomination of ACT as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve

Thank you for your invitation to make a submission to the Committee on its Inquiry into the Proposed Nomination of ACT as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

The HIA has prepared a written submission, which is attached, for your attention. I can also arrange for it to be provided in an electronic format if that is required.

HIA hopes that its comments and suggestions can raise the level of debate on this proposal and ACT's sustainable future. I would be pleased to discuss this submission and answer any questions that may arise, at your convenience.

Yours sincerely
Housing Industry Association Ltd



Caroline Lemezina
Executive Director, ACT/Southern NSW

**SUBMISSION TO ACT LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING and ENVIRONMENT**

Inquiry into Proposed Nomination of ACT as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve

Background

The Housing Industry Association in the ACT and Southern NSW represents 1800 members who are vitally concerned with the future of their working and living community. The members of the housing industry are responsible for delivering over 2,000 housing units each year in the ACT. They play a very important role in the economy of ACT and the surrounding Region, and are keenly aware of its future development and growth.

HIA is also concerned about the need to sustainable design and building, and as a result established the GreenSmart programme for its members. It is a practical approach to sustainable building, which focuses on educating builders, designers, product manufacturers and consumers about the benefits of environmental responsible housing. GreenSmart is an industry driven initiative which aims to encourage a mainstream application of its sustainable design and construction principles to contemporary housing. As a voluntary initiative, it provides market recognition for environmental endeavours in the residential design and construction industry, and retains a high level of affordable choice for house buyers.

Response to Issues Paper

HIA is also concerned about the increasing propensity of Governments to ramp up the level of regulations when issues, such as environmental sustainability require addressing. It is due to this background of the current levels of environmental and heritage regulations which now exist in ACT, that HIA does not support the proposal for the whole of ACT to become a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

Economic Sustainability

HIA is concerned that the Issues Paper has not fully addressed the economic issues, which are a critical component of any sustainable Region.

A financial impact statement, which addresses both the Issues Paper's claimed benefits and HIA's concerns for possible red tape restrictions and disincentives to potential investitures should be prepared and released for public consultation before any decision is made by Government.

HIA is a long term advocate for improving the ACT's water storage capacity so that the future development of ACT and its surrounding region is better assured. Although the need for a new water storage facility is some years off, a Biosphere Reserve could make the decision more complicated, lengthy and costly to achieve, thus restricting the ACT's development potential.

Existing Environmental Credentials of the ACT

The ACT is already highly regarded for its natural environment and its very positive role in protecting downstream water supplies. HIA believes that our trees, heritage sites and buildings, water and energy supplies are well protected under current policies and regulations.

To achieve this reputation, unfortunately the requirements of current legislation is often very onerous and restrictive, and then are often managed and administered in contradictory,

uncertain and time delaying manners. The ACT does not need another layer of red tape restriction placed upon the Territory's future development, which will act as a disincentive for the investment required to deliver necessary change and development.

There is also a risk that by isolating such a reserve solely with the borders of the ACT, it will lead to an insular view of the environment. While a species may be rare within the ACT, it may be very well populated across the border, and unnecessary restrictions could be placed on possible developments in the ACT. But development and growth of the ACT is not isolated, and the Territory's economic prosperity does positively impact throughout the surrounding region.

Planning Policies and Processes

The Government's Spatial Plan for the ACT's future growth to increase up to 500,000, is dependent upon both new land outside the existing urban boundaries and infilling within the existing urban area. The establishment of a Biosphere Reserve across the whole of the Territory could place this strategy at risk. The proposed Reserve could be appropriately applied to only the National Park areas of the ACT.

The National Capital Plan also provides clear and definite protection to the natural surroundings of the City. The uniqueness of Canberra's siting, its urban footprint and significant National areas are all enshrined in the National Capital Plan.

HIA believes that the current ACT planning system, with input from relevant agencies, adequately addresses the sustainable needs of Australia's largest inland City. For example, the later stages of Gungahlin have been re planned to address the issues of woodland and grassland protection, while still allowing future development. Also the future Molonglo development area is being rigorously planned to ensure a very environmentally sustainable outcome.

Although the establishment of a reserve may not give rise to any more legislation, it is likely to become another step in the lengthy planning approval process. HIA is concerned that opponents in their objections to change, growth and development would also likely use it. HIA is aware that Councils in the Mornington Peninsular and Western Port areas of Victoria, which are a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, have extended Victorian Government's stringent water and energy sustainability requirements, thus leading to a further cost increase for new house buyers.

Current planning reform processes being undertaken by ACTPLA reflect the building industry's long term criticism of the ACT being one of the most complicated and uncertain systems in Australia. Industry is anticipating a vast improvement from the new legislation later in 2007, which will allow a quicker and more certain planning outcome, and which could help alleviate the increasing problem of housing affordability.

Summary

In summary, HIA does not support the proposal for the whole of ACT to become a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve until a complete financial impact statement has been prepared, so that the effect of the proposal on the Territory's economy can be considered.

We believe that the current planning policies and systems do adequately protect ACT's environment. The impost of another layer onto the development approval process will only add to a system that is now beginning to be reformed.