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PIA ACT Submission to ACT Legislative Assembly Planning Committee - Inquiry into Billboards

The Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) is the national association representing professional town planners throughout Australia. The Institute has a total membership of about 5,000 people. The ACT Division of the Planning Institute of Australia (PIA ACT), is led by a committee of members who voluntarily help advance the planning profession in the ACT. PIA ACT generally supports the Intent of the General Development Controls in the Signs General Code, NI2008-27, specifically:

- to ensure that the signs are a type appropriate for the zone and contain appropriate content for the location
- to ensure that advertisements and signs do not compromise the role of the Territory as the setting of the National Capital and Seat of Government of the Commonwealth
- to ensure that signs and advertisements complement the attractiveness, safety, legibility and amenity of the natural, modified and built environments both by day and night
- to ensure that signs and advertisements are not incompatible with the existing or future desired character of the locality
- to support the role of signs and advertising as an important factor in identifying the commercial character and vitality in locations such as ground floor level retail, mixed services and industrial areas
- to establish provisions for signage in a specified area which create and co-ordinate a particular design theme; and
- to ensure appropriate agreement is established for proposals that are on or encroach into Territory Land.

The ACT Chapter of PIA also notes that there are a number of current provisions governing the use of signs and billboards in the ACT including:

- The Signs General Code, NI2008-27, effective March 2008;
- Roads and Public Places (Removable Signs) Code of Practice 2005, Disallowable Instrument DI2005-207; and
- The National Capital Plan - Signs General Code.

In general, PIA supports current arrangements that do not allow for commercial roadside signs in road reservations along main approach routes, other than directional signs, temporary real estate signs and temporary signs advertising community events. We note that billboards at the Canberra Airport may not currently be allowed in other similar areas and are not subject to Territory or National Capital Plan provisions, but acknowledge that these may be permitted under the Commonwealth Government's Airport Act 1996 and the Canberra Airport Masterplan 2014-2034.

PIA ACT generally supports a continuation of current restrictions on commercial signs in residential and mixed use areas, but acknowledges that in some limited instances it may be appropriate to allow for larger signs, including electronic signs in commercial and industrial areas, such as in Garema Place and in Fyshwick. For example, the current sign for the Canberra Theatre is considered appropriate in this context, provided that the content is specific to events being held at the venue. Likewise the current electronic billboard at the Canberra Convention Centre should only be permitted to display information pertaining specifically to the venue and not general commercial advertising. PIA suggests there may be a case for similar signs in association with sporting precincts.

However, we also consider it important that billboards and signs are not a distraction or potential safety hazard for motorists, cyclists or pedestrians and do not detract from the visual amenity or clutter streetscapes. Signs that provide directions or community information are appropriate, but should not be larger than necessary. Commercial advertising billboards, in general, should be prohibited. Such billboards detract from Canberra's attractiveness as a city set in a natural environment.

PIA also notes that as at Friday 16 June 2017, there were 24 on-line responses to a RIOTACT article on billboards. Of these posts, seven were opposed to billboards and two posts suggested that the issue of billboards was too trivial to waste time over. A number of people who posted messages could not find any information on current restrictions, and were seeking assistance. Other messages provided sarcastic or humorous comments about particular signs. There were a relatively small number of responses to the RIOTACT article, and it is PIA's view that these responses suggest that there is **not** a groundswell of public opinion supporting major changes to current arrangements.

In general, it is not clear to PIA ACT why current policies are in need of a "shake up", as suggested by the Chief Minister. However, we suggest that there is a case to simplify the current regulatory provisions and make them easier to find if doing a search on the ACT Government's website.

Should you require more information, please do not hesitate to contact us on the details above.

Yours faithfully



President,

PIA ACT Division

