

Standing Committee
Planning and Urban Renewal Committee
Canberra, ACT 2601

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Submission to Planning Committee inquiry into billboards

To whom it may concern

Regarding the inquiry into rules and practices around outdoor advertising in public spaces, I would like to make the following points:

1. Practices elsewhere should not guide this decision

It is a great strength of the ACT that our public spaces remain free and clear of visual pollution. Advertising turns what should be friendly and welcoming public spaces into a minefield of attacks on people's bodies and self-worth. Advertisers insult the intelligence of their unwilling viewers and the perpetual attempts to mislead, manipulate, and encourage poor choices and addictions are guiding Australia down the path to becoming a lower trust society.

I urge the Committee not to assume that the normalisation of this trend elsewhere constitutes an argument for doing the same thing here. Rather, evidence in the form of the visible ugliness in other cities should make us more determined than ever not to sacrifice the aesthetic we currently enjoy.

2. More billboards would be "swimming against the tide" of other state priorities

We are seeing increasing evidence of the harm advertising causes (sexualisation of girls, loss of self-esteem, eating disorders, the manipulation of children to make demands of parents). Largely as a result of this, a range of groups and state bodies are engaged in efforts to reduce and regulate advertisements targeting children and vulnerable groups. Given this trend, it seems bizarre to give away such huge concessions to advertising in other areas.

We are also seeing more concern than ever with the specific problem of road accidents and deaths, leading to higher fines and lower speed limits in some areas. In the current climate over road safety it hardly makes sense to line the roadside with visual distractions targeted at drivers.

Policy in these areas needs to be coherent and not undermining of itself.

3. Revenue would be trivial relative to the costs

The total revenue in prospect from billboards would not even amount to a decimal point on the scale of revenue the ACT government currently collects. Yet it fundamentally change the look and face of the ACT. The benefit may even be more negligible due to the very sensible reforms the ACT is making towards use of land tax. Anything which affects the natural beauty of the ACT and undermines the value of public spaces will subtly reduce revenue sources tied to land values.

I urge this committee not to let advertisers loose on our public spaces. To the degree that current laws against public advertising are being skirted, the push should be firmly in the other direction.

Yours sincerely

Mark Gibbons

