

Mr Jeremy Hanson MLA (Chair)  
Attention: The Secretariat  
Standing Committee on Economic Development and Tourism

5 May 2017

Via email: [hamish.finlay@parliament.act.gov.au](mailto:hamish.finlay@parliament.act.gov.au)

Dear Mr Hanson

**Inquiry into a new convention centre for Canberra**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into a new convention centre for Canberra. This letter forms our submission to the Inquiry.

**Background**

We note the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry which are as follows:

The Standing Committee on Economic Development and Tourism, noting that the proposal to construct a new convention centre for Canberra has attracted tri-partisan support in the Assembly, resolves to inquire into and report on the proposal to construct a new convention centre for Canberra including:

- The level of demand from business and clients for a new centre and the likely economic impact of a new centre on Canberra;
- Whether the “Australia Forum” proposal has the support of stakeholders;
- The amount of work required to take the proposal to an investment ready stage
- The appropriate source of funding (federal, territory or private sector) for each stage of the project;
- The level of priority that should be given to a new convention centre in relation to other infrastructure projects in the ACT; and
- Other matters arising during the course of the inquiry.

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## **Our priorities**

ACTCOSS are informed in our submission for the Inquiry by our *Community Shared Statement for the ACT 2016 Election* which has been endorsed by 19 representative and peak bodies. Our shared statement laid out key themes and priorities for the future of Canberra across city infrastructure, economic development, social infrastructure, services and our local environment.

The [statement](#) can be found here along with our [Budget Submission](#) and [supplementary briefing](#).

### ***Economic development***

Our priorities for economic development include increasing access to secure jobs that pay a living wage, including by investing in the public sector, public services, public and social infrastructure projects that increase jobs in the local economy.

We note that improving access to secure jobs should pay particular attention to young people, older people, people who are returning to work from caring roles and people who have been long term unemployed.

We note that a key utility of the convention centre will relate to the service and tourism industries and that these industries produce some jobs which are low paid, casualised and insecure.

Hospitality (accommodation and food services) is the industry with the highest incidence of casual employment (64.5%) and unemployment (5.7%, in terms of last industry of employment) in Australia.<sup>1</sup> It is also the industry with the lowest proportion of workers with paid leave entitlements and the highest proportion of underemployed workers.<sup>2</sup> ACT research has found that a large proportion of workers in this industry in Canberra are likely to face housing stress – and this subsequently comes at the expense of household expenditure on other goods and services.<sup>3</sup>

For workers in this industry, this can create ‘a cycle of insecurity at work and unaffordability in the housing market, with low-paid work and variable hours making it impossible to secure affordable accommodation’.<sup>4</sup>

ACTCOSS would argue the level of priority that should be given to a new convention centre in relation to other infrastructure projects in the ACT should

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- 1 A Kryger, *Casual employment in Australia: a quick guide*, Research paper series, 2014–15, Department of Parliamentary Services, January 2015, <[http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/library/prspub/3612450/upload\\_binary/3612450.pdf;fileType=application/pdf](http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/library/prspub/3612450/upload_binary/3612450.pdf;fileType=application/pdf)>.
  - 2 ACOS, *Submission to Independent Inquiry into Insecure Work in Australia*, ACOS, Sydney, January 2012.
  - 3 Housing and Homelessness Policy Consortium ACT, *Housing affordability and the labour market in the ACT*, ACTCOSS, Canberra, 2016, accessed 4 May 2017, <<http://www.actcooss.org.au/sites/default/files/public/publications/2016-consortium-project-2-report-housing-affordability-and-the-labour-market-in-the-act.pdf>>.
  - 4 ACTU, *Lives on Hold, Unlocking the potential of Australia’s workforce: Independent inquiry into Insecure work*, commissioned by the Australian Council of Trade Unions, 2012, p.20. See also, VCOSS, *Insecure work creates vulnerability and increases inequality*, VCOSS submission into the Victorian Inquiry into the labour hire industry and insecure work, VCOSS, Melbourne, 2015, p.11.

be determined according to the relative impact of investment on creation of secure jobs that pay a living wage. ACTCOSS encourages the Committee to undertake a comparative analysis of the impacts of ACT Government investments in the new convention centre against investment in other critical infrastructure, including social services. We would also be interested to see the multiplier effect of investment in different industries on flow on spending on other goods and services in the ACT economy.

### ***City infrastructure***

In our Budget Submission and Budget update prioritising commitments made in last year's ACT election, ACTCOSS detailed our key priorities for Canberra.

Our priorities for city infrastructure include:

- Increasing affordable housing for households in the bottom 40% income quintiles through a resourced housing strategy
- Developing transport services that are accessible, affordable and fit for purpose
- Ensuring urban renewal increases affordability
- Accessibility, sustainability and inclusiveness for all ages
- Ensuring that urban planning and city design decisions are made with genuine involvement and consultation with the communities that live, work and use those spaces, including residents, workers and local businesses.

### ***Other priority areas***

We also seek investments in health infrastructure that prioritises increasing access to services, especially mental health, sexual and reproductive health, drug and alcohol, chronic disease and aged care services; promote consumer control in service design and delivery; amplify consumer advocacy voice; expand access to services for people with the poorest health status and outcomes by providing health services in diverse settings, increasing the cultural appropriateness, cultural competence and quality of services.

In addition, ACTCOSS has identified a number of areas where the ACT needs to retain contingency for investment due to funding transitions and shifts in funding, including in housing, disability and mental health services.

### **Considerations to guide any investments**

ACTCOSS are not a stakeholder within the Australia Forum Proposal, however, we note some considerations. This is clearly a proposal for an ambitious piece of national infrastructure.

The business case produced by Ernst and Young in January 2015 shows that the Australia Forum proposal is clearly predicated on the idea that the convention centre including the centre for dialogue would be a forum for dialogues, conferences, and other occasions of national importance best held in

the nation's capital. It would be a landmark building unlike any other in the country befitting the role of the national capital and its importance in the region.<sup>5</sup>

There would be heavy take up and usage of the centre by national agencies and the Commonwealth Government. The centre would provide benefits to the Australian Government as well as benefits to the Canberra economy and these should be carefully considered in weighing up how much, if any, investment comes from the ACT Government as opposed to the Australian Government.

While we do not provide comments on the design, any investments should ensure that infrastructure is sustainable and accessible. An additional theme of our shared priorities for economic development is to ensure there is a safe climate and clean energy by supporting 100% renewable electricity by 2020 and zero net emissions by 2040. The design and planning of any new convention centre should therefore work to showcase environmentally sustainable design (in areas such as energy efficiency and waste management).

We have also stressed the need for infrastructure in Canberra to be truly accessible and inclusive to maximise the capacity of all people in Canberra to participate in education, recreation, economic activities and employment. The lack of Canberra meeting venues with good disability access is problematic and the existing convention centre is sub-optimal in this regard.<sup>6</sup> Any new convention centre should showcase good disability access (physical, sensory and digital).

We hope this has provided the committee with some insights into our priorities for economic development and city infrastructure, and some issues which should be considered in determining the relative merits of any investments which the government might make in a convention centre.

Please feel free to contact me on the email below or by phone on 02 6202 7208.

Yours sincerely,



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5 Ernst and Young, *Australia Forum – and its potential economic benefits*, Ernst and Young, January 2015.

6 Findings of PWD ACT Access Consultations, Presentation to ACT Legislative Assembly, October 2015.