Australian Institute of Architects

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ACT Chapter submission to the

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY
Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Water
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In response to the
Inquiry into ACT Greenhouse Gas Reduction Targets

Who is making this submission?

The Australian Institute of Architects (the Institute) is an independent, national member based organisation with approximately 10,000 members. The Institute actively works to improve the quality of our built environment by promoting quality, responsible and sustainable design. The ACT Chapter of the Institute (ACT Chapter) facilitates the Institute's activities in the ACT. The Institute has over 300 active members in the ACT.

Background

The ACT Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects (ACT Chapter) makes the following comments to the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Water in response to the *Inquiry into ACT Greenhouse Gas Reduction Targets.*

In response to a number of articles published in the media, on the matter of increasing density in Canberra to address the future sustainability of the City, the ACT Chapter was asked to make a submission to this inquiry. The following comments are the ACT Chapter's response to this request.

Increasing Density in the City

The ACT Chapter recommends the Committee asses the cost to the environment and the economy of new Green field suburbs on the outskirts of the City. As a City, we need to think about how we plan our Cities for the future, and how we retrofit our city and its buildings. The clear link between our affluent lifestyle and our carbon footprint means this is not only about urban form, but also about how we live with less consumption and still make our lives pleasant and rewarding.

The ACT Chapter believes that increasing density in the established areas of Canberra and stopping Greenfield fringe developments presents an immediate opportunity to reduce infrastructure costs to government and to reduce GHG emissions. This could support a number of sustainability targets for the Government as it brings together various interrelated issues around both the environmental and economical sustainability of the City.

We consider it to be preferable to develop and redevelop inner city sites within the city's existing footprint. Increasing suburban density in a managed way, in and around town centres, while retaining the heartland of existing suburbs, not only has environmental benefits, it provides lifestyle and workplace choices; and more housing types – a choice not just about suburban housing versus high-rise apartments but inclusive of other affordable dwelling options.

The established areas of Canberra have the capacity to accommodate population growth, make our city more energy efficient and minimise the environmental and economic cost of new utilities and road infrastructure. When considering costs and opportunities in achieving GHG targets the ACT Chapter would recommend the Committee seek an understanding of the cost to government of establishing infrastructure for services in Greenfields suburbs, on the outskirts of the City. This would include the cost of water, gas, and electricity reticulation, stormwater and sewer services, communications networks and the cost of extending the already struggling bus network to the ever-extending outer edge of the city.

Increasing density in the City could reduce GHG emissions and address economic issues in a number of areas;

1. Support the existing public transport system presenting opportunities for high frequency transport thus making it more viable.
2. Reduce the loss of existing Greenfield areas

3. A high level of energy efficiency is easily achieved in apartments and medium density housing
4. Reducing the need for construction of new infrastructure and the use of the resources inherent in this
5. Support and make use of existing infrastructure such as schools, shopping centres and community centres that might otherwise be struggling due to reduced population density and changing demographics

By returning established inner suburbs to their former population densities - when houses had an average of more than four occupants - a wider variety of services and local businesses will locate to inner areas. This will add to a number of other valuable opportunities that could arise out of increasing urban density in the City, including;

1. Economic viability – support existing infrastructure including schools, shopping centres and transport
2. Vitality of the City
3. Affordable housing that is not on the outskirts of the city so that it is affordable over time not just at the time of sale.
4. Creating a healthy City – a walkable City is a healthy City
5. Making a safer City – where there are people there are safe streets. An example is the current discussion about the City Walk area. Rather than re-build a road through the area that would be used mostly by day in the same way that the pedestrian mall is used, permanent residents would walk out their front door and on to City Walk at all times of the day creating safety by populating the streets.

Supporting documents

This submission has focused primarily on the benefits of increasing density as part of a Government strategy to reduce GHG emissions. Sustainable City planning covers a wide range of components including energy generation and use; water collection, use and conservation; transport; population studies and demography; and urban and governance matters. Increasing density is one element of the multi faceted approach needed to reduce GHG emissions in the ACT. To provide a broader context and address some of the other elements, the ACT Chapter has attached with this submission, for the information of the Committee, the following documents:

1. The submission made by the National body of the Australian Institute of Architects (Institute) to the Senate Select Committee on Climate Policy.

2. The Second Plank– Building a Low carbon Economy with Energy Efficient Buildings

The Second Plank is a report prepared by the Australian Sustainable Built Environment Council (ASBEC). ASBEC is the peak body of key organisations committed to a sustainable built environment in Australia of which the Institute is a member.