



OUR ALBERT HALL

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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **RELEASE OF NCA INQUIRY REPORT**

*The Way Forward* is the apt title of the federal parliamentary report on the role of the National Capital Authority, released this week. *Fast Forward* would have suited too. The Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories was only appointed on 11 March this year, submissions were in a month later and the public hearings were held in April and May. The report's publication two months later is pretty good going.

Among the organisations featuring prominently in the report are Friends of the Albert Hall, the National Trust of Australia ACT, and the Walter Burley Griffin Society. Last year the three groups mounted a collaborative challenge to an impervious and imperious National Capital Authority over its unacceptable planning proposal for the Albert Hall precinct, the now notorious Draft Amendment 53. Less than eighteen months after the first and famous face-off, in the Albert Hall itself on 5 March 2007, the NCA is to be radically reformed, its Chief Executive has resigned and its Chair will not seek reappointment.

Commenting on the report, Friends of the Albert Hall Vice-President Dr Lenore Coltheart welcomed the report's proposals for a reformed and consultative planning authority. '*The Way Forward* opens the door at last to a more rational and a more transparent planning approach for the ACT. Among the report's 22 recommendations we note especially the establishment of a National Capital Consultative Council, to include some form of community representation, and better collaboration between federal and Territory governments.'

Also among the recommendations are an NCA Board with 8 members selected on merit and experience, including at least two from the ACT region, and that the NCA have a special heritage advisory body. Dr Coltheart suggests 'While some of the detail needs to be clarified, in relation to reform of planning, governance and heritage protection, the report is right on the money.' The Friends are among those who are optimistic about achieving a new, reformed and accountable NCA and better planning outcomes for the Canberra community.

The next step is for Minister Debus to accept the recommendations and for the clock to start ticking on the 18-month schedule for a bilateral Working Group to finally resolve the planning destiny of designated areas, including the Albert Hall precinct. Friends of the Albert Hall welcomes the requirement that the community must be consulted in this process.

Still on the wish list though is the call made 18 months ago. 'We strongly urge that the Minister take the step the report proposes, and abandon the now notorious DA53.' Dr Coltheart adds: 'If there is one symbol of the change this report heralds, it is right where these problems converged last year – at the Albert Hall. A decision by the Minister to abandon DA53 would signal a new era in which federal planning authorities will genuinely recognize, value and take account of the views of the Canberra community in planning for our nation's capital.'

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