

Dr John Gray OAM, FAILA(Retd)
Landscape Architecture, Environmental Design

The Secretary,
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital & External Territories
Parliament House,
Canberra, ACT 2600

CLIMATE CHANGE, ECOLOGY, WATER AND THE CENTRAL NATIONAL AREA
Submission to the inquiry into the role of the National Capital Authority, 2008

About this submission:

I am addressing in this submission the issue of promotion of the national capital (Item e, Terms of Reference). More specifically I will argue the case for the Australian Government to make a decisive commitment to environmental interpretation in the Central National Area for the educational benefit, interest and enjoyment of those who visit the national capital. In the process I will draw the Committee's attention to the Australian government's limited initiatives, over the past 20 years, in the more natural parts of the Central National Area, particularly in the foreshore parklands of Lake Burley Griffin, outside the parliamentary triangle.

My principle concern is that the Central National Area does not adequately reflect the now well-recognised national importance of climate change, ecology and water to the future of our country and the great need to deal with these challenges. In my view, the Australian government should be demonstrating its commitment to addressing these issues in an obvious way in the Central National Area.

As an extension of my argument I am proposing the development and management of a small number of conservation reserves in the Central National Area to assist visitors to learn more about contemporary environmental issues. I am, in turn, putting forward three examples of reserves which could be developed in the foreshore parklands of Lake Burley Griffin. These could be developed consistent with both the requirements of the tourism industry and also with the need to protect threatened plants and animals. Sensitively designed interpretive centres would be an essential element of their development. The Australian government should, in my view, undertake these three initiatives in the next phase of evolution of the Central National Area.

The Central National Area – the past twenty years:

The Australian government has made substantial progress with the further evolution of the Central National Area in the first 20 years of the national capital's dual planning system. The majority of developments in this period have been in or near the parliamentary triangle or Anzac Parade. We have, for example, seen the development of important infrastructure works (principally new roads) and the creation of a range of culturally based elements such as commemorative places, monuments and national institutions. Some ageing landscape and building elements have been restored. Much of this work has been of a high quality and is to be commended.

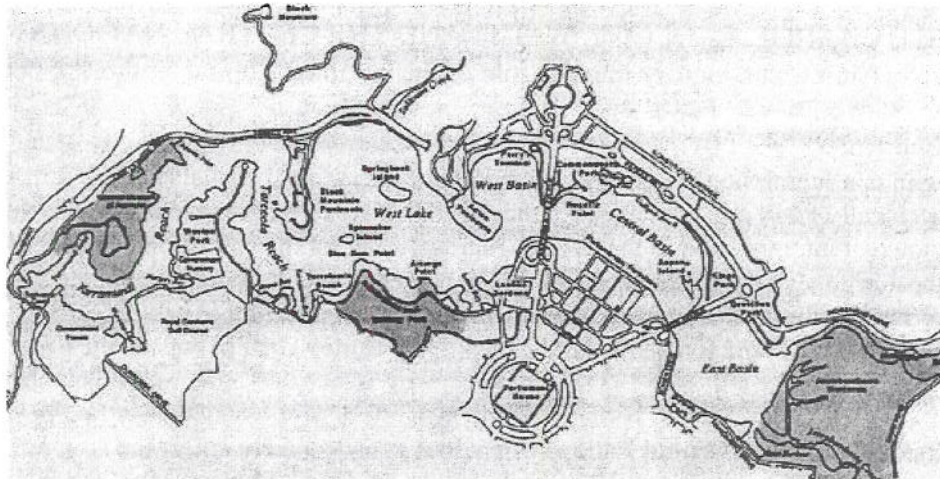
Nevertheless we have seen very limited evolution of the more natural elements outside the parliamentary triangle and in particular in the foreshore parklands of Lake Burley Griffin. There have of course been some building developments adjacent to the foreshores but the actual parklands have, with some limited exceptions, remained largely unchanged over the past 20 years.

Given that Lake Burley Griffin is an essential element of the Griffin plan and in turn of the Central National Area it is difficult to understand why the Australian government has allowed this situation to develop.

Possible environmental initiatives in the Central National Area:

There are a number of significant natural areas in the Central National Area which are of aquatic and terrestrial ecological interest and which have excellent potential as conservation reserves to assist in the interpretation to Australians of the major environmental issues that confront the nation.

How important are such reserves? A CSIRO report – *Implications of Climate Change for the National Reserve System* – launched in March this year by the Australian environment and water minister Mr Peter Garrett, emphasises the importance of conservation reserves in learning about and adjusting to climate change. CSIRO states that “Australia’s 9,000 protected areas are critical for nature conservation in a warming world”. It also draws attention to the fact that more species of animals and plants will have a better chance to adapt and survive if protection is given to as many different types of habitat as possible.



The three places illustrated (from the left) – Yarramundi Reach grasslands/Pryor Arboretum, Stirling Park and Jerrabomberra Wetlands – merit serious consideration for investments by the Australian government in their development. All three are recognised as of ecological significance in the Australian government publication *The Ecological Resources of the ACT*. The ACT government has already gazetted one of these places as “Jerrabomberra Wetlands Nature Reserve” but there is only limited development there so far. The other two, located on National Land, have not been similarly recognised to date.

These three areas cover a good cross-section of the natural elements in the Central National Area. They include a significant native grassland area with a nationally threatened animal, a small arboretum with a diverse range of tree species, an area of natural woodland which is the habitat for a nationally threatened plant, and a significant wetland with very large bird and other animal populations including many species of international migratory birds.

Conclusion:

I thank the Chair and Members of the Committee for the opportunity to contribute to this important enquiry. I hope that my submission will make some contribution to the matters you are considering.

I would be happy to appear before the Committee if that were its wish.

John Gray

10 April 2008