

Revitalising planning in the nation's capital

Canberra Times September 5, 2015 **Tony Trobe**

In conversation with Malcolm Snow, chief executive of the National Capital Authority

TT: Why did the National Capital Authority decide to review the National Capital Plan?

MS: The National Capital Authority (NCA) administers the National Capital Plan for the Australian government and has a statutory obligation under the Australian Capital Territory (Planning and Land Management) Act 1988 to keep the plan under constant review and to propose amendments to it when necessary.

The plan has not been comprehensively reviewed since it came into effect in 1990 just after self-government for the ACT. Dr Allan Hawke's review of the NCA in 2011 provided clear recommendations to the Australian government on how to find the right balance in planning responsibilities between the Commonwealth and the ACT government. This review of the plan proposes a number of changes in line with his recommendations.

TT: What does the NCA hope to achieve in the plan review?

MS: The plan reform work seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- To respond to contemporary circumstances and community expectations;
- To clearly articulate and protect the Commonwealth's interest in the national capital;
- To adjust metropolitan planning arrangements so as to streamline the planning process and empower the ACT government to manage the future growth of Canberra;
- To reduce ambiguity, duplication and complexity in the planning process by removing most of the NCA's "special requirements" for a substantial proportion of the ACT; and
- To "fine-tune" provisions relating to areas identified as having the special characteristics of the national capital (designated areas).

TT: What feedback did you receive in the submission process on the National Capital Plan Exposure Draft?

MS: There was strong support for the review proposals, which was encouraging. The exposure draft was released for public consultation on June 5, 2015, and officially closed on July 22, 2015, and attracted 39 submissions from a range of stakeholders and community groups.

As you would expect, the submissions raised a number of issues. Commentary ranged from positive feedback regarding the simplified plan format, which has made it easier to navigate, digest and understand, to concerns over the removal of "special requirements" for some areas. Removal of these "special requirements" would reduce the current duplication and complexity in planning for a large portion of territory land. This removal would also include the Murrumbidgee River Corridor and Namadgi National Park. However, both these areas will continue to be recognised as part of the National Capital Open Space System.

It's also important to note that the draft has not altered detailed building policies, including planning guidelines relating to City Hill and West Basin – these remain largely in line with the current National Capital Plan, though the NCA has proposed that the land around City Hill, Barton, West Basin and along Constitution Avenue could be used for diplomatic purposes.

TT: What is the next step for the review?

MS: The NCA will review the submissions received on the exposure draft in the coming weeks. We will consider all of the community's concerns and amend the proposed plan document accordingly. The community will have a further opportunity to comment again on the revised plan when a draft amendment is released in late September. A report summarising all of the submissions received on the exposure draft will be publicly released when consultation on the draft amendment commences.