

Chairman's Opening Remarks at the Public Forum, 26 November 2009

I welcome you all to tonight's public forum, the first of a planned annual series of such events presented by the National Capital Authority. The Authority has five members, and three of them — Gary Rake, the Chief Executive, authority member Peter Core, and I — live in Canberra. The Hon Neil Andrew, former Speaker of the House of Representatives, comes from South Australia, but spent 21 years here as a Member of Parliament. Our other Authority member, Kathryn Greiner, comes from Sydney, but has come to Canberra for meetings and her own work over much the same time. The Authority has some 55 employees, and all of them live in Canberra or close by.

My own Canberra lineage goes back to 1924 when my mother's favourite aunt arrived here with her husband, who worked on the construction of what we now call Old Parliament House. My mother and father came here as teachers in 1929, and returned here in 1943 with their three sons. The boys all started school here, and with a couple of gaps, I have spent most of my life here since.

We in the NCA have a responsibility for the present and future shape of the National Capital and for the maintenance of its central areas, a responsibility set out in the Act that established us. We are also citizens who vote in elections for the members of the ACT Legislative Assembly, send our children to Canberra schools, shop locally and play in Canberra sporting teams.

If I may say so, the members of this large audience share a comparable double life, for you are citizens of the ACT but, like the rest of the Australian population, this city is your national capital. We in the NCA do our work in the interests of all Australians, for the national capital is for all of them — and those who live in Canberra make up rather less than 2 per cent. But they — you — are very important to us, because we need you to understand who we are, and what we do, and why we do it, because the present and future Canberra involve the NCA in planning and making choices, and those choices affect all of us.

When I was appointed interim Chairman I formed the view that the Authority needed to engage with the citizens of Canberra in a more thoroughgoing way, and my first paper to the Authority set out a set of consultative processes that I thought we should adopt. This first forum is one of them. Three other forms of engagement are worth a mention now. First, we will progressively improve our website and make it interactive, so that you will be able to find what we are doing there and comment on it, if you feel the need to do so. I hope that we will be able to publish 'issues papers' that set out aspects of the real problems that we all face, like the inevitable increase in Canberra's population, the problem of parking, and so on. I offered, without prompting, to appear before the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories a few months ago, and will do so again next week.

I should add that the NCA and the ACT Government have a strong working relationship, and my aim is to enhance that relationship during my term. That does not mean, nor

could it, that we will agree on everything — but it does mean that we share a very large common ground.

Let me finish with two comments about consultation. I try to answer every letter that comes to me as fast as I can, and I will listen tonight as intently as I can to what is said. But ultimately the NCA, in making its decisions and recommendations, will have to follow its sense of the national interest past, present and future. This is not the city I came to in 1943, nor the one I returned to in 1961, nor the one I came back to again in 1980. Each one was larger, and more diverse in texture. Each generation has put its own impress on the national capital, and ours will do the same. But I hope I can deliver on the promise that in the next few years Canberra residents will be able to engage in a consultative process about its future as no earlier generation could.

Thank you.