



Boosting Tourism

Funding and Vision for the Future of
Canberra Tourism



19 September 2008



The Liberal Vision

The Canberra Liberals' vision is to enhance Canberra's attractiveness and acclaim as a premier tourism and convention destination. The Canberra Liberals' investment in tourism is an important component of our strategy to diversify the ACT economy.

Tourism is a major generator of revenue for many Canberra businesses in fields such as transport, accommodation, dining and entertainment. Tourism is estimated to contribute \$1.4 billion to the ACT economy and is a significant provider of private sector jobs.

The Stanhope Government has significantly cut funding that promotes Canberra as a destination. Although the ACT has succeeded in growing the yield per visitor, we have not enjoyed appreciable growth in visitor numbers. The stagnation in visitor numbers is a consequence of Mr Stanhope's cuts to tourism promotion.

The ACT has many advantages over interstate destinations because of the number and quality of national museums, galleries and institutions of political importance based here. The ACT tourism industry has enormous potential for growth if the ACT Government shows some leadership in promoting the region and organising high profile events. A healthy tourism sector will provide a return to the community through increased jobs, business opportunities and taxation flows which will fund other services.

Labor's Failures

The Stanhope Government has failed Canberra's tourism industry. It has slashed resources – both people and funding – for this industry. Funding was slashed by \$3.5 million in 2006, a reduction of 18 per cent. The Stanhope Government has downgraded the priority accorded to this industry and has then stood by and watched tourism numbers stagnate.

- Under Labor, tourism has been subsumed into the Department of Territory and Municipal Services as nothing more than a relatively minor, ancillary function. The Department does not even have a direct link from its homepage to information on tourism.
- The harsh reality is that it takes a considerable time to build up the appropriate people skills to develop and manage tourism programs.
- It takes even longer to build up a reputation as a tourist destination in interstate and international markets:

At a time when tourism is experiencing severe challenges as a consequence of the relatively high value of the Australian dollar, higher fuel prices and competition between destinations, Canberra needs to work harder and smarter to attract tourists. The failure of the Stanhope Government to respond effectively to these challenges is reflected in the latest Tourism Australia forecasts for 2008 and beyond. **In the case of the ACT, the key indicator of domestic visitor nights is forecast to reach a peak in 2008 and then decline over the next seven years and not return to this peak until 2015.**

Budget Cuts Based on Flawed Evidence

In the lead up to the 2006 ACT Budget, the Stanhope Government commissioned a review of all ACT Government programs; this review was chaired by Michael Costello.

- Based on the Costello review, the Stanhope Government made a number of gratuitous comments about the value and importance of tourism to the ACT in its 2006 Budget papers. The Stanhope Government asserted that ACT spending was high per capita compared to that of the states, but it failed to acknowledge that our per capita spend is notably less than that of the other two small jurisdictions – Tasmania and South Australia.
- The Stanhope Government also asserted – incorrectly – that there was duplication between the marketing and promotion activities of the ACT and the various national institutions.
- The Stanhope Government claimed – again incorrectly – that the corporate overheads of the former tourist statutory authority comprised 16 per cent of its annual budget.
- And the Stanhope Government suggested that marketing services for tourism should be ‘rationalised’ within the Department of Territory and Municipal Services.

The legacy of the Stanhope Government’s administration of Canberra’s tourism industry has been one of appalling neglect. In large part thanks to the cutting of resources and policy drift, the forecast from the Tourism Forecasting Committee reveals the prognosis for the local tourism industry is poor.



A New Vision for Canberra Tourism

The Canberra Liberals will take a number of initiatives to revitalise and rejuvenate the tourism industry, including the following.

Come Visit Me in Canberra

The ACT Chamber of Commerce & Industry has suggested that the ACT Government should do more to sell Canberra through the thousands of international students and diplomats who reside in Canberra.

A Canberra Liberal Government will develop a “Come Visit Me in Canberra” pack for diplomats and international students, pre-packaged for easy posting to friends and relatives.

There is nothing so effective as a personal referral. The pack will promote the key attractions of our city and provide practical information on accommodation and keynote events throughout the coming year. We will distribute packs via embassies, universities and through international student associations on campus. There will also be an electronic version of the pack.

A Permanent Home and Enhanced Facilities for Floriade

Commonwealth Park has proven its worth time and again as a beautiful home for the annual Floriade event. The Stanhope Government has set aside money in the 2008 budget to find a new site for Floriade. Labor has gone even further in its election policy by proposing to move Floriade to a permanent site at the Aboretum, among an inaccessible forest of seedlings on the side of a windswept hill.

The Stanhope Government has wasted seven years failing to secure a permanent home for Floriade.

Labor has not explained how parking or road access for Floriade visitors could be accommodated at the Aboretum. This is another case of Mr Stanhope pushing forward one of his white elephant ideas, without consulting the Canberra community.

We believe there is wide-spread support for keeping Floriade on the shores of Lake

Burley Griffin. There is no more beautiful location in Canberra for the event.

A Canberra Liberal Government will seek a 100 year agreement with the Commonwealth Government to secure a permanent home for Floriade at Commonwealth Park. In return for securing a uninterrupted option to operate Floriade at Commonwealth Park, we will make a significant capital investment in new facilities at Commonwealth Park.

We have listened to imaginative suggestions from businesses in the tourism industry, including ideas provided by the Australian Hotels Association. We will offer to invest in new facilities at Commonwealth Park including the following possible projects:

- refurbishment of Stage 88, including upgraded toilets and dressing rooms;
- construction of kitchen and catering facilities in a central location, for instance adjacent to or near Stage 88;
- investigation of the feasibility of a shallow summer swimming area suitable for families with young children, for instance adjoining Nerang Pool (this enhanced facility could be a small scale version of the pools at South Bank in Brisbane);
- refurbishment of and expansion of toilet facilities;
- insertion of raised walkways to allow panoramic views of key garden beds (the proposed walkways would be in unobtrusive locations away from the centre of garden displays, for instance running alongside the edge of the park adjoining Parkes Way);
- addition of fountains, public artworks and improved lighting; and
- contribution towards upgrade and maintenance of in-ground irrigation systems.

These proposals will need to be individually agreed by the National Capital Authority and we will also consult the Canberra community through a formal consultation process, to ensure that there is genuine public support before we proceed with any enhancements to this valued public space.

A Canberra Liberal Government will offer to invest up to \$10 million in Commonwealth Park, to enhance the amenity of the space and to secure a permanent home for Floriade.

The Canberra Art Biennale

The national institutions in Canberra house the most impressive collections of artworks in Australia. The National Gallery of Australia, the National Portrait Gallery and the Australian War Memorial are among the greatest drawcards in the Parliamentary Triangle.

Time and again these institutions have shown that major art events can be powerful magnets for interstate tourism. Over the years the National Gallery of Australia has been able to draw very large numbers of interstate visitors to Canberra, to view blockbuster exhibitions of art from overseas museums and galleries. However in recent years there has been emerging concern that overseas institutions are

growing more reluctant to lend precious artworks, due to heightened assessment of the risks to artworks during transit to Australia.

Despite the premier position that Canberra enjoys as a home to publicly owned art, our city does not enjoy as strong a reputation as a centre of contemporary commercial art. The cities of Melbourne and Sydney have been most effective at hosting major contemporary art events to attract interstate tourists. For instance the recent 16th Biennale of Sydney attracted 435,000 visitors. A number of high income art lovers are prepared to travel interstate to see art – not just to admire it, but also to buy it.

A Canberra Liberal Government will inaugurate a Canberra Art Biennale that will more than rival the Biennale of Sydney and the Melbourne Art Fair. Unlike the rival events in other states, the Canberra biennale will also involve coordinated art exhibitions involving public institutions throughout Canberra. This provides us with a significant point of marketing differentiation.

Visitors to Canberra will be able to follow an Art Trail that takes them around displays of contemporary works that are for sale, in addition to visiting public galleries to view works of national significance. The Biennale will provide Canberra's public institutions with an opportunity to cycle works out of storage which have not been seen for some time.

The Canberra Art Biennale will be timed in summer and will be centred around the parliamentary triangle. Our public art institutions are within easy walking distance of each other and we will book venues like Albert Hall, the Hyatt and the Great Hall as locations for the display of leading contemporary art.

The evenings will include film events in the parliamentary triangle. The Canberra Art Biennale will also feature artist talks, lectures by leading art experts and exhibits that incorporate works by some of the best Australian and international artists. The event will directly benefit living artists, help to enhance their reputation and advance their careers.

A Canberra Liberal Government will provide \$1 million of towards the operating costs of the first Biennale in 2010, to ensure its success.

We anticipate that some of this investment can be recovered through commission on sales and there will be a broader return to the Canberra economy through increased visitor numbers. Art buyers are often high wealth individuals and this event will improve both the number of tourists and the yield per visitor.

New International Convention Centre

The future of Canberra as a tourist destination is closely linked to the health of the local convention industry. Canberra has good convention facilities, but it would draw a far better share of the convention market if it had a new international-standard convention centre.

In 2006, the Canberra Liberals floated a concept plan for a possible new

Convention Centre. However a new convention centre befitting the nation's capital will require substantial Commonwealth investment. The ACT Government does not have the financial capacity to pursue a new facility alone without a partnership agreement with the Commonwealth and significant contribution from the Commonwealth. Furthermore if the facility is to be located on the eastern side of Civic, then the Commonwealth will first need to honour its existing agreement to duplicate Constitution Avenue to accommodate increased traffic.

Any centre will have to compete on the international stage, against major convention facilities across Australia and throughout the region. Consequently the centre has to encompass a range of facilities to provide a variety of convention and meeting options, a range of standards of accommodation, a selection of tourism and associated services and the convenience of access to the Canberra Central Business District. In addition, as befitting the nation's capital city, this centre has to have the capacity to cater for large scale international conventions and meetings.

Season Festivals

Canberra has the marvellous opportunity to take advantage of the four distinct seasons of the year: the Canberra Liberals will develop a calendar of events based on the seasons, that reinforces Canberra as a tourist destination across the year. We will develop a key event for each season as the anchor and the major draw card for that season.

At present, Canberra has Floriade as the major event to herald Spring and Canberra has a number of festivals and events that promote Canberra in Autumn.

A Canberra Liberal Government will develop a major event for January to celebrate Summer and a major event for Winter. The Canberra Art Biennale will be a significant new blockbuster event on our tourism event calendar in the Summer of 2010.

The Stanhope Government has made a bizarre and hasty election promise to invent a new event in Autumn. It is remarkable that the Stanhope Government seems unaware that Canberra already has several significant events in Autumn. A further unspecified event would congest accommodation and distract attention from existing thriving festivals and events.

The plethora of events already staged in Autumn include the following.

- The National Folk Festival
- The Canberra International Walking Weekend
- The Canberra International Music Festival
- The Balloon Festival
- The Canberra Festival
- The Canberra Day celebration
- The Canberra District Wine Harvest Festival
- The Canberra Marathon
- Celebrate in the Park
- Anzac Day
- The Federal Budget

The question has to be asked – “where is Jon Stanhope in Autumn?” The Stanhope Government seems to have no understanding of the existing array of tourist events already staged in Autumn.

Canberra Tourism

The ACT is the only jurisdiction in Australia without an independent tourism authority. In 2006 the Stanhope Government shut down the Australian Capital Tourism Commission, an organisation that had been working hard to promote Canberra as a destination. It absorbed the agency into an unrelated department.

Canberra needs an independent organisation that has the capability to develop programs that promote and market tourism in the ACT. It is essential that the ACT has the capacity to compete with other state tourism organisations – and to have an organisation that has appropriate flexibility and is not confined within a departmental structure or by bureaucratic strictures. An independent authority can react quickly to opportunities as they present, cope quickly with threats to visitation and work cooperatively with the Commonwealth Government and industry.

The Canberra Liberals will re-establish an independent statutory authority to be called Canberra Tourism to develop and promote tourism in the ACT and region. There will be no net additional cost, as we will transfer resources and staff out from under the mantle of the Department of Territory and Municipal Services. We will reduce bureaucratic interference and allow tourism officials to act in a more commercial and independent way.

The Canberra Liberals will work through Canberra Tourism to further develop and promote the destination brand of Canberra and its region, and to ensure that the key attributes of our city in particular have a very high recognition factor both nationally and internationally.

Collaborative Activities

The Canberra Liberals will seek to maximise the return for funds that are allocated to tourism by facilitating collaboration within the ACT Government between the agencies or parts of agencies responsible for tourism, events, conventions and sport. Enhanced collaboration also will be fostered between the ACT Government and relevant Commonwealth Government agencies, the NSW Government agencies and regional councils and tourism organisations.

A good example of collaboration on a regional basis was the recent initiative between NSW and the ACT to promote and market the Snowy Mountains as a tourist destination – and using Canberra as the gate way to the Alpine Region.

Other Tourism initiatives

The Canberra Liberals will also:

- increase funding to National Capital education tourism programs and will also assist national institutions in marketing their exhibitions to schools;
- undertake a comprehensive review of the “See yourself in Canberra” branding campaign within six months of taking office, to refresh or replace the campaign with more effective messages;
- ensure that the infrastructure required to support the growth of our tourism industry – such as attractions, accommodation, roads, rail, airport, signage and other assets – is developed and delivered in a timely and efficient manner;
- deliver appropriate training courses through schools, vocational training providers and tertiary institutions, to create a tourism and hospitality work force that is second to none;
- hold annual forums on the future of the Canberra tourism industry, to generate ideas for new attractions and events, to develop strategies to respond to emerging issues and to stay ahead of our competition; and
- review all legislation and regulations affecting tourism with an aim of reducing unproductive red tape – we will allow tourism operators to get on with business, without the burden of unnecessary and stifling legislation and regulation.

Marketing Canberra to the World

A Canberra Liberal Government will make a serious investment in raising the profile of our city as a destination. This investment will help increase tourism and economic activity in the ACT.

A Canberra Liberal Government will increase annual tourism funding by around 20 per cent by 2010, with an additional \$9 million in funding over the next four years. This will include funding for the Canberra Convention Bureau and for marketing the ACT as a tourism destination interstate.

In addition we will provide a further \$1 million for the first Canberra Art Biennale in 2010.

The new funding for promoting the Territory will be scaled up incrementally, to allow development of effective marketing campaigns ahead of increased investment in strategy, product development and increased marketing materials.

	2008-09 \$000	2009-10 \$000	2010-11 \$000	2011-12 \$000
Additional investment in marketing the ACT as a destination	1,000	2,000	3,000	3,000
The 2010 Canberra Art Biennale		500	500	
Investment in Commonwealth Park infrastructure		10,000		

The new funding provided by a Canberra Liberal Government will be a real and genuine increase. We will publish disaggregated financial details to reveal the true spending on tourism, events, sporting and other programs, to ensure openness and transparency.

Investment in tourism yields a return for the whole Canberra community. For example in the 2003-04 financial year, the ACT Government spent \$22 million on tourism and promotion of the ACT, and in return received \$107 million in indirect taxation revenue flowing back to public coffers. Tourism funding is an investment that delivers a return to the community, a return that will allow ACT Governments to pay for the services that Canberra residents deserve.

The intention of the Canberra Liberal's tourism policy is to build recognition of Canberra as a destination among Australian and international visitors. We will make tourism a priority once more, after seven years of neglect from the Stanhope Government. Our new investment will focus primarily on the promotion and marketing of the Territory and will help raise the profile and appeal of Canberra in all key source markets.

Authorised by Andrew Health, Canberra Liberals