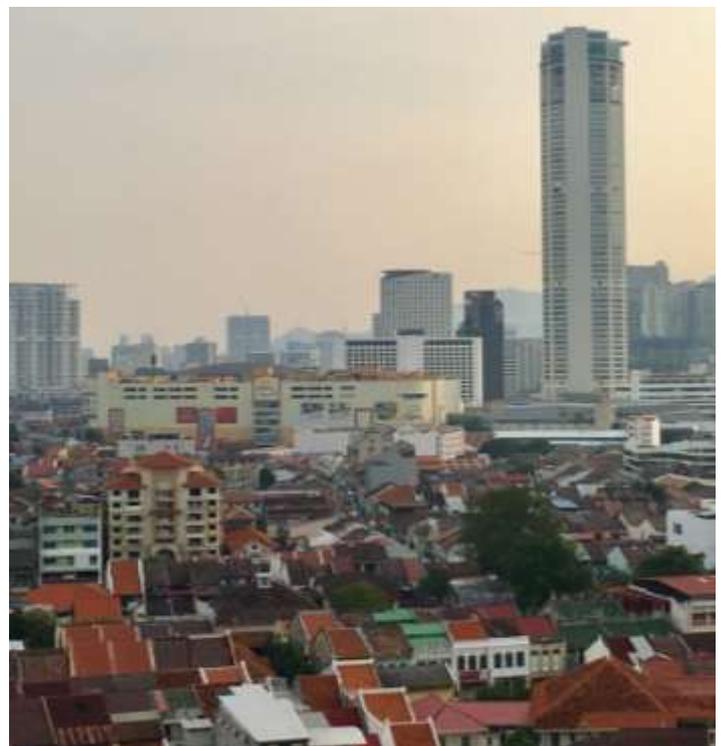




# **Cultural Landscape Diversity and the Implications for Management**

## **Australia ICOMOS Cultural Landscape Symposium Proceedings**

**Hobart, Tasmania  
10<sup>th</sup> November 2018**



# **Extreme Challenges Facing the Conservation of the Lake Burley Griffin and the Lakeshore Landscape — a Community Parkland Space**

**Juliet Ramsay**

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## **Abstract**

In the 21st Century, community parkland landscapes have become vulnerable to exploitation by political financial interest groups. The associated values that are under threat are – environmental qualities, views and vistas, significant landscape experiences, community health and recreation resources, and particularly, intergenerational equity.

Using Lake Burley Griffin as a case study, this presentation explores how 21st Century land economics and developer driven strategies have over-ridden and unravelled expert urban planning and design while also ignoring well-supported heritage values. The paper commences with the story of Lake Burley Griffin and its lakeshore landscape and covers a summary of the lake's planning and development processes and the community advocacy undertaken, including its disheartening outcomes. It explores the promulgation of false spin and ignored community concerns for a government program that promotes development at the expense of the ethos of heritage.

The paper touches upon some suggestions as to how community members and the wider heritage discipline could counteract these powerful and damaging forces to strengthen and influence cultural capital in order to protect community parkland spaces.

## **Introduction**

Australia has much to thank its forebears of colonial administration for, for their provision of a generous supply of green space that initially was manifest as domains, botanic gardens, commons and government farms (Freestone 2010, p. 241). Those green areas have evolved and expanded as community parks and recreation and natural areas, evident in city centres, urban fringes, riverine areas, and on hilltops and along foreshores. Canberra, initially planned in the closing era of the picturesque landscape movement and largely established in the mid 20th Century with modernist ideals, was bestowed with a great swathe of open space and a central lake as a core.

In February 2015, a group of friends met for a picnic at Weston Park, on the edge of Lake Burley Griffin, Canberra. All were concerned about recent damaging impacts on the parklands of Lake Burley Griffin that were instigated by Canberra's Kingston Foreshore Development process that had removed a neighbourhood rowing club and a commercial boat maintenance complex from the foreshore area enabling the sale of those sites. Both the boat club and the maintenance complex were subsequently relocated into community lakeside parklands.

The friends consolidated into an advocacy group – Lake Burley Griffin Guardians (the Guardians) and soon discovered that those original issues were the tip of the iceberg of what was being considered for the lake system of Lake Burley Griffin and its lakeshore landscape. Planning had been set in train to ensure that a process of city densification extending over a strategic lakeside parkland and some of the lake-bed in the West Basin could continue. The heritage values of Lake Burley Griffin, the community and the environmental benefits of the lakeshore landscape were ignored.

Lake Burley Griffin with its lakeshore landscape, although a recognised national icon, has only some segments listed for heritage protection. On the National Heritage List is the High Court National Gallery Precinct. On the Commonwealth Heritage List are the Parliament House Vista (encompassing parklands and gardens on the north and south side of the Central Basin), Yarralumla and Surrounds, the Carillon and the Sculpture Gardens of the National Gallery of Australia. On the ACT Heritage List are Jerrabomberra Wetlands and Weston Park, and there are numerous additional place nominations to heritage lists (refer GML 2009, pp. 2-3). Despite various studies and nominations there is no all encompassing heritage listing, conservation or management plan for Lake Burley Griffin's waters and its lakeshore landscape, a designed cultural landscape, as an integrated lake landscape system.

As with all cultural landscapes, understanding the natural environment component of Lake Burley Griffin's landscape system is fundamental to its conservation and management. The Lake is part of the Murray Darling Basin system comprising an impoundment of the Molonglo River with a catchment of approximately 185 km that extends to the source of the Queanbeyan and Molonglo Rivers and includes Sullivans, Woolshed and Jerrabomberra Creeks. With inflow from the Molonglo River and other contributing streamlines, including urban runoff, virtually ceasing in drier times, the Lake's waters are retained for lengthy durations and it subsequently requires a major flood for a significant flushing out of accumulated pollutants and contaminants. The Lake was first filled in 1964 and is comparatively young, with natural systems evolving, but yet to mature. Full maturity may be some time in the future (D. Mackenzie, email 3 June 2019).

Acton Park covers most of the West Basin lake landscape and is described as follows:

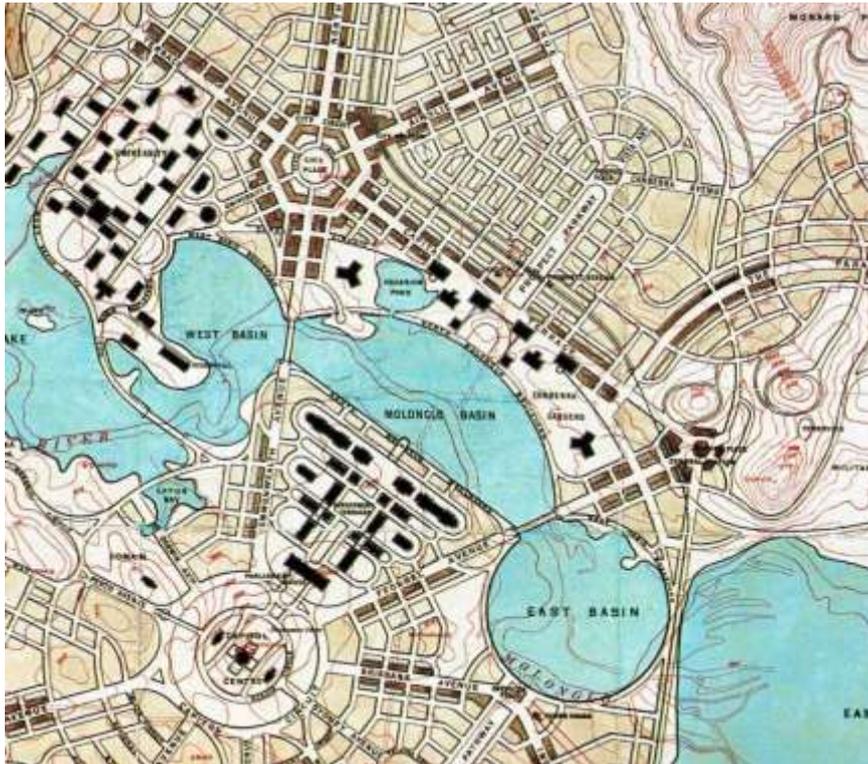
*Acton Park consists of 10.4 hectares along the foreshore of Lake Burley Griffin's West Basin. It is a peaceful beautiful lakeside park with a historic grove of she-oak trees that were planted in 1927. (ACT Government, Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate website).*

As well as being a strategic component of the award winning Lake Burley Griffin system, the history of West Basin demonstrates how the planning showcase of 20th Century Canberra was flipped over in the 21st Century allowing land economics to prevail to the neglect of iconic heritage.

## The Lake Burley Griffin planning story

The incorporation of ornamental waters was a prerequisite for Australia's national capital and a substantial lake system was to be the central feature of the National Capital plan designed by Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin, and of the subsequent Griffin plans of 1913 (National Capital Authority 2004, p. 45) and 1918 (refer Figure 1). But it was the Menzies Government's National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) (refer Figure 2), undertaking intensive technical research from the 1950s to 1963 as well as a

strong consideration of practical requirements, that made the lake system plan work. The Commission conserved the Griffins' three-basin composition, but softened the hard edges so that East and West Basins had a naturalistic edging more in line with natural contours of the landscape. The landscape style is discussed by Dianne Firth in her thesis, *Behind the Landscape of Lake Burley Griffin* (2000, p. 6) noting how the picturesque aspirations of the 19th Century met the international modernism ideals of the 20th Century. This is reflected in the landscape style of the lake, which can be loosely described as 'modern picturesque'.



**Figure 1** Canberra Plan of City and Environs by W.B. Griffin 1918 from *The Griffin Legacy* report. (Source: National Capital Authority 2004).



**Figure 2** Master Plan of Lake Burley Griffin prepared by the National Capital Development Commission 1963. (Source: National Capital Development Commission, map G8984 C3G45, 1964, National Library of Australia).

The lake structure as constructed in 1964 avoided the use of the Griffins' causeways delineated in the 1911, 1913 and 1918 plans that helped to make the East and West Basins circular, although the 1918 plan (refer Figure 1) demonstrated that the West Basin causeway could not be constructed in a circular form, most likely due to the course of the Molonglo River. Research by the NCDC, leading to the 1964 plan, included a scale model of the lake to test variable water flows and their impacts (Baker 2013, p. 132). The lake was sculpted into formal and informal areas and expanded in parts to create rowing and sailing courses and beaches for recreation. Ken Taylor in *Canberra City in the Landscape* (2007, p. 135) notes that hydraulic considerations were critical design decisions determining the shore alignment and that edge treatments also considered ecological issues, potential wave magnitude, turbidity, sedimentation and erosion.

In 1957 a plan of the lake, prepared by the English planner William Holford, had deleted East and West Lakes on either side of the East and West Basins as they were deemed impractical, reduced East Basin by 50% and had the impoundment wall located off Acton Peninsula (Reid 2002, p. 240). In the early 1960s West Lake and East Basin were returned to approximately their former size to provide suitable waters for recreation (Baker 2013, p. 131). To minimise turbulent water flow, the NCDC established a more natural and less erodible shoreline with several islands to channel water flow (refer Figure 2). The lake infrastructure works included two gracefully curved concrete bridges and a dam wall each of which were outstanding engineering designs of their time. The ends of the southern banks of Central Basin foreshore were bevelled to allow the bridges to meet the lakeshore at right angles and for the lake to be streamlined and hydraulically efficient (Baker 2013, p. 131).



**Figure 3** The completed and filled West Basin from the air above ANU in 1964, taken by Richard Clough. (Source: National Library of Australia, BibID: 2253890).

West Basin was developed as a horseshoe shape in the 1960s, utilising the natural form of Acton Peninsula as a partial boundary rather than a projection into the basin as proposed in all the Griffin plans. Being protected from the forces of water flow present in other parts of the Lake, West Basin's northern area was constructed with a long extent of beach (shown as a white foreshore line in Figure 3) to provide for public recreation.

Walter Burley Griffin, a landscape architect and architect, had used formal and informal plantings in his American work. He expressed an appreciation of Australia's natural vegetation and, with Marion Mahony Griffin, compiled a list of native plants and their landscaping values (Clough and Gray 1964, p. 3). In his *The Federal Capital: Report Explanatory of the Preliminary General Plan*, (Griffin 1913, p. 7) noted 'the forest reserves of Black Mountain as incidentally perpetuating there the only remnant of primeval luxuriance in the city site'.

Before the lake was constructed, apart from the natural vegetation, plantings and clearing for pasture from the settlement era existed. During the Griffins' time the lake landscape had begun to incorporate areas of Australian naturalness extending from Black Mountain and from Stirling Ridge to the West Lake shores. Landmark plantings of intense evergreen and formality were established with cypresses on the hill at the western end and a redwood plantation at the eastern end of the lake providing strong green vista terminal features. A continental arboretum, proposed by Griffin, is shown on his 1918 plan (Reid 2002, p. 146) to extend around West Lake and to the nearby hills beyond. During the lake's construction era from 1957-1963 some 40.5 ha of landscape planting was established around the Lake with planted character areas that used existing native trees and groupings of willows and poplars as formal and informal landscape areas. A total planting of 55,000 trees was accomplished (Clough and Gray 1964).

The Lake landscaping works of the 1960s retained much of the exotic tree planting from earlier years blended with native plantings, and followed an overarching principle – to retain the character of the natural landscape with the grey brown colour of the natural landscape to predominate, but with light fresh green around the lake margins; with autumn colours to be fully exploited in character areas of the Lake; and the Central Axis and Kings and Commonwealth Avenues to be formally planted (Clough and Gray 1964, p. 3-4).

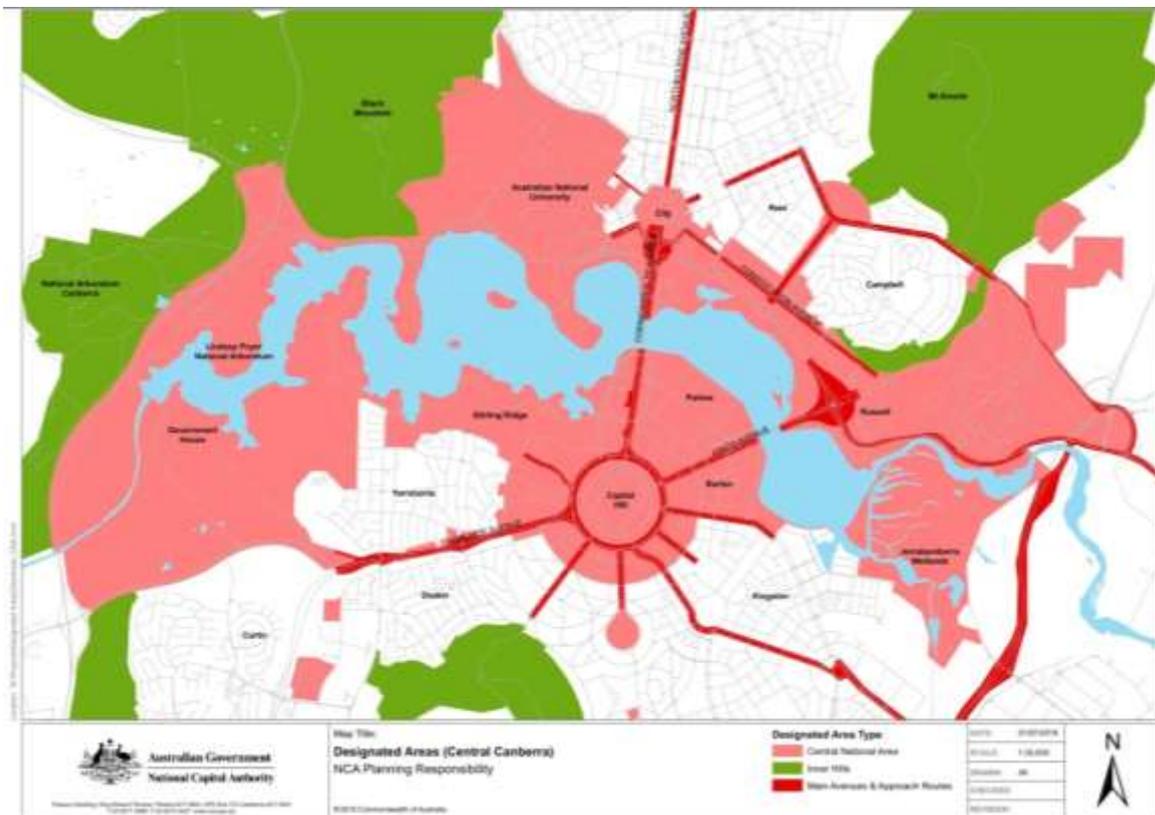
The completed lake and landscape was a masterwork of design and engineering that successfully kept the spirit of the Griffins' plan while achieving a functional and modern attractive expression. The works received the Australian Institute of Landscape Architecture Award of Landscape Excellence in 1986 and the Award of Excellence from Engineering Australia in 2001 (Australian Institute of Landscape Architects and Australian Engineering Legacy websites). National Engineering Landmarks that form part of the Lake Burley Griffin landscape include Scrivener Dam, the Commonwealth Avenue and Kings Avenue Bridges, the altered shoreline and Aspen Island (Australian Engineering Legacy website).

From the moment the Lake filled it became a recreation feature of the fledgling city, with people enjoying the natural (soft) lake environments as well as the structured (hard) environments. The community and visitors continue to use the Lake and its landscape for water sports, fishing, cycling, walking, national and local events and visit for relaxation and enjoyment of the views and vistas (Pipitone 2009).

## From sanguine planning to visionless confusion

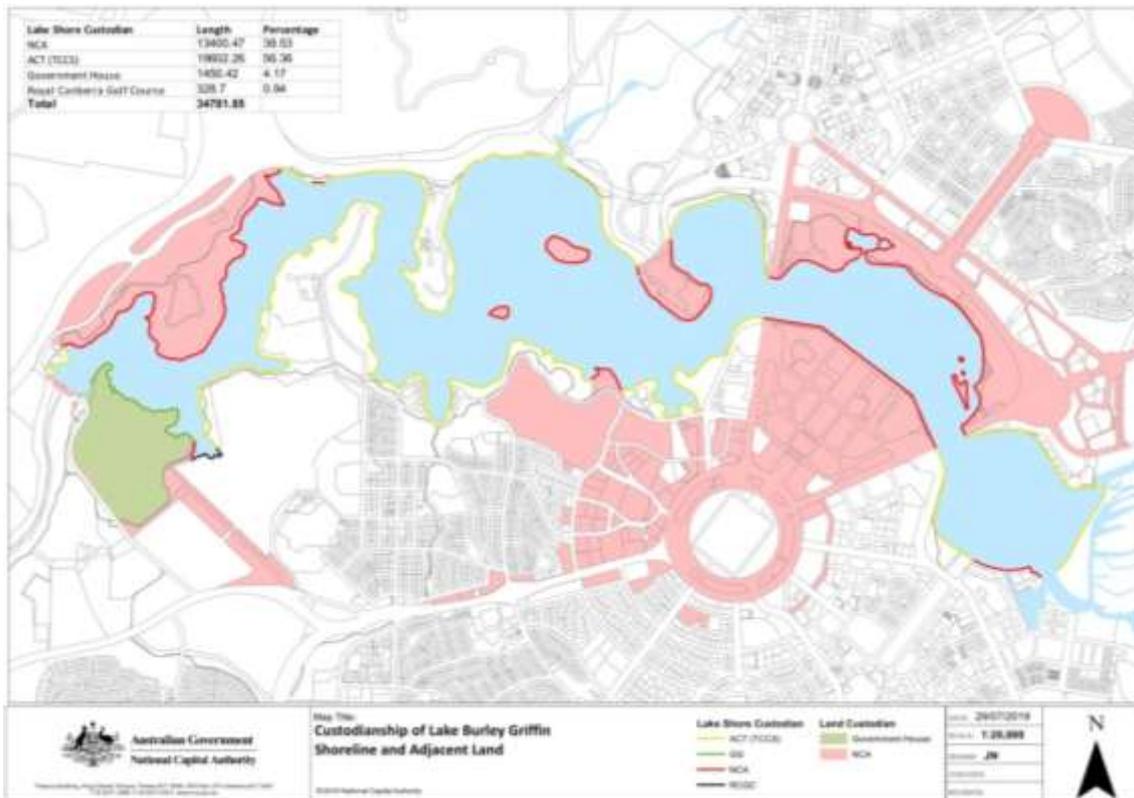
'Town' or 'urban planning' became a discipline in the 20th Century and, as noted in the Introduction to *Urban Nation Australia's Planning Heritage* by Robert Freestone (2010), has only been popular since 1910 when it 'arose to capture goals of efficiency, health and beauty of cities over and above the existing preoccupations of the established built environment professions of architecture, engineering and surveying'. However, the early noble intentions of the profession were overtaken in the years leading into the 21st Century, when urban planning became dominated by economic interests.

Land custodianship by a series of Federal Government Planning Authorities had existed in Canberra for almost 50 years. The most influential authority was the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) established by the Menzies Government in 1958 to hasten the development of the seat of Canberra as the National Capital at a time of post World War II wealth and rapid population growth. The NCDC was also responsible for the establishment of the framework for the satellite cities of Woden Valley, Belconnen, Tuggeranong and Gungahlin and major national cultural institutions. However, the foremost work of the NCDC was the construction of the central lake system (Lake Burley Griffin and lakeshore landscape) that became part of the National Capital Open Space System (NCOSS). NCOSS provided for an open space system to spread across Canberra's hills, including the Lake Burley Griffin system and the Molonglo River course which separated Canberra's satellite cities. NCOSS was part of the 1984 Metropolitan Plan and a designated area of Canberra (refer Figure 4) due to its national significance and being free of urban development (Fischer 2013, p. viii). Canberra's bush covered hills are a major feature that earns the city the title of 'the bush capital'.



**Figure 4** The 'Designated Area' of the National Capital (in red), 2019. (Courtesy of the National Capital Authority).

Following the establishment of the ACT Government in 1988, the NCDC was abolished in 1989. The *Australian Capital Territory Planning and Land Management Act 1988* that divided planning responsibilities between the ACT Government and the Federal Government's National Capital Planning Authority (that later became the National Capital Authority (NCA)) created a complex and confusing dual planning system with the NCA responsible for the national area, identified as the 'Designated Area' under the 1990 *National Capital Plan*, while the Territory Plan was to guide the planning and development of the Territory (Fischer and Weirick 2017, p. 118). Figure 5 illustrates land custodianship surrounding Lake Burley Griffin.



**Figure 5** Shoreline Custodianship of Lake Burley Griffin Shoreline 2019. The area edged in 'red' is land managed by the Commonwealth Government, the area edged in yellow is land managed by the ACT Government, and the area edged in green is the Governor General's Estate. (Courtesy of the National Capital Authority).

Table 1, below, chronologically sets out the sequence of changes to the Lake.

1911	A lake central feature of the prize winning plan for Canberra by Walter Burley Griffin and Marian Mahony Griffin, surrounded by a perimeter of parklands with 2 bridges and 2 causeways over the waters, including an extensive East Lake and West Lake either side of three central basins.
1913	Central Basin widened with an island at the Regatta Point location in the plan.
1918	West Basin circular shape changed in the plan (Reid 2002, 240).
1957	William Holford's plan transformed the lake to an amorphous shape, deleted East and West Lakes, greatly reduced the lake's size and the formality of its form, and impounded the lake at Acton Peninsula.

1957	National Capital Development Commission established by <i>National Capital Development Act 1957</i> <a href="https://www.archives.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0007/562606/NCDC_files.pdf">https://www.archives.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0007/562606/NCDC_files.pdf</a>
1959	NCDC plan for the lake keeping Griffin's basin composition, land and water axes and the perimeter of parklands. The east and west ends of the Central Basin south side were bevelled. Freeways separated the city from the lake.
1961	NCDC plan for landscaping of the central basin extending natural vegetation from hills to the centre of the City commenced (Reid 2002 p.272).
1963	Lake completed with the lake shoreline mostly following natural contours.
1964	NCDC Master Plan for Lake Burley Griffin. Lake waters reached their final level by 29 April.
1964	Inauguration and naming of the lake, Lake Burley Griffin by Prime Minister, the Hon Robert Menzies.
1986	The NCDC received the Australian Institute of Landscape Excellence Award for Lake Burley Griffin and Adjacent Parklands (AILA 1986; NCDC 1986).
1988	The establishment of the <i>ACT Government through the Australian Capital Territory (Self Government) Act 1988</i> . <i>The Australian Capital Territory Planning and Land Management Act 1988</i> .
1989	The NCDC was abolished and National Capital Planning Authority (NCPA) established under the <i>Australian Capital Territory (Planning and Land Management) Act 1988</i> with responsibility for the capital but not for the rest of the city.
1989	Permanent Parliament House on Capital Hill completed.
1990	<i>The National Capital Plan 1990</i> published.
1992	Plan prepared proposing the development of Acton Peninsula and for foreshore urban buildings in West Basin (Reid 2002, p. 335).
1997-	Planning for Kingston Foreshore. Construction commenced in 2007.
2004	<i>The Griffin Legacy</i> report published.
2006	Amendments to the <i>National Capital Plan</i> (A.56, 59 60 and 61) provided authority for developments without heritage or social planning.
2007	Joint Standing Committee for the National Capital and External Territories review of the Griffin Legacy amendments.
2008	Passage through Parliament of the amended <i>National Capital Plan</i> .
2014	The <i>City Plan</i> , prepared by the ACT Government, with strategic planning that includes development of West Basin.
2015	<i>City to the Lake Strategic Urban Design Framework</i> prepared by the Land Development Agency, showing the development planned for West Basin.
2016	Amendment 86 to the <i>National Capital Plan</i> introduced wording to allow urban development in the lake parklands, as well as giving strength to heritage in the Designated Area.
2016	Auditor General's report on the Land Development Agency.
2017	The establishment of the ACT Government's City Renewal Authority.
2018	Henry Rolland Park opened 23 April. ACT Government referring to this as Stage 1 of the West Basin development and staging map developed ( <a href="https://www.act.gov.au/cityrenewal/places/west-basin">https://www.act.gov.au/cityrenewal/places/west-basin</a> )

**Table 1** Timeline of events associated with Lake Burley Griffin.

Adding to the planning confusion, the NCA was also responsible for the lands under ACT custodianship that held recognised national significance and lay within the Designated Area. This included segments of the Lake Burley Griffin lakeshore landscape that had been granted to the ACT Government. The National Capital Plan is a legal instrument developed to guide and direct land management in the Designated Area and up until May 2019 has been subject to 91 amendments.

The early years of self-government coincided with a 'land economics movement' and in 2003 a Canberra Central Task Force was established comprised 'of out-of-town political heavies and land development lobbyists who demanded that the ACT derive more revenue from inner city land sales after "up-zoning"' (Jack Kershaw, letter *Canberra Times* 4/9/17).

The NCA responded to the development pressures with *The Griffin Legacy* report (NCA 2004) richly adorned with painted images. The report covered a history of the Griffins' Canberra planning, but distorted the planning intention to support market forces and enable development of central Canberra (including West Basin), the area declared in the National Capital Plan as being of 'national significance'.

Some of the troubling directions from *The Griffin Legacy* report were transformed in the series of amendments to the National Capital Plan (Amendments 56, 59 60 and 61) without basic urban strategy studies for heritage, social value and the environment (Weirick 2007; Fischer and Weirick 2013). Some of the amendments were far-reaching. For example, Amendment 61 gave directions for the development of an apartment enclave over West Basin with the infilling of 2.8 ha of the lakebed extending up to 80m from the existing shoreline. The Federal Government's Joint Parliamentary Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories (JSCNCET 2007) recommended disallowance of the amendments, and Senator Bob Brown submitted a disallowance motion in Parliament, but both Labor and Liberal politicians provided strong reasons against the motion (Commonwealth Parliament of Australia 2007). Neither position reflected the heritage values of the Lake, City Hill or the past acclaimed urban planning. Senator Bob Brown's motion urging disallowance was lost.

Amendments 56-61 created a flawed National Capital Plan that gave guidance for markedly increasing the density of the inner city landmark feature of City Hill as well as West Basin with high-rise developments that will block significant vistas across the lake. The iconic Commonwealth Avenue route to Australia's Parliament is to be edged on its western lakeside with privately owned apartment blocks, whereas the original design was for parkland with vistas across lake waters to distant mountain ranges.

These changes are part of a wave of city development that has been transforming the excellence of past planning to a city responding to ad hoc market forces. The transformation is well-described by Karl Fisher and James Weirick (2017, pp. 111-135) who also note the shift from high-level political support for Canberra at the Federal level to persistent disinterest on the part of Federal politicians. The political attitude is coupled with the divesting of public assets and chronic underfunding for the planning and development of the capital and its heritage.

The National Capital Authority planners in their *The Griffin Legacy* report ignored the layered history and the heritage of the outstanding contribution of the Menzies NCDC in executing a feasible, well engineered and designed lake system. *The Griffin Legacy* report

instead became a blueprint for market development. Tony Powell, former Director of the NCDC, noted:

*...for 25 years the National Capital Plan protected Acton Park, West Basin, for specific public open space for recreation and tourist activities, a status that was confirmed by it being zoned as part of the National Capital Open Space System that was changed without public consultation by a variation to "residential" with a gridiron street pattern that was not in any Griffin's or NCDC schemes. (Powell 2016).*

The spin promulgated by the Governments was that infilling part of West Basin followed the line of a segment of the arc of Griffin's 1918 plan, as if that claim would make it a desirable proposal. As noted above, the design and engineering for the Lake was well researched by the NCDC and kept the spirit of the Griffins' three basin composition, but involved many alterations to the original Griffin Lake outline. To promote a small segment of the Griffin West Basin outline to validate lake infill for development is antithetical to the Griffin's plans of 1913 and 1918, as well as the NCDC plan of 1963.

## Environmental and climate factors ignored

As Canberra's lakes and most of its creeks do not flow perennially they are prone to poor oxygenation. A wide diversity of plants on land and in the water promotes wildlife habitat and helps trap the inflow of nutrient-rich minerals, which are the prime cause of eutrophication and blue-green algal blooms that in turn can cause more serious deoxygenating and possible fish kills (D. Mackenzie, email 3 June 2019).

The continuous green space of trees and grasslands of the Lake Burley Griffin lakeside is an integral component of the lake system. The natural lake edges of West Basin that have established native wetland grasses are now currently valuable as habitats for wildlife such as swans, ducks and coots, while platypus and rakali (the water rat) have been seen foraging in West Basin's water.

West Basin's naturalistic lake edge and open grassed areas suitable for recreational play and family picnics are to become hard-edged, life-free concrete boardwalks and building structures that not only block significant vistas, but also promote cold winter shadows. The more obvious issues of climate change are excesses and durations of temperature. Frost, drought, summer heat waves, fire and flood that figure strongly in the lives of Canberra citizens will worsen, particularly as population and city densification increases.

## Heritage values and ethical planning ignored

The lake and its landscape is part of a National Heritage List nomination, 'Canberra the Planned National Capital', that in 2013 was to be finalised by Minister Greg Hunt. The listing however was thwarted by the ACT Labor-Greens Government that would not agree to the proposed boundary. The Chief Minister, Andrew Barr MLA, in a letter to the Hon. Greg Hunt MP (30 November 2015) regarding the listing proposal, also wrote 'It is important that any future listing does not impose unnecessary additional regulatory burden or economic uncertainty of any kind'.

The Guardians membership is of predominantly retired individuals with backgrounds in a broad range of disciplines, but who have combined due to their common outrage at the

plans to damage Lake Burley Griffin and its associated lakeshore landscape. The group has a strong association with the Australian Garden History Society and has links to the National Trust of Australia (ACT), the Community Councils for North Canberra and Inner South Canberra and some neighbourhood community groups. The Guardians have attempted to pursue heritage listing, believing that the mechanism would enforce the heritage values to be considered.

Well-researched documentation in the form of heritage nominations and emergency nominations for 'Lake Burley Griffin and Lakeshore Landscape' were prepared by the Guardians citing heritage significance at a national level against seven of the eight national heritage criteria (Lake Burley Griffin Guardians 2016). This is comparable to the National Heritage listing of the designed cultural landscapes of 'Adelaide Park Lands and City Layout'; 'Centennial Park', Sydney; and Melbourne's 'Domain Parkland and Memorial Precinct' (Department of Environment & Energy 2019). In addition, a Commonwealth Heritage List nomination was prepared. Despite this, the nominations for the 'Lake Burley Griffin and Lakeshore Landscape' have been ignored by the Federal Government and its Heritage Council. However, the Lake waters and one metre of lakeshore edging is supposed to have blanket protection under Commonwealth Heritage in the *Environment Protection Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999*, but this is a status that is yet to be formally tested.

The ongoing lack of the Federal Government's heritage listing encouraged the Guardians to liaise with Australia ICOMOS (International Council of Monuments and Sites) and the ICOMOS-IFLA (International Federation of Landscape Architects) International Scientific Committee on Cultural Landscapes to prepare a Heritage Alert. This led to a Resolution being passed at the International ICOMOS General Assembly in 2017 (ICOMOS letter, 19th February 2018). Both the Federal and the ACT Governments have acknowledged the ICOMOS letter, but appear to have ignored its strong recommendations that covered the lack of progress on the National Heritage listing, that the infill of the Lake for development be halted, and that an overarching conservation management plan recognising and protecting heritage and environmental values be undertaken.

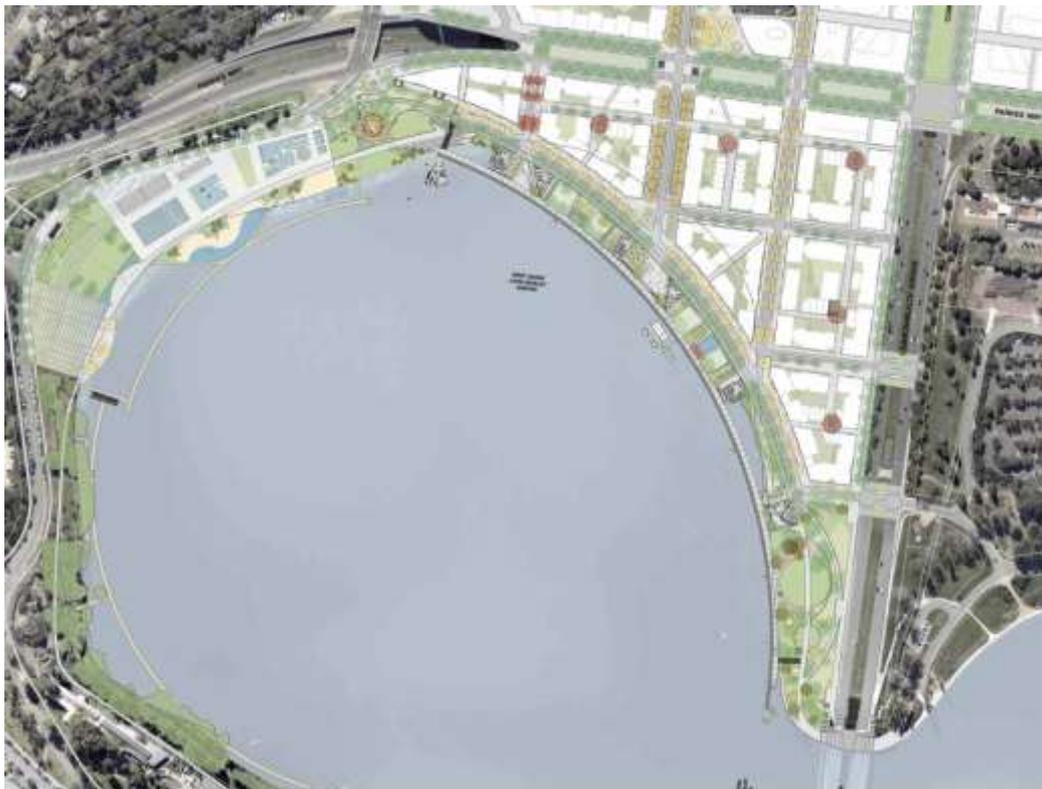
The Guardians, have also pursued other advocacy angles such as legal compliancy, environmental and social concerns, liaison with politicians, informing the public, flyers, petitions to both Federal and ACT Governments, media letters and media releases, information stands, sausage sizzles, clean-up-the-lake work, banner displays and public meetings. The first public meeting in 2016, that had speakers from the Federal and Territory Governments in attendance, resulted in unanimously agreed resolutions for an entire Lake Burley Griffin heritage listing and a halting of the West Basin development. The second public meeting in October 2018, held jointly with other community groups and University of Canberra's Institute for Governance and Political Analysis, had over 400 people attend and had similar resolution outcomes (Lake Burley Griffin Guardians 2018). The Guardian's petition to the ACT Government had over 700 signatures, yet has also been emphatically ignored by the ACT Government (E. Lee, letter 3 August 2018).

Planning processes undertaken by the ACT's Land Development Agency (LDA) that included excessive payments made to commercial operators in West Basin and which were exposed by the ACT's Auditor General, Maxine Cooper (Lawson 2017) resulted in the removal of the agency and the emergence of the City Renewal Authority. This authority however has continued to implement the warped vision of its predecessor. Journalist Jack

Waterford, who publicised the Auditor General's revelations, noted that Canberra 'may have the best-educated and most bourgeois citizens of any city in the world but it has never seemed to have exemplary public administration' (Waterford 2016). The Guardians have also observed other examples of government-developer cronyism, for example the relaxed rules for developers, with shortcuts in environmental assessments and heritage impact studies such as shown in the flow on from the Griffin Legacy amendments.

West Basin with its Acton Park lakeshore landscape, a critical component of Lake Burley Griffin, is but one of the unfortunate proposals subject to intense development promotion directed by the NCP and promoted by the ACT Government. As noted above, the Griffins' 1918 plan is being misleadingly used to give credibility to the Land Development Agency's 'City to the Lake' proposal, particularly the infilling of 2.8 ha of the Lake to extend the apartment estate area.

Acton Park has been neglected for many years, with the Government adding additional parking areas on redundant futsal courts while commercial operators such as bike hire and paddle boats, that gave the park some vitality were closed down years before they needed to be, thus making the place appear dull and lacking in vibrancy although it continues to be well used by joggers, swimmers, tourists and cyclists. The neglect appears strategic so as to foster the preparation for a densely populated privately owned estate, the 'City to the Lake' proposal.



**Figure 6** City to the Lake development proposal at West Basin, 2016. (Image provided to the Lake Burley Griffin Guardians by the Land Development Authority 2016).

The first stage of the 'City to the Lake' project, a park beside the northern end of Commonwealth Avenue Bridge, was opened in April 2018 with the City Renewal Authority

using the opportunity to foreshadow the ensuing damaging development stages (Willett 2018, pp. 120-121) and to apply more spin:

*Just as with Sydney's Darling Harbour, Brisbane's South Bank and Melbourne's Docklands, a redeveloped West Basin will unite the city centre with its best landscape feature* (ACT Government City Renewal Authority 2018).

ACT Planning is clearly trying to gain credibility in their planned appropriation of Acton Park and Lake by equating the peoples' parkland with post-industrial urban renewal. The West Basin development as a major source of revenue for the ACT Government is being strongly promoted, while the proposed final expensive stage of the project – the lowering of Parkes Way to make the City to the Lake connection, is not mentioned. There are sound reasons and support for public transport infrastructure, but what we are seeing in the ACT is the construction of new urban infrastructure primarily for political/economic purposes rather than meeting a demographic demand.

Canberrans generally delight in their self-sufficient city of wide green open spaces with a magnificent lake and gracious vistas. Lake Burley Griffin and its lakeshore landscape are interconnected with the city, the suburbs and the much wider natural open space areas. In 2016, Canberra citizens voted overwhelmingly to brand their car number plates 'Canberra the Bush Capital' (Canberra Times, 14 March 2017) representing their love for their nature-based city. However, one of Canberra's wealthiest development teams has been reported as believing that the term 'bush capital' is used by people to tone down developers delivering ambitious projects who believe their high-rise developments are 'sophisticated' (Foden 2018).

## Conclusion

We are now witnessing the undoing of the special qualities of the national capital created in the 20th Century. The ACT Government, reliant on land sales to augment its revenue, is focusing on the sale of green-field areas, including parklands in the city area. The damaging city development proposals with their roots in the 1990 National Capital Plan show no respect for urban heritage planning, the effects of modern climate change on the fragile lake shore environment, the ensuing heat bank and traffic chaos from excessive development, the social need for intergenerational equity or the recreational needs of rapidly increasing numbers of apartment dwellers.

West Basin should have had protection under the Designated Area planning provisions of the National Capital Plan and the National Capital Open Space System, but this has not saved the lake or parklands and neither have its heritage values. Lake Burley Griffin is loved by Canberrans and visitors, but development on its shores and appropriation of its waters are calamities. Although urban density may need to increase in Canberra, it should not be at the loss of strategic and valued community parklands which, together with Lake Burley Griffin, forms the designed cultural landscape of national significance.

The Lake Burley Griffin and Lakeshore Landscape example indicates that heritage listings and legislation in Australia do not appear to be effective in combatting development proposals that are destructive of significant heritage. Heritage groups now need to form and to do battle on behalf of heritage, but wins for heritage are not guaranteed. Basic principles such as the need for intergenerational equity and the precautionary principle are also being ignored. This low ebb for landscape heritage needs a new approach. Education is perhaps a

seed for change if understanding the value of cultural landscapes could be promoted to school children. The topic could be included into existing programs such as environmental education.

A troubling concern noted by the Guardians is that few Canberrans and perhaps fewer Australians in general realise that the shoreline of Lake Burley Griffin, their capital, is destined for urban development. Such a major reuse of national landscape and lake water, zoned as nationally significant, should have elicited not only broad national, but also broad international condemnation. However, possibly due to the 'secrecy' associated with the development rezoning and speed of amendments to the National Capital Plan, few people are aware that it is actually happening.

Walter Burley Griffin is famously quoted from an article in *The New York Times* 2 June 1912 (Griffin D, 2008:21) – 'I have planned a City like no other city in the world'. In 2017, Heather Henderson, daughter of Prime Minister Robert Menzies, expressed the painful feelings of most Canberrans when writing that 'If we keep going, Canberra will end up looking like any other city'. Henderson further noted, 'It is sad, distressing, agonising (no word is too strong) to be a witness to the destruction of Canberra ... Who, in their right mind, could prefer concrete and coffee shops and (greatest horror of all) blocks of flats, to calm beautiful water and trees on the shore and mountains in the distance?' (Henderson 2017).

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