

The Wrap

Land allocation undiplomatic

Community opposition prompts rethink on embassy sites.

Plans to build more diplomatic embassies in parts of residential Canberra have been withdrawn following a community backlash to the proposal.

Canberra residents of the inner-south suburb of Yarralumla successfully lobbied to stop plans to incorporate parts of their suburb into the diplomatic estate, which reserves land for diplomatic embassies.

In its recently released report, the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories stated that a decision to reserve land adjacent to Stirling Ridge in Yarralumla was not properly considered.

“The decision ... has aroused community anger, not just for the loss

of open space used by local residents, but because it has highlighted the essentially ad hoc process by which land accrues to the diplomatic estate,” the report stated.

In Canberra, the ACT government manages all land in the territory except for specially designated areas known as ‘national land’, which is reserved for use relating to the city’s role as the national capital, and instead falls under the authority of the Commonwealth government.

The National Capital Authority (NCA) is responsible for planning and development approval on national land, including the allocation of Commonwealth sites for diplomatic missions.

However concerns about the apparent conflict of interest in the NCA’s role were raised as part of the inquiry.

The Save Stirling Park Group suggested there should be separate bodies to manage the planning and approval of development.

“NCA is not an independent agency when it comes to new diplomatic estates,” it stated.

“It is the proponent of the development but it is also the planning authority that approves the development.

“There should be a separation of these two responsibilities as happened in other normal property development.”

The committee recommended a number of changes to the current process of allocating land to diplomatic missions in the ACT. These include a shift to a more commercial approach and the development of a long-term strategy for the allocation of land to diplomatic missions. •

LINKS

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Question Time

From ballot box to despatch box

Question

With the Prime Minister announcing the election date eight months before polling day, what are the actual rules governing the election process?

Answer

Australia’s electoral rules are outlined in the Constitution and the Commonwealth Electoral Act.

The Prime Minister sets the wheels in motion by advising the Governor-General to dissolve the House of Representatives. Each House can continue for no longer than three years after its first meeting but may be dissolved earlier. Acting on the advice of the Prime Minister, the Governor-General then issues the writs for an election once the House is dissolved.

This year the Prime Minister has said she will advise the Governor-General to dissolve the House and issue the writs on Monday 12 August for a 14 September election.

The writs are an authority from the Governor-General to the electoral commissioner to command the conduct of an election. They spell out the date

by which nominations must be lodged, the close of rolls, the date of the poll and the date for the return of the writs.

Electoral rolls must close one week after the writs have been issued. Nominations then will close somewhere between 10 and 27 days after the issuing of the writs. Polling day must be on a Saturday and must be at least 33 days after the writs are issued.

When election results have been determined, the writs are returned to the Governor-General. The writs must be returned within 100 days of their issue and the new parliament must meet no later than 30 days after the date appointed for the return of the writs. •

Do you have a question?

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