



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING, PUBLIC WORKS AND  
TERRITORY AND MUNICIPAL SERVICES**

(Reference: [Draft variation No 298—Holt  
\(Belconnen golf course\)](#))

**Members:**

**MS M PORTER (The Chair)  
MS C LE COUTEUR (The Deputy Chair)  
MR A COE**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**FRIDAY, 15 OCTOBER 2010**

**Secretary to the committee:  
Mrs N Kosseck (Ph: 6205 0435)**

**By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

**WITNESSES**

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## **Privilege statement**

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*Amended 21 January 2009*

**The committee met at 1.05 pm.**

**WATSON, MR CHRISTOPHER LEX**, Community member

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Planning, Public Works and Territory and Municipal Services inquiry into draft variation No 298, Holt—Belconnen golf course. Are you familiar with the contents of the privilege card?

**Mr Watson:** I am, thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you understand the implications?

**Mr Watson:** Indeed, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you have some introductory remarks that you would like to make?

**Mr Watson:** I am an individual who has long been concerned with planning issues, particularly in Belconnen, and especially now in west Belconnen, with the add-on developments that have occurred in Macgregor West. That is why I am very interested in what is happening in part of Belconnen golf course. I put in a submission regarding Belconnen golf course when the central part of the golf course was allowed for housing, back about 10 years ago.

I have also been involved with the Belconnen Community Council, not on this Belconnen golf course but on general planning issues in west Belconnen that are particularly pertinent to the remaining rural land. Of course, that includes the open space at the golf course and, going across the border and down into lower Ginninderra Creek, I have long been concerned with not only planning issues but landcare issues. I was a founding member of the Ginninderra Catchment Group. That might go back 20 years now; I am not sure.

I could summarise my two submissions, including the one that I made to the planning authority when they asked for responses to this variation to the territory plan. However, I think it is better if I spend 10 minutes addressing you, having sat through the hearing the other day when people were, in the main, proponents of the excision for housing. That might be an interesting way to give you feedback on how I saw what they were saying and how it fitted in with what was done by ACTPLA in this consultation report. That is why I was a little bit late getting my submission in, because I realised that the best way to handle this was not just to give you a copy of my submission to ACTPLA but to try and make a reasonable rebuttal—if that is the word—in summarising the issues and their comments. In my address now, some of those issues will come in. But I think it is better to spend the time on what was said the other day.

When Andrew Barr came in the other day, he said that a lot of people like to live near golf courses. That may be so, but any subdivision must be in the interests of good town planning practice. That does not give an open sesame to just put houses nearby, without having regard to how they relate to community facilities, shopping, public transport and so on.

There was a question from your committee about golfing becoming somewhat less popular. That could well be so, but, of course, with a growing population, in time there will obviously be a growing need for golfing for those who want to take it up. Obviously, with the growing population in Canberra, which is now about two per cent per annum—and it will keep growing as long as Australia is growing—if you keep growing by two per cent, and we are at 350,000 now, that is 700,000 by 2045. Of course, it will not stop there.

In other words, with the growth in Molonglo and the continuing densification, whether we like it or not, there are going to be more people wanting to play golf. It is not only golfing, of course. A lot of these golf courses, including the one at west Belconnen, are open space. They can, in due course, if golfing does fall away and the clubs themselves cannot keep going, be bought back somehow and put to other uses, particularly recreational uses.

One of the questions from the committee last week was to Mr Burrows from the Magpies club. He was asked: “Are you sure there is going to be a golf course there in perpetuity?” He did not answer that question. So there is a conflict of interest here. As parts of golf courses are hived off for housing, the clubs that run the golf courses are getting some injection of money or handouts; I am not sure how this occurs. But there is obviously a conflict of interest.

The conflict of interest was very markedly shown in the consultation phase, where the only time that ACTPLA apparently turned up to meet the public was in this drop-in consultation, which was advertised in the paper, at the Magpies club itself. There was no public consultation by ACTPLA. There should have been. It is a draft variation to the territory plan; they should have run an advertised public consultation, say, at Kippax library—at the very least, like what was done in an earlier generation by the NCDC. They would always have, for subdivisions of this character, and actually for all suburbs, displays at, say, Kippax Fair or Belconnen mall. I do not know whether you remember this sort of thing, but they would be staffed by planners for the week. On many occasions I would be going through Belconnen mall and it would be advertised on displays there and you could speak to people. Invariably, you would be invited to make submissions and it would then go before the parliamentary joint committee. Of course, that is the role that you are playing now.

They are the standards that I look up to. We moved to Canberra in 1970, so for those first 10 or 20 years, when the NCDC was in charge of affairs, that is what I expected. And I hope we will get back to that level of commitment and professionalism in consultation. I have to make that point because the other day at the hearing they did say there was consultation going on, but it was not quality consultation in a public place. If I dived into the Magpies club for that drop-in, it is not a presentation by ACTPLA in a public place. There is a real conflict of interest when it is held in the hall of the golf club itself.

The other issue that should be taken into account is the relationship of ACTPLA with ACTION. It is most unfortunate. We have a planning authority—and I underline the word “authority”—and you would like to think that the planning authority is taking all things into account. Unfortunately, public transport is under the department, under

TAMS. A question was asked the other day: “How have you consulted with ACTION?” The reply was: “Well, there obviously wasn’t much.” All that was said was: “We’re supplying a path to get from the estate to the closest bus stop.” I did a measurement on the map, and it is well over a kilometre to get to that bus stop from the furthest part of the estate.

For any planning authority in the best jurisdictions—and I hope that around the world it is better than what is happening here—public transport would be part and parcel of any subdivision like this. And you would design it so that there was a proper bus route through the estate. Obviously, if it goes ahead, you have got 350 units there, and that is a large number of people. But all they are saying is that there is one bus stop a kilometre or so away at Holt, near Spofforth Street. Of course, the young and the old are going to find it difficult to walk to it. I see this add-on estate as almost being an enclave. The other day you were talking about gated communities. I see it as just an appendage where people, particularly young mothers and particularly the old, will become very socially isolated because it will be difficult to use buses. Also, the young and the old do not drive.

My wife has had a leg operation. She cannot walk that well. She can walk reasonably to a bus stop which is half a kilometre away, say, but she certainly will not be walking a kilometre to a bus. And of course the community facilities—the shopping facilities, the community hub—are right down there in the centre of Holt, let alone getting to Kippax.

So it is going to be a classic case of isolation. And that, to my mind, is an absolute tragedy. I hope that the committee will go out there and realise how isolated this proposed appendage subdivision is. The people already in the middle of the golf course are very isolated. I would imagine that if a survey was done you would find a minute proportion would be walking down to the Holt shops, because there is a path that is through the existing golf course. Unless they are driving, those people are already virtually isolated.

It does make a mockery of the greenhouse targets of 40 per cent by 2020. I would imagine that this particular estate, if it goes ahead, will be virtually mainly car oriented, with very little public transport. And it is such a long way away from shopping facilities.

The other thing that came up was this. Mr Barr said that it would be good to locate people close to services. I think Mr Calnan said, “Well, some other subdivisions aren’t located very close.” Let us not continue the mockery of town planning and have subdivisions isolated like this one is. Heaven forbid! What has happened in this last 10 or 20 years when we are having isolated subdivisions?

When I came here in 1970, I was so proud to be coming—I came from Adelaide. I am not saying that it was perfect there, but I moved to Latham and here you had your local centre, your school. And similarly in Holt and so on. This philosophy of good-quality planning seems to have gone out the window partially. Mr Calnan said, “Well, it must comply with energy standards.” I wonder what they are. How many public transport stars would this get—let alone how many housing stars?

There were these two things recently in the paper: “changes urged to capitalise on solar” and “rezoning may delay solar push”. It could well be, if this gets the go-ahead, that it will be on very minimal standards. Even though David O’Keeffe said, “Oh, heavens, we would like to have photovoltaics on the roof”—or solar heaters and this, that and the other. But in actual fact, when it comes to building, if it is not mandatory that there be passive orientation for winter warming and 90 or 95 per cent of roofs facing north so you can have your photovoltaic cells and your solar heaters, it all goes to water. All Calnan could say was that it must comply with energy standards. But what energy standards, let alone public transport standards, are mandatory for this subdivision?

I have probably said enough. I was going to say that I do not know if I was the only submission, but I would hand this submission that Jack Kershaw sent me to ACTPLA. I do not know if he followed up with you, but he said he thought the variation should be abandoned. He said:

It fails as good planning ... and perpetuates a compromised, even dangerous golf course.

He is a golf player; I am not.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes; we have received Mr Kershaw’s submission.

**Mr Watson:** Good. I would like to table those things on solar push. Are they going to escape this solar push? The other thing is that there is an inquiry by your sister committee on the ecological carrying capacity of the ACT and region which you would well know about, by the standing committee on climate change.

There are two issues there in particular. It talks about the “sustainable level of resource use, in terms of ACT urban, ecological and carbon footprints”. I would say that this would have a very high carbon footprint if it goes ahead.

And secondly there is the “role of the ACT in the region in relation to population and resource use”. In my original submission, I made a plea that this whole remaining rural land, and that includes the open space of Belconnen golf course, should be part of an inquiry as to what is the wisest use of that rural land, including cross-border issues. That is what I am spending a fair bit of time on now with a cross-border committee.

I have been in contact with members for Ginninderra, and Jon Stanhope, on that very matter. I wrote to the commissioner for the environment, Maxine Cooper, on this issue, saying, “Let’s have a proper survey out there done by”—I think you might have to get a special committee to do it, because ACTPLA seem to be very tardy in taking these things up. I wonder whether they have enough appropriate professional expertise—they might just be so small in numbers these days. With this high rate of development in Canberra—we are growing at two per cent per year—it is very difficult to cope with all of this. Maxine Cooper—they said, “Well, if I can’t cope with your questions, I’ll pass it over to the ACT national resource management committee”—or group; whatever they are called. So we have to await that.

So it looks as if I am going to have to be a ginger group for this for some time to come. I am working with fellow people down in the ACT and across the border. And of course, we are very worried about the implications of the Belconnen tip—the former site.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Mr Watson. We have five minutes now.

**Mr Watson:** Oh, right. Have I spoken that long?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, you have. We have five minutes to take questions from members.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I hear what you say about the public transport and the almost inevitable car dependency. Do you think there would be any possibility of improving it if they linked up the new proposal with the existing and put a bus route through the middle?

**Mr Watson:** There is no existing bus route through the middle.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** There is only one bus stop down here, but I have been trying to think where you could put a bus. You could put a bus down the middle and a path across. The question I am getting at is this. Do you think there is any way it could be improved—apart from it not being there, which clearly would be your number one option?

**Mr Watson:** I would doubt it, and I do not think that even the road design through the middle of the golf course now is designed for buses. There are too many difficult curves. There might be a possibility that it can be. Anyway, as I say, I am opposed to it, but any design that goes ahead should insist that you have an adequate road for buses through the estate itself.

**MR COE:** If not a housing development, and obviously you are not going to see holes 19 to 27 reinstated any time soon, what do you think that site could be used for in the future.

**Mr Watson:** That is a good question. There must be other types of recreational use that are going to be in demand. There might be cycling trails and so on through there. It is a lovely site, in a sense, with the Brindabellas in the distance, and it is only a couple of hundred metres from the Strathnairn Arts Association site. So it really is a lovely bit of rural land. I am sure that there are other types of recreational use. There might be golf putting courses—all sorts of other uses. I know that it is difficult for the developer, when things are in semi-private hands, to suggest, but the point is that surely there are a lot of other sporting-type associations that would respond to that—your question.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Do you think there could be agricultural uses or is it too poor?

**Mr Watson:** It could revert to rural use. I have had interaction with Corkhill Bros, who own a lot of that rural land, which is all down slope from the Belconnen tip. That goes from Stockdill Drive right across to the ACT border. They have got about seven square kilometres there. At one stage they were trying to subdivide that for other uses,

and that was good; it was knocked back by ACTPLA. There is no reason why that could not be incorporated in the interim into some rural lease. I do not know how that works out financially with the owners. The developer-owner is David O’Keeffe.

But all I am worried about is what is the wisest use of this land. It is certainly not for add-on housing. That is the thing. Obviously there is a housing shortage and problems of affordability, but of course we take that as read. David O’Keeffe said you have got to try and keep costs down. That means they could well have to cut corners on what they are going to put on their roofs or passive design. As you said, they would like to be on one storey but they might be forced to two storeys. I can tell you that older people—my wife and I—would hate to live in a two-storey house. She has had a leg operation and we are one-floor people. I am sure this happens with many people that are stuck in two-storey houses and—David O’Keeffe talks about two different bedrooms; it is a matter of getting up and down the jolly stairs.

**THE CHAIR:** I heard him say that it would be one storey.

**Mr Watson:** But it may not be mandatory. It may not turn out to be one storey because apparently ACTPLA insists now, for densification, on having two storeys.

**THE CHAIR:** The committee will look into that. Thank you very much for your presentation.

**Mr Watson:** Thank you for the opportunity to come and talk to my submission.

**THE CHAIR:** We will send you a copy of the *Hansard* so that you can have a look and check that it is okay. Just check for accuracy against your understanding of what you said. We have not taken any questions on notice, so we will not be sending you any other requests. Thank you for coming before us this afternoon.

**The committee adjourned at 1.29 pm.**