

To: [Legislation Scrutiny Committee](#)
Subject: Planning Amendment Bill 2020
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To the Committee Secretary
Planning Amendment Bill 2020

This Planning Amendment Bill 2020, introduced to the Legislative Assembly on 13 February 2020, should NOT go ahead. It is a betrayal of the community in its exclusion of community interests and well-being from consultation and influence, instead according priority the interests and profits of developers.

I have now lived equal time (25 years) in Canberra, where my late husband was an early recruit to the newly established Urban Research Unit at ANU, and in Northern Australia, 15 years of which have been in the city of Darwin. Canberra at the time when we took up residence there was a very similar population size to current Darwin, around 100,000. But there the similarity ends. A simple example is that when we purchased our home in Canberra, the other side of the road was designated community green space, so we could be confident in the knowledge that it would always remain that. (It is now part of Canberra Nature Park.) In contrast, land zoned for green space or community use in Darwin is simply land vacant until it is rezoned and made available to the next ambitious developer!

The proposed planning legislation is totally back to front. It proposes top down planning which actually reduces the already limited participation of the community in planning decisions. The community knows best what they need for a healthy quality of life, an attractive, diverse, easily negotiated neighbourhood with integrated natural systems and community spaces, facilities and meeting places. Particularly important in Darwin is the oft expressed desire for shade and protection from extremes of climate, yet such universally desired attributes are more often overridden in a mistaken trust in short term economic factors. Controversial current examples are proposals that would adversely affect two of Darwin's most iconic and highly valued public facilities - one to compromise the Bicentennial Park and the hugely popular Deckchair Cinema with the construction of a venue for the consumption of alcohol and poker machines, with its inevitable car park, in spite of the Park being one of the few green spaces left in the city, and the impossible noise interference with Deckchair screenings; the other being development so close to the popular Botanical Gardens Amphitheatre so extensively used for diverse cultural community activities as it would drastically impede the extremely popular regular events which of necessity are noisy!

Darwin could/should have been the most beautiful capital city in Australia, but it often seems to me to be hell-bent on becoming the ugliest and least habitable. Just in my time here there has been a continuing loss of green space and an increase in city temperatures as documented by Architecture AU. It isn't simply the number of medium and high rise apartment blocks but the abolition of the requirement for set-backs to permit ameliorating green planting. Now the harsh summer heat bounces from the hot pavement to the hot cement buildings and back on to the passing pedestrian, making it impossible to walk from my home to the shops despite the comparatively short distance. It is not even possible to pursue a shaded work through Bicentennial Park because so many Australian trees have been removed and replaced with spindly introduced frangipani (inimical to every form of Australian wildlife), lower limbs of surviving trees have been removed, and even the beautiful clumps of shady banyans (such a wonderful habitat for urban wildlife) have been removed. With much of the understory between the Park fence and the water being removed, an understory essential to a range of wildlife, the Park has become increasingly sterile, in addition to lacking the continuous shade that would make walking pleasant..

Good urban planning truly engages with the community and prioritises real community consultation, in contrast to the charade of community members sitting outside waiting to be invited into the meeting to present their 'objections' to the proposed development for a few minutes then escorted out, the decision having already been made by the planning authority! True consultation engages the community from the beginning and is integral to the planning process. It is inclusive, not exclusive, and of course it is completely transparent. The community, as well as the 'planners' should be able to initiate proposals, not simply to respond to the initiatives of government and paid consultants.

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It is nonsensical to be planning suburbs with smaller and smaller blocks, for houses completely dependent on air

conditioning as there is no space on blocks for cooling trees, where breezes are impeded by the colour-bond fences required to maintain a semblance of privacy, where there is no provision for children to engage in healthy outdoor activity like backyard cricket or simply kicking a ball around, for adults and children to maintain the well-being and mental health deriving from contact with the natural world, a need so well documented in social research, suburbs where there is so little provision for pleasant pedestrian paths and accessible small parks. Perhaps one of the most urgent contributions the community can make to sharing the NT's planning would be to alert the Planning Commission to the consequences of failing to adapt to the vital demands of climate change.

THE PLANNING AMENDMENT BILL 2020 must be withdrawn in order for the Northern Territory to take its place in the twenty first century.

Jo Vandermark