

SUBMISSION

THE ACT LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY INQUIRY INTO THE PROVISION OF MUNICIPAL SERVICES IN THE ACT

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Executive Summary

Canberra's livability, community participation, and economic confidence depend fundamentally on the quality of our municipal services. When public spaces are clean, safe, and well-maintained, community life thrives children participate in junior sport; families feel safe in local centers; older Canberrans remain active; and businesses, including community clubs, invest confidently in their precincts.

But when municipal upkeep slips—when graffiti accumulates, footpaths fail, signage deteriorates, rubbish collects on verges, and public spaces appear tired or neglected—the impacts compound. ClubsACT shares the view of the Canberra Business Chamber that even "small" maintenance failures, when repeated across the city, produce "an air of decay and neglect," damaging perceptions of safety, reducing visitation, and undermining the attractiveness of Canberra as a destination to live, work, study and invest.

ClubsACT submits that municipal services are not cosmetic extras—they are foundational infrastructure underpinning community wellbeing, sporting participation, neighborhood identity, and economic vitality. Community clubs sit at the Centre of this ecosystem: as major providers of sport facilities, as managers of public green space, as safe gathering places, and as employers and investors in local communities. The quality of municipal services directly affects the viability and vibrancy of clubs, the activities they support, and the communities they serve.

This submission argues for a new whole-of-government approach to municipal upkeep—one that acknowledges that:

- Well-maintained public spaces are essential community infrastructure
- Municipal neglect disproportionately harms vulnerable groups, including older residents, women, families, and young people
- Sporting participation is structurally linked to the safety and quality of parks, footpaths, verges and active-travel corridors
- Clubs amplify, but cannot replace, government responsibility for baseline municipal standards
- The appearance and cleanliness of the city influence population attraction, the visitor economy, business confidence and community pride

We propose a comprehensive reform program including a City Standards Taskforce, a Rapid Response Municipal Maintenance System, stronger anti-vandalism enforcement, co-funded graffiti and property-damage support, and systematic benchmarking against comparable jurisdictions as required by the Terms of Reference.

The ACT Government has an opportunity to reset municipal expectations, rebuild public trust, and create a city that reflects the standards we claim for ourselves: clean, welcoming, safe, and worthy of the national capital. ClubsACT stands ready to partner in delivering that vision.

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1. Introduction

ClubsACT represents Canberra's community clubs: major employers, providers of sport and recreation, custodians of green and open space, and critical social infrastructure throughout the Territory. Canberra Clubs play a strong and vibrant role as part of the visitor economy and the quality of municipal service delivery across the ACT is of significant importance to our sector.

Our members support tens of thousands of participants in junior and senior sport, maintain hundreds of hectares of grounds, support thousands of volunteers, and serve as economic anchors in suburbs, town centres, and local shopping precincts.

The Terms of Reference require the Committee to consider:

- **The maintenance and upkeep of public spaces, including playgrounds, sportsgrounds, verges, waterways and local shops**
- **The geographic spread of active-travel infrastructure and parks**
- **Waste removal effectiveness**
- **Street art and graffiti policies**
- **Benchmarking ACT performance against comparable jurisdictions**

These are all issues directly affecting the viability and vitality of community clubs.

ClubsACT makes this submission to highlight how declining municipal standards impact the organisations responsible for much of Canberra's community life—and how a renewed municipal strategy can restore community confidence, participation and neighborhood cohesion.

2. Canberra's Municipal Environment Is a Foundation of Community Life

ClubsACT has repeatedly emphasised, in submissions to government, that community life begins with the quality of shared spaces. The condition of footpaths, verges, green spaces, local shops and waterways is not a peripheral concern—it is central to:

- **Sporting participation**
- **Club visitation**
- **Volunteer engagement**
- **Community safety**
- **Youth inclusion**
- **Economic activation**
- **Social connection and mental wellbeing**

Municipal systems are the "first tier" of infrastructure on which clubs rely to deliver community benefit. If the ACT Government wants Canberra to be Australia's most liveable city, then the municipal environment must reflect that ambition. At present, it does not.

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3. Evidence of Declining Standards: A City Showing Compounding Neglect

As has been widely reported and noted by the Canberra Business Chamber, across Canberra there are multiple small but cumulative failures that collectively create a sense of decay:

- **Graffiti on public and private buildings**
- **Damaged or poorly maintained signs**
- **Overgrown trees obstructing visibility**
- **Footpath damage caused by tree roots**
- **Rubbish accumulation and fly-tipping**
- **Dead animals left uncollected near roads**

ClubsACT concurs with this assessment. The same issues appear around club precincts, sporting fields, local shopping centres, and pathways used daily by children, families, older people and volunteers.

While each individual instance may appear minor, the cumulative effect is profound:

1. **Reduced perceptions of safety, especially at night**
2. **Declining community pride**
3. **Reduced visitation to local centres and clubs**
4. **Lower participation in sport due to degraded or unsafe routes and facilities**
5. **Higher operating costs borne by clubs and other businesses, which often step in to fill municipal gaps**
6. **Weakened volunteer morale**

In some areas, clubs and other businesses are effectively supplementing municipal services—mowing, pruning, maintaining adjacent green space—without recognition or structured partnership.

4. Impacts on Community Clubs and Sporting Participation

Municipal failures do not fall evenly across the community: clubs and sporting organisations feel them acutely.

4.1 Footpaths, Active Travel, and Sporting Access

Cracked paths, tree-root uplifts, poor lighting, and obstructed signage reduce safe access for:

- Children walking or cycling to training
- Older residents accessing clubs for social inclusion
- Families attending weekend sport
- Volunteers carrying equipment
- People with disabilities

Participation drops when the journey to the field or club feels unsafe.

4.2 Presentation of Local Centres and Club Precincts

A degraded public realm around clubs contributes to:

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- **Lower patronage**
- **Reduced family attendance**
- **Negative perceptions of night-time safety**
- **Economic decline in surrounding areas**

Clubs are economic anchors. When municipal maintenance slips, the entire precinct suffers.

4.3 Sporting Fields and Adjacent Green Space

Clubs already invest heavily in maintaining sporting surfaces and green areas. However:

- **Poor verge maintenance**
- **Inconsistent mowing**
- **Litter accumulation**
- **Damaged infrastructure around fields**

...all undermine the experience for players, spectators and volunteers.

The result: reduced community usage and avoidable financial pressure on clubs.

5. Safety, Graffiti, and Anti-Social Behaviour

ClubsACT notes that graffiti is “an ongoing issue” on both private and government-owned property and that the cost burden falls unfairly on owners.

ClubsACT experiences similar pressures:

- **Graffiti on club walls, fences, and signage**
- **Vandalised lighting or infrastructure**
- **Damage to playing-fields facilities**
- **Broken glass and rubbish from anti-social behaviour**

These issues erode public confidence and increase operating costs for clubs at a time when many are already financially constrained.

In recent times ClubsACT has raised directly with Government, as have our members, the declining appearance and perceived safety of the CBD/city area specifically. Whilst being mindful of the issues of homelessness impacting on a proportion of the ACT population, the accumulation of rubbish and graffiti in certain areas around clubs and hospitality venues has had a direct and negative impact on tourist and patron perceptions.

5.1 Reported Safety and Amenity Impacts on Clubs in the CBD Precinct in past 12 months

ClubsACT members operating within the CBD precinct have reported a significant escalation in safety, security, and amenity issues over the past 12 months. These incidents are no longer isolated or sporadic; rather, they reflect a sustained pattern of anti-social behaviour, criminal activity, and declining public amenity that is directly affecting club operations, staff safety, member confidence, and visitor perceptions of the city.

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Members have reported **multiple violent incidents**, including **stabbings**, with at least one occurring **in broad daylight** within close proximity to club entrances. In addition, there has been **rampant theft**, including shoplifting, vehicle break-ins, bicycle theft and the theft of personal property from patrons and staff. These incidents have materially undermined perceptions of safety and deterred casual visitation, particularly by families, older members and interstate visitors. Clubs have increasingly found themselves acting as **de facto safe havens**, frequently providing refuge to individuals fearing for their personal safety and contacting police on numerous occasions. This informal role, while undertaken out of community responsibility, places an unreasonable burden on clubs and their staff and underscores broader failures in public safety management within the precinct.

Anti-social behaviour has intensified, directly deterring customers and reducing foot traffic. In one serious incident, an **armed threat prompted a full lockdown of local businesses**, disrupting trade and reinforcing perceptions of a precinct under stress. Tragically, a **fatality occurred outside the main entrance of one CBD club**, an event that has had lasting impacts on staff wellbeing, member confidence, and the reputation of the surrounding area.

Clubs have also reported **persistent drug and alcohol use in areas immediately adjacent to club entrances**, including near family-oriented attractions such as a children's merry-go-round. This behaviour has further discouraged family attendance and raised serious concerns about the appropriateness and safety of public spaces intended for community use. We understand there have been increasing incidents of overdosing by users in this area in recent times.

The deterioration of amenity is compounded by **extensive graffiti**, in some cases covering entire buildings, significantly diminishing the visual appeal of the CBD and undermining Canberra's image as a safe and welcoming national capital. Ongoing vandalism—including damage to planters, fixtures and façades—has imposed direct financial costs on clubs, with graffiti removal alone exceeding **$3,500 in a single instance**.

Members have also noted that **public spaces surrounding clubs are increasingly monopolised for extended periods**, contributing to reduced accessibility, heightened safety concerns, and diminished shared use of the public realm. The **closure of nearby car parks** has further exacerbated these issues, increasing perceptions of risk for patrons and staff travelling to and from venues, particularly at night.

Finally, clubs report that the **lack of accessible parking** in the CBD precinct is actively discouraging potential employees from accepting roles, compounding existing workforce challenges and impacting recruitment and retention. These operational pressures are reinforced by **growing concerns expressed by club members and interstate visitors**, many of whom have questioned their personal safety and expressed reluctance to return to the precinct.

Taken together, these incidents demonstrate that safety and amenity challenges in the CBD are no longer abstract or theoretical. They are tangible, recurrent, and materially affecting community clubs that play a critical role in activating the city, supporting employment, hosting visitors, and providing safe social spaces. Addressing these issues requires a coordinated, visible and sustained response that restores confidence, safety and shared ownership of the public domain.

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More particularly, there can also be seen to be a direct impact on the nighttime economy arising from these issues especially as they relate to perceived safety in some areas.

ClubsACT shares the broader view of the business sector that the city centre is perceived as "unsavoury and unsafe" by locals and visitors. This perception mirrors what clubs see in some suburban centres after dark, lower foot traffic, reduced family attendance, and heightened safety concerns.

ClubsACT strongly supports the Chamber's call for:

- **Greater police presence**
- **A stronger ACT Government campaign against property crime**
- **Clear consequences for vandalism**

Community clubs need municipal spaces that feel safe, well-lit, and well-maintained. Without this, visitation declines and communities disengage.

6. Economic and Social Consequences of Municipal Decline

Municipal decline affects three pillars upon which clubs and community life depend:

6.1 The Visitor Economy

Canberra hosts 5–6 million visitors annually, contributing $3–4 billion to the economy. Municipal neglect threatens this. ClubsACT shares the Chamber position that emphasises the importance of presenting Canberra as a well-kept city for visitors.

Clubs host tournaments, conferences, community events and sporting carnivals. Poor presentation of public spaces deters visitation and diminishes economic impact.

6.2 Business and Workforce Attraction

A degraded municipal environment diminishes:

- **Investor confidence**
- **Commercial precinct vitality**
- **Business relocation decisions**
- **Workforce attraction**
- **Campus and student experience for families relocating for work or education**

Clubs, many of which are major employers, rely on the Territory's ability to attract workers and maintain vibrant precincts.

6.3 Community Wellbeing and Social Cohesion

Clean, safe public spaces underpin:

- **Childhood development and outdoor play**
- **Community sport**

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- **Social inclusion**
- **Neighbourhood identity**
- **Crime prevention through active public presence**

Municipal neglect diminishes all these outcomes.

7. Geographic Equity and Suburban Fairness

The Terms of Reference require attention to the "geographic spread" of active-travel infrastructure and playgrounds.

ClubsACT submits that:

- **Some suburbs clearly receive less frequent maintenance than inner-city areas**
- **Older suburbs face greater infrastructure deterioration, yet receive no compensatory uplift**
- **Sporting precincts with high youth usage often have poor lighting or damaged paths**
- **Local shops surrounding clubs often show inconsistent graffiti removal, rubbish collection and verge maintenance**

A family in Kambah, Macgregor, Gowrie or Chisholm deserves municipal standards equal to those in Manuka or Braddon.

Suburban fairness must become a core principle of municipal reform.

8. Benchmarking, Transparency and Accountability

The Terms of Reference specifically direct the Committee to examine benchmarking against comparable jurisdictions.

ClubsACT strongly supports this and recommends that the ACT Government introduce:

- **Municipal performance scorecards, published quarterly**
- **Benchmark comparisons with:**
  - **City of Melbourne**
  - **City of Sydney**
  - **City of Parramatta**
  - **Leading planned urban municipalities internationally**
- **Response-time KPIs for:**
  - **Graffiti removal**
  - **Rubbish and dead-animal collection**
  - **Footpath repairs**
  - **Tree pruning**
- **Public heat maps showing maintenance schedules suburb-by-suburb**
- **Annual independent municipal audit**

This is consistent with our broader advocacy for evidence-based policy, regulatory transparency, and performance accountability across all government functions impacting community clubs.

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9. Clubs as Partners in Municipal Stewardship

ClubsACT is not simply identifying problems—we are offering partnership.

Clubs already:

- **Maintain sportsgrounds and open space**
- **Manage green assets adjacent to club precincts**
- **Facilitate community events that draw thousands into municipal areas**
- **Support recreational participation across the Territory**
- **Provide lighting, fencing, waste facilities and amenity infrastructure**
- **Deliver volunteer-based maintenance activities**

However, this work lacks formal recognition, co-funding structures, or integrated planning. We propose:

9.1 A Municipal Partnership Framework for Clubs

Under this model, clubs could enter voluntary agreements to:

- **Maintain green space adjacent to club precincts**
- **Support verge and litter management**
- **Undertake joint safety and lighting assessments**
- **Coordinate with TCCS seasonal maintenance cycles**
- **Improve access routes to junior sports facilities**

In exchange, government would provide:

- **Small grants**
- **Maintenance equipment support**
- **Waste-disposal credits**
- **Coordinated planning input**
- **Recognition as municipal service partners**

This mirrors partnerships already used successfully in NSW and regional Queensland.

10. Recommendations

ClubsACT proposes the Committee endorse the following reforms.

10.1 Establish a City Standards Taskforce

A multi-agency unit responsible for:

- **Proactive auditing of municipal defects**
- **Monthly reporting on standards**
- **Cross-government coordination with Sport & Recreation, Access Canberra and ACT Policing**
- **Targeted activation of club precincts, local centres and high-use sporting corridors**

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10.2 Create a Rapid Response Municipal Maintenance System

Including:

- **48–72-hour response time for graffiti on public assets**
- **Priority repair of damaged signage**
- **Prompt removal of dead animals and major street litter**
- **Immediate remediation of dangerous footpaths**

This echoes the Business Chamber's call for a dedicated taskforce and stronger municipal responsiveness.

10.3 Introduce a Co-Funded Graffiti & Vandalism Remediation Scheme

For private property owners including clubs.

Features:

- **Cost-sharing for graffiti removal**
- **Small grants for vandalism repair**
- **Insurance-gap coverage for repeated damage**
- **Support for anti-graffiti coatings and lighting upgrades**

10.4 Strengthen Community Safety Measures

Including:

- **Increased police visibility around local centres**
- **Expanded CCTV coverage to assist operational policing responsiveness**
- **Lighting audits around club precincts and playing fields**
- **ACT Government campaign signalling zero-tolerance for vandalism and property crime**

10.5 Improve Geographic Equity of Maintenance

Measures:

- **Suburb-specific service benchmarks**
- **Priority upgrades for older suburbs**
- **Higher frequency verge mowing in high-traffic areas**
- **A "Fair Suburbs" municipal renewal fund**

10.6 Establish Benchmarking and Transparency Framework

Required under Terms of Reference item (e).

Including:

- **Annual municipal performance report**
- **Independent audit of response times**

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- **Cross-jurisdiction benchmarking**
- **Public service dashboards**

10.7 Create a Municipal Partnership Framework with Clubs

Including:

- **Co-funded maintenance projects**
- **Green-space partnerships**
- **Active-travel access improvements**
- **Local-centre revitalisation collaborations**

11. Conclusion

Canberra is a beautiful city, but our municipal standards no longer reflect our aspirations. As the Business Chamber has observed, repeated small failures create a picture of a city that appears untidy, neglected, and at times unsafe.

For clubs, the consequences are real: reduced visitation, higher operating costs, declining community participation and a diminished sense of local pride. For families, volunteers, sporting participants, older residents, businesses and visitors, the municipal environment shapes whether Canberra feels welcoming, functional and safe.

Community starts in the places where people gather. When those places are clean, safe, vibrant and well-maintained, the community thrives. When they are neglected, the community suffers.

ClubsACT urges the Committee to recommend a new municipal strategy built on partnership, equity, accountability and pride of place.

We stand ready to contribute to a renewed vision for Canberra—one that honours the role of clubs, lifts community expectations, rebuilds public confidence and strengthens the social fabric of our suburbs.

Yours sincerely,



Craig Shannon
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Appendix A: Mapping of ClubsACT Submission Issues and Recommendations Against the Inquiry Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference	Key Issues Raised by ClubsACT	Relevant Submission Sections	Corresponding ClubsACT Recommendations
(a) Maintenance and upkeep of public spaces (playgrounds, sportsgrounds, local shops, verges, waterways)	Declining standards in public space maintenance; graffiti accumulation; damaged footpaths; poor verge and tree management; rubbish and fly-tipping; degradation around club and sporting precincts	Sections 2, 3, 4, 5, 5.1, 6	**Establish a City Standards Taskforce; Rapid Response Municipal Maintenance System; Improved maintenance cycles for verges, footpaths and public domain; Fair Suburbs municipal renewal fund**
(b) Appropriateness of geographic spread of active travel infrastructure, parks and playgrounds	Unequal maintenance outcomes between inner-city and suburban areas; unsafe access routes to clubs and sporting facilities; poor lighting and path conditions affecting participation	Sections 4.1, 7	**Geographic equity benchmarks; Suburb-specific maintenance standards; Priority upgrades in older suburbs; Integration of active-travel planning with sporting access**
(c) Effectiveness of services related to waste removal	Rubbish accumulation around clubs and public spaces; fly-tipping; delayed removal of dead animals; impacts on amenity, safety and perceptions of neglect	Sections 3, 5, 6	**Rapid Response system for waste and dead-animal removal; Performance KPIs for waste services; Public reporting of response times**
(d) Effectiveness of policies relating to street art and graffiti removal	Extensive graffiti including full-building coverage; cost burden shifted to clubs and businesses; slow response times; vandalism reinforcing perceptions of disorder and insecurity	Sections 3, 5, 5.1	**Co-funded Graffiti & Vandalism Remediation Scheme; 48–72-hour graffiti removal targets; Stronger enforcement and deterrence; Public education campaign**
(e) Benchmarking ACT performance against similar jurisdictions	Lack of transparent service benchmarks; absence of comparative performance data; no public accountability framework for municipal services	Section 8	**Annual municipal performance scorecards; Cross-jurisdiction benchmarking (Melbourne, Sydney, Parramatta); Independent audits; Public dashboards**
(f) Any other related matter	Public safety failures; anti-social behaviour; impacts on night-time economy; workforce access and parking; clubs acting as de facto safety providers;	Sections 5, 5.1, 6, 9	**Strengthened policing and CCTV; Lighting audits; Parking and access considerations; Municipal Partnership Framework with Clubs**

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