

What do we want ...

“the right to protest”

It took only a matter of seconds for a peaceful, well-organised rally to turn into the worst political violence seen at the new Parliament House. Peaceful protesters had been singing, chanting and strolling around the lawns of Parliament House when a general move to the front doors set off a rush of people and emotions. Two violent hours later the foyer of Parliament House was spattered with blood and paint, smashed glass crunched underfoot and discarded banners littered the forecourt. (The Australian, 20 August 1996)

In the aftermath of the August 1996 demonstration at Parliament House, people wanted answers: “How could things get so out of hand?” “Who was to blame?” “What must be done to prevent this happening again?”

At the time, a parliamentary committee reviewing protests in the national capital resisted calls for more stringent laws to regulate protests. Instead, Parliament’s National Capital Committee, in its report *A right to protest* (May 1997), recommended a cooperative approach to the management of protests, with better liaison between protest organisers and relevant authorities.

The production of a public information booklet on protesting in the national capital was one of the key recommendations from the National Capital Committee. That recommendation has now been implemented with the release of a booklet from the National Capital Authority entitled *The Right to Protest, A guide*.

‘People do not require formal approval to conduct a protest or demonstration in the national capital.’

The protest guide outlines the legal requirements that apply to protests in the national capital. It also provides protest organisers with details of people to contact when planning a demonstration in the national capital.

According to the National Capital Authority, people do not require formal approval to conduct a protest or demonstration in the national capital. However, the erection of structures associated with a protest do require approval. The protest guide outlines the procedures that people must follow if they are intending to build any structure in association with a protest. It includes an application form for approval of protest structures.

The protest guide also outlines the special guidelines that cover the conduct of protests around Parliament House. Those guidelines restrict protests to an authorised area at the front of Parliament House.



The protest guide encourages protest organisers to contact the following people when planning a protest:

National Capital Authority, call (02) 6271 2888 or email: natcap@natcap.gov.au

Australian Federal Police Demonstration Liaison Team, call (02) 6275 7126 or after hours to Police Communications, call (02) 6256 7777

Security Controller, Parliament House, call (02) 6277 4700 or after hours call (02) 6277 5999

For copies of the protest guide or for more information contact:

National Capital Authority
GPO Box 373
Canberra ACT 2601
Visit: www.nationalcapital.gov.au

Call: (02) 6271 2888
Email: natcap@natcap.gov.au
Fax: (02) 6273 4427