

Peter Harrison Memorial Prizes

State of Australasian Cities Conference 2025

The Peter Harrison Memorial Prizes are administered by The Fenner School of Environment and Society and The Australian National University Endowment for Excellence, in collaboration with the Australasian Cities Research Network (ACRN). The ACRN is a formal network of Australian and New Zealand universities and scholars which aims ‘to promote, foster, champion, and disseminate research relevant to Australasian cities and regions’. The Prizes are awarded every two years, being selected from written papers accepted for presentation at the biennial State of Australasian Cities Conference (SOAC). The purpose of the Prizes is to encourage and recognise outstanding research and scholarship in Australian urban studies, and specifically for work that advances knowledge and capacity for the ecological, social and economic sustainable development of Australasian cities and regions.

The prizes commemorate the leading practitioner-academic Peter Firman Harrison (1918-1990) and his approach to the planning and development of Australian cities.

Prizes to be awarded:

- *Prize One (Open Category)*. A paper by an established researcher, or team of researchers, which is judged to make a distinctive contribution to knowledge and capacity for the sustainable development of Australasian cities and regions.
- *Prize Two (PhD Scholar Category)*. A sole-authored paper by a researcher who was, at the time of paper submission, a PhD student enrolled or awaiting award of a PhD at an Australasian university, which is judged to make a distinctive contribution to knowledge and capacity for the sustainable development of Australasian cities and regions.

In 2025, each Prize will consist of a Certificate and the sum of AUD\$1500. In the case of joint authorship, the Open Category Prize will be shared. The Prizes are enabled by the endowed Peter Harrison Memorial Fund of The Australian National University’s Endowment for Excellence.

Selection Committee. The Selection Committee comprises 3-5 researchers drawn from the Convening Group of ACRN/Scientific Committee of the current SOAC conference, and chaired by the Director of The Fenner School of Environment and Society, ANU, or their nominee. The Convening Group of ACRN are representatives from the universities who host and/or provide ongoing, core support to SOAC Conferences. The selection committee and process are adjusted to prevent conflicts of interest either individual or institutional.

Eligibility. Written papers of around 5,000 words that have been submitted for the biennial State of Australasian Cities Conference, may be nominated by the author/s to be considered for the Prizes.

Process. Authors submitting abstracts for the State of Australasian Cities Conference will have the option of indicating whether they wish to be considered for the Prizes, and whether for the Open or PhD Scholar Category. If so, they are invited to submit a

full paper of around 5,000 words. From that list of papers, the Selection Committee will determine the papers worthy of being awarded the two Category prizes.

The Selection Committee reserves the right not to award the Prizes in any particular year. In the event that the ACRN ceases to operate or support the Prizes, or that SOAC is not held or ceases as a conference series, the operation of the Prizes will revert to the ANU for reconsideration.

Acknowledgements. The contributors to the original endowment marking the legacy of Peter Harrison are acknowledged, and especially the later contribution of the firm Aither. Patrick Troy's contribution to initiating the Prizes and managing their repurposing over time is also acknowledged.

Criteria for the Prizes:

1. Around 5,000 words in length and adhering to the format and style Guideline of the journal [*Urban Policy and Research*](#).
2. The quality and innovative character of the research reported, assessed against the standards of the peer-reviewed Australasian urban studies literature.
3. The presentation and coherence of the written paper.
4. The distinctive contribution to the sustainable development of Australasian cities and regions including environmental, equity and economic aspects and particularly the integration of these.

Peter Firman Harrison, 1918–1990

Peter was born in Brisbane and grew up in Rose Bay Sydney. He had a hard childhood growing up in the Great Depression. His father, a commercial traveller, lost his job and he left school at 14. His first job was in a factory in Woolloomooloo polishing pick handles. The harsh realities of working life were brought home to him when he was laid off on his 18th birthday so that his employer did not have to pay an adult wage. He completed a degree in architecture in a night school course at Sydney Technical College in 1942. His studies resulted in him developing a life-long interest in the work of Walter Burley Griffin. His own experience and acute observations of the realities of commercial life for ordinary people left him with an enduring appreciation of their aspirations and sensibilities.

He served in the RAAF as an Architect/Draftsman from 1942-45. On his discharge he worked with the Department of the Interior, and then as a Draftsman and Planning Officer from 1946-50 in the Cumberland County Council while studying part-time at Sydney University for a Diploma in Town and Country Planning. In 1951 he joined Dennis Winston's Department of Town Planning at Sydney University as Senior Lecturer and remained there until 1958.

He was very active in the Australian Planning Institute and was a member of the API committee that made a submission in 1955 to the Senate Select Committee on the planning and development of Canberra arguing that the Griffin Plan should be implemented.

The National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) established in 1958 appointed Peter as its first Chief Planner early in 1959. Peter made a strong case for the

expansion of Canberra and mounted a vigorous defence of Griffin's approach and developed the case for the 'Y' Plan adopted in 1967.

One of his critical responses to some of the more adventurous planning proposals he dealt with was to apply the *mother test* as in "Would my Mother live in it?" It was his way of bringing his colleagues back to earth and to the concerns and values of those they planned for. A man of high principle, he was impatient with humbug and dismissed can't and hypocrisy, especially about city planning, in colourful terms.

Peter left the NCDC as First Assistant Commissioner to take up a Fellowship in the Urban Research Unit in the Australian National University in 1967. His Masters Degree thesis on Walter Burley Griffin, was published posthumously by the Australian National Library in 1992. His contribution to Town and Country Planning was recognised by the award in 1972 of the Sidney Luker Memorial Medal.

Although his own published output was prodigious he made few contributions to the debates through academic journals, preferring to try to influence his professional colleagues through professional journals, conference presentations and the popular press. His influence on planning of Australian cities, and especially on Canberra, was profound. Peter's strong defence of the public interest in urban planning saw him take issue on many occasions with political leaders, senior bureaucrats and private entrepreneurs alike. He had a deep commitment to due process and challenged powerful interests if he felt the public interest was under threat. This led him to resist directions from Ministers if they were not made in the designated formal manner. This aspect of his independent character was not always welcomed by Ministers, senior officials or his peers although he did earn respect for his courage and independence.

He was made a Member of the Order of Australia in 1980 for 'services to town planning'. His distress at proposals for Canberra's development led him, in 1985, to resign from the Order. He also resigned his Life Fellowship of the RAIA in 1990 in protest at the policies of the ACT Chapter of the RAIA on the Canberra Metropolitan Plan

Peter lived modestly but was generous to students and colleagues. His contribution to research into Australian cities, often through cooperation with other scholars, was without peer.