

Introduction

- 1.1 The Immigration Bridge Australia Proposal (the IBA proposal) is a community initiated project intended to commemorate Australia's migration history since 1788 through the construction of a pedestrian bridge in Canberra. Once completed, the bridge is intended to be gifted to the nation for Canberra's centenary in 2013.¹
- 1.2 The bridge has taken the name 'Immigration Bridge' and if approved will span the West Basin of Lake Burley Griffin (the Lake) linking the National Museum of Australia (NMA) to the Parliamentary zone.²
- 1.3 The project was proposed in 2001 by Mr Gianni De Bortoli who was part of a community group, the Snowy Mountains Hydro Electric Scheme Steering Committee (the Steering Committee) from the Cooma district of New South Wales.³
- 1.4 Immigration Bridge Australia (IBA) was formed in 2005 and is the proponent of the Immigration Bridge. IBA is a 'registered, not-for-profit company limited by guarantee' that evolved from and absorbed the original Steering Committee.⁴
- 1.5 The IBA proposal is at this point primarily being funded through community donations with the majority of revenue for the project being collected from the anticipated selling of 200 000 name places on the 'History Handrail' of the bridge. IBA also has the support of corporate sponsorship. The History Handrail would provide for the memorial aspect of immigration while also funding \$22 million of the estimated \$30 million

1 Immigration Bridge Australia, *Submission 29*, p. 3.

2 Immigration Bridge Australia, Lt. Gen. Lawrence O'Donnell (R'td), *Transcript T1*, p. 2.

3 Immigration Bridge Australia, Lt. Gen. Lawrence O'Donnell (R'td), *Transcript T1*, p. 2.

4 Immigration Bridge Australia, Lt. Gen. Lawrence O'Donnell (R'td), *Transcript T1*, p. 2.

cost of construction of the bridge.⁵ In addition, individual stories of migration will be recorded in the 'Migration Book' and on the IBA website.⁶

- 1.6 To date approximately 6000 places have been sold on the History Handrail raising about \$600 000.⁷
- 1.7 The IBA proposal will be subject to the works approval process, managed by the National Capital Authority (NCA), as provided for under section 12 of the *Australian Capital Territory (Planning and Land Management Act 1988* (Cwlth) (the PALM Act) which is initiated by receipt of a works approval application.
- 1.8 The proposal may also be subject to the heritage assessment process as provided for under the *Environment Protection Biodiversity and Conservation Act 1999* (Cwlth) (the EPBC Act).
- 1.9 In addition, land will have to be ceded by the Australian Capital Territory Government (the ACT Government) to provide for the southern anchor of the bridge.
- 1.10 While the IBA proposal was officially launched in 2006, it is still in concept form and a development application has not yet been prepared for its formal consideration by the NCA. IBA has indicated that it expects the process from concept design to design brief and passage through the works approval process to take approximately between 18 months to two years.⁸
- 1.11 In 1997, a bridge in the same area where it is suggested the Immigration Bridge be located was included in the winning entry for the NMA design competition.⁹ A bridge in that area was also included in the NCA's *The Griffin Legacy* which sought to incorporate early, unrealised elements of Walter Burley Griffin's plan for Canberra.
- 1.12 As the suggested location of the proposed bridge (as included in the NMA winning design) was within a Designated Area, that is, an area of national

5 Immigration Bridge Australia, Mr Andrew Baulch, *Transcript T1*, p. 4.

6 The Migration Book is intended to allow the continuing collecting of migration stories beyond those that reserve a place on the History Handrail. The Migration Book will contain 'stories but it will also be the full collection of names, countries of origin, years of arrival' and mode of transport that people came by to Australia. Immigration Bridge Australia, Mr Andrew Baulch, *Transcript T1*, p. 16.

7 Doherty, M 2009, 'Bridge seen as adornment to capital', *The Canberra Times*, 2 April 2009, p. 2

8 Immigration Bridge Australia, Mr Graham French, *Transcript T1*, p. 4.

9 National Capital Authority, Mr Gary Rake, *Transcript T1*, pp 17-18.

significance as recognised under the National Capital Plan (the NCP)¹⁰, an amendment to the NCP would have to be undertaken if a bridge were to be built in that area.

- 1.13 Taking this into account, the NCA decided ‘an amendment to the NCP be undertaken if a bridge were further contemplated’¹¹ in this area. Amendment 61 to the NCP resulted and came into effect on 30 November 2006.¹²
- 1.14 Amendment 61 provided for a high-span pedestrian bridge connecting the National Museum and the Parliamentary zone. The proposal for the Immigration Bridge over the West Basin area conforms to the NCP as a result of Amendment 61 coming into effect.
- 1.15 In its March 2007 report titled *Review of the Griffin Legacy Amendments*, the committee reviewed Amendments 56, 59, 60 and 61 and recommended that they ‘be disallowed and reworked.’ This recommendation was made in view of the evidence received at the time and the committee’s findings. Community comment identified concerns about the impact of Amendment 61 on vista and heritage values in and around the West Basin of the Lake.¹³

Committee objectives and scope

- 1.16 On 25 February 2009, the Minister for Home Affairs, the Hon Bob Debus MP referred the inquiry to the committee and requested it to report by the end of May 2009.
- 1.17 The committee thanks the Minister for the referral and believes the inquiry is timely in regard to the IBA proposal’s current status.
- 1.18 The terms of reference of the inquiry provided that the committee examine the IBA proposal by taking into consideration the process adopted by IBA to settle the design for the bridge taking into account the:
- heritage values of the Lake and its foreshores; and

10 The *Australian Capital Territory (Planning and Land Management) Act 1988* provides for the National Capital Plan (NCP). The NCP is the overarching planning document for Canberra and the Territory.

11 National Capital Authority, Mr Gary Rake, *Transcript T1*, p. 18.

12 National Capital Authority, *Submission 60*, p. 7.

13 Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories, March 2007, *Review of the Griffin Legacy Amendments*, Parliament of Australia, Canberra, pp 62-63.

- the interests of Lake users.
- 1.19 The committee also examined the process adopted by IBA to raise funds for the construction and ongoing maintenance of the bridge.
- 1.20 In addition, the committee examined the approval process required under the PALM Act as it would relate to the IBA proposal.
- 1.21 This inquiry has given the broader community the opportunity to share its views on the IBA proposal prior to the consultation that IBA is required to undertake as part of the works approval process. In addition, the NCA has stated it would undertake consultation in regard to the IBA proposal although it is not required to.¹⁴

Conduct of the inquiry

- 1.22 The committee initially advertised the inquiry and called for submissions by issuing a media release on 26 February 2009. Submissions were further sought through advertisement of the inquiry in *The Canberra Times* on 28 February 2009 and in *The Australian* on 4 March 2009. The closing date for receipt of submissions was 27 March 2009. The committee received 84 submissions which are listed at Appendix A.
- 1.23 Public hearings were subsequently held in Canberra on 30 March and 1 April 2009. Transcripts of evidence received during those hearings can be found on the committee's website at: www.aph.gov.au/ncet. Witnesses that appeared before the committee at public hearings are listed at Appendix C.

Reader guide and structure of the report

- 1.24 This report outlines the committee's findings and recommendations in relation to the IBA proposal. Recommendations have been listed separately at the front of the report for reader ease. The report outline follows.
- 1.25 Chapter 2 provides a background to and outlines the main elements of the IBA proposal; the structure of the IBA organisation; and the fundraising methods and mix used.

14 National Capital Authority, Mr Andrew Smith, *Transcript T1*, p. 29.

- 1.26 Chapter 3 details the works approval process under the PALM Act in regard to the IBA proposal. This chapter also addresses the environmental and heritage assessment process that may apply to the proposal under the EPBC Act. The issue of maintenance of the asset if gifted to the nation is also discussed.
- 1.27 Chapter 4 encapsulates community comment about the bridge proposal in regard to the potential impact on: the use of the Lake in the West Basin area; pedestrians and cyclists who may choose to use the bridge; and access for mobility impaired persons. In addition, community comment about the possible impact on vista, heritage value and the natural environment of the Lake and its foreshores is addressed.

