

Emeritus Professor D. J. Mulvaney

12 March 2009

The Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital  
Parliament House

Sir

**Submission to the Inquiry into the proposed Immigration Bridge**

As a former member of the Australian Heritage Commission, and a former Chair of the ACT Heritage Committee, and domiciled in Yarralumla, site of the proposed bridge, I submit the following comments. I consider that they are relevant to the terms of reference.

- Despite the proponents' claim that their proposal received in-principle support from both the National and Territory governments, and also from the National Capital Authority, their publicity assumes greater authority than this. In any case, no public discussion has taken place, nor has the Yarralumla Residents Association discussed its implications. In support of my contention, I refer to a presentation of the proposal, made by the Campaign director, Andrew Baulch, to a meeting of the Heraldry and Genealogical Society of Canberra on 6 June 2006. Members were told that an architect and designer had been selected, that the project was going ahead, and that an appeal for migrant names was open. They were encouraged to subscribe.
- The meeting also was informed that the fee was \$110, including \$10 GST. When I queried the necessity to pay tax on a supposedly national project, I was informed that the tax would not be collected by the government, but retained. If this reply was correct, setting the sum at \$110 was both misleading and false advertising.
- It is proposed to site the bridge within the Albert Hall Precinct area, one of undoubted Heritage significance. Its placement would interfere with the general aesthetic ambience and with the attractive vistas across the West Basin. In my opinion, this waterscape merits Heritage registration, not obstruction. The Precinct should be retained to allow future planning for further cultural facilities.
- The bridge would require a minimum of twelve metres clearance for sailing boats. This surely necessitates an authoritative demonstration that neither this lengthy structure, nor its supporting pylons, would cause wind obstruction, eddies, or hazards, to sailing or rowing activities. The long-term hindrance to free activities on this extensive tract of water, would outweigh the benefits of pedestrian bridge traffic.

- Such a high bridge would require a disabled access lift, and a staircase or ramp at either end. Such a massive construction would conflict with the graceful design of the Commonwealth Avenue bridge.
- The bulky access structure (especially a ramp) could occupy considerable space. Assurance is essential that construction would not result in the closure or elimination of Flynn Drive. This road provides an important diversion of traffic from Commonwealth Avenue (and is a much used route to Yarralumla).
- The National Museum has been forced to adapt to restricted space. The bridge access would further reduce its area. It would add a solid structure which would obscure the vista towards the museum and impede the superb views from the museum restaurant. Importantly, it would also require access pathways around the museum, an already landscaped precinct.
- Pedestrian numbers require accurate estimation. As the Albert Hall Precinct is isolated from all other National institutions and separated by Commonwealth Avenue, it is unrealistic to assume that many tourists will walk to the bridge. Besides, car parking is restricted in the area, and the Heritage Precinct cannot be converted into a car park. In any case, it is likely that the bridge would be avoided during Canberra's cold, windy or wet weather.
- The project is flawed, because it assumes elitist concepts. Firstly, because only those donors who can afford the fee would have themselves or their ancestors represented. More significantly, it omits Australia's original migrants, the Aboriginal people. Such a racially divisive project should not be authorised. I remind you that in the first edition of the *Prehistory of Australia* I wrote (1969, p. 12): 'The discoverers, explorers and colonists of . . . Australia, were its aborigines.' This surely qualifies them as migrants.
- The project requires funding from an ambitiously high 200,000 subscribers, together with private and corporate donations. In the present economic climate this seems unrealistic. Additionally, it requires expensive Australia-wide publicity. Even then, what are the arrangements for maintaining the bridge? There are grave risks that the taxpayer may be required to fund the financial shortfalls in this 'gift' to the nation.
- In Sydney, The National Maritime Museum already sponsors a comparable scheme, the Immigration Wall. As Sydney Harbour received most convicts and many free migrants, Sydney seems to be a more appropriate site for a National memorial. (The National Maritime Museum set the precedent for a National monument outside Canberra.)
- An alternative less costly and visually destructive memorial could take the form of either (a) an elaboration of the Sydney Immigration Wall model, or (b) the erection within the National Triangle in Canberra of a monument to *all* migrants to Australia.

Encl: copy on CD

Yours sincerely  
D. J. Mulvaney AO, CMG  
Emeritus Professor