

**Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on the National  
Capital and External Territories –  
Inquiry into the Immigration Bridge Australia proposal**

Submission by Cleaver Elliott – Canberra Resident  
10 March 2009

I write this submission to express my clear opposition to the proposal to build the pedestrian bridge proposed by Immigration Bridge Australia.

I advise that I am a Parliamentary Officer in the Department of the Senate and that I write this submission in my private capacity.

As I understand it, the Immigration Bridge Australia proposal is to construct a pedestrian bridge across Lake Burley Griffin in the vicinity of Acton Peninsula and that the Joint Parliamentary Committee is considering this proposal in the context of its terms of reference.

In my submission, it would be open to the Joint Parliamentary Committee to make findings on two key questions as follows;

1. Is a pedestrian bridge required at that location? Answer; no.
2. Is there a need for a memorial to Australia's migrant community? Answer, yes.

Reasoning for the answers to these two questions is set out below.

My submission is written in the following contexts;

- I am the son of a migrant, and I am married to a migrant. I am proud of my migrant heritage and associations - in other words, I am not anti-migrant!
- I am a long-time Canberra resident (since 1963) and have used the lake extensively for sailing, canoeing and swimming and its foreshores for cycling and dog walking throughout that time and to the present.
- I was an employee of the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) in the mid 1970s and in the privileged position of minute secretary to the NCPC, I understand the Canberra plan, Walter Burley Griffin's aspirations and the importance of design integrity for the city as a whole, its built landscape and its natural landscape.
- I perform regular sailing race support duties for the Canberra Yacht Club in addition to my sailing activities. I am therefore very familiar with the dangers people get into and the fear that they experience when they fall in the lake.

While I do not have the figures to hand, they would be available to the Joint Parliamentary Committee, death by exposure from falling in the lake is a real and continuing danger throughout the winter months in Canberra.

- I am a member of the Canberra Yacht Club and I own a boat with one of the larger masts on the lake – in other words there is self interest in this submission!

My opposition to the bridge is based on the following points;

- there is no pedestrian traffic requirement for the bridge
- the bridge does not propose to carry bicycle traffic
- dangers to users of the bridge
- dangers posed by the bridge to lake users – an unacceptable navigation hazard
- damage to the heritage values of Lake Burley Griffin
- the bridge is unnecessary: its purpose duplicates an existing migrant commemoration in Sydney
- concerns at the responsibility for the substantial and perpetual cost of upkeep and maintenance of the bridge once complete.

*There is no pedestrian traffic requirement for the bridge*

The bridge, as a bridge, is unnecessary. It is proposed to be constructed in an area of no pedestrian activity. The bridge would be a white elephant; it comes from nowhere and goes nowhere. Both the National Museum and Lennox Gardens are remote locations, exclusively accessed by motor vehicle.

Any studies conducted by the ACT Government or the NCPA will show that there has been no request or requirement demonstrating sufficient demand for pedestrian access in this area to the extent that would warrant the cost of such a major construction and its subsequent maintenance and upkeep.

As part of its inquiry, the Joint Parliamentary Committee must be sure of the pedestrian and traffic requirement for such a structure. That demand must be either significant, or of significant potential.

The demand pressures for capital works for pedestrian, motor vehicular and cycling needs in this city are massive, the budget to meet those needs is enormously strained and the priorities are hard fought over. These other traffic needs must be met first before diverting resources to something for which there is no need or demand.

*The bridge does not carry bicycle traffic*

Canberra city traffic management, combined with environmental needs, require that any opportunity to encourage cycle traffic must be maximised. I understand that the bridge is limited to pedestrian access. As discussed elsewhere in this submission, pedestrian usage would be minimal. If the bridge were to proceed (despite all the reasons against such a proposal) studies would need to be done for including cycle usage and access for the bridge.

The point that is being made here is that of course the bridge is not being proposed as a bridge, it is being proposed as a memorial. The first step that needs to be taken for



such a project is that normal town planning and traffic planning studies need to be completed and the traffic demand must be established before the bridge could be considered viable. ( Eg some moderate ANU student pedestrian & cycle traffic to the National Library would exist, as well as some commuter cycle traffic to the Parliamentary triangle, but visitors seeking to link their visits to the National Museum with the attractions in the Parliamentary triangle would use motor vehicles.)

#### *Dangers to users of the bridge*

If the bridge is constructed so as to permit the continuation of the existing usage of the lake for sailing, it will need to be very high. If the bridge is constructed at that height, it will be difficult for the elderly and the handicapped to access. Further it will be dangerous to walk on, frightening for elderly users and dangerous for children.

The Parliamentary Joint Committee may want to take evidence and examine existing weather patterns and particularly prevailing wind directions. The prevailing wind is from the West, and it is significant in both speed and frequency. The westerly direction is broadside to the proposed pedestrian bridge. The bridge would be windswept to the extent that would be frightening to many users. To whom would fall the responsibility of recovering people who became frightened or disoriented and unable to return from halfway across the bridge? Such a task is assigned to rangers in places such as the forest sky walks in various national parks in Australia but who would undertake that responsibility in Canberra? To overcome this, the bridge would have to be enclosed -- significantly increasing its cost and increasing the potential that the materials used would deteriorate and become an eyesore in a very short space of time. Once enclosed, the available space for graffiti would expand -- again increasing costs.

In a city like Canberra, there is a great reliance on the motor vehicle, as a consequence the bridge will seldom be used. It will be a lonely and isolated place and therefore dangerous for the occasional user. Who will be able to assist those who fall from or are thrown from the bridge? Death by exposure from falling in the lake is a real and continuing danger throughout the winter months in Canberra.

Because of its isolation and infrequent usage it will be a likely venue for suicide.

#### *Dangers posed by the bridge to users of the lake*

The Canberra Yacht Club will be putting in a more technical and detailed analysis of the concerns posed by the bridge to sailing users of the lake. I make the following points.

The bridge is proposed to be constructed at one of the choke points on the lake -- the space is very narrow at that point and there is considerable traffic during summer months with racing and other recreational users of the lake.

The location of the bridge is at a critical point for sailors experiencing strong wind conditions who traverse this narrow area looking for shelter to change sails. It is also right in the centre of the area that the CYC Sailing School traverses with young and

beginner sailors. The number of pylons in the proposed bridge are very dangerous and an unacceptable navigation hazard. Navigation hazards are things that sailors just have to deal with, but to actually install a navigation hazard is completely daft and raises complex questions of liability for the government authority which owns and manages it. I would not like to be the civic authority having to deal with parents of sailing school students drowned or injured as a result of the navigation hazard created by the bridge.

The bridge must be high enough to permit the navigation of large trailable yachts. The size of masts on yachts now using the lake has increased from heights of 16 feet to 30 feet in the 40 years that I have been using the lake. This increase in the height of masts is likely to further increase in the future. Any responsible planning of a public facility must take this projected future requirement into account.

If the lake is to continue to attract national regattas, an important tourist drawcard for the city -- the sailing area cannot be allowed to be restricted by structures such as this proposed pedestrian bridge, right in the centre of the most popular area of the lake for sailing, and restricting sailing and yachts from accessing areas close to the city where they can provide a colourful backdrop to the city and its public events.

The pylons of the bridge will create navigation hazards to sailing boats, rowers, fishermen with small electric powered boats and canoeists. The pylons will create additional blind spots, endangering small craft from collision with the large cruise vessels e.g. MV Southern Cross. Noting that the area proposed for the bridge is one of the busiest sections of the lake where dangers of collision already exist and collisions do occur.

The bridge will pose a danger to lake users of projectiles being thrown from the bridge. As the bridge is remote and isolated, experience elsewhere (for example with freeway overpasses) has demonstrated the fatalities and serious injuries which occur in these circumstances.

#### *Damage to heritage values*

The unbuilt vistas of Lake Burley Griffin are a unique and precious thing. Naturally they cannot remain forever, the lake is man-made and over time our built environment will and must increase. However, those unique heritage values must be preserved where possible. For tourists and residents alike, the tranquillity and natural beauty of the unbuilt vistas to the Brindabella's and of the lake and its surrounds are to be treasured and valued. Any construction must be sensitive to these requirements.

As noted above there is no requirement for the bridge -- there is no pedestrian activity in the area and there is no demand for it, there is no need for it, it serves no pedestrian purpose or traffic purpose, it is not a requirement of the city in any sense. Nobody has sought it, nobody has required it.

On this basis the bridge must be seen only as a memorial. It must therefore in town planning terms be designed and dealt with as a memorial. A memorial which imposes



such an eyesore on the heritage values of the lake is not a satisfactory town planning solution to the requirements of a memorial.

No doubt the Joint Parliamentary Committee will have researched Griffin's plan and its adaptation and implementation (the latter point is significant as the plan has evolved since Griffin's original scheme), as well as taking professional advice on this matter.

To say as Immigration Bridge Australia does that the bridge will complete the Griffin plan is misleading. While Griffin's in his 1911 design did include a bridge at that location, the scale and size of the ornamental pool was very different to what was surveyed and gazetted as the plan in 1925. The lake as finally constructed and its associated major roadworks and bridges means that a bridge at the proposed location would now seriously detract from the clean simplicity of the Parliamentary triangle, the primary core derived from the Griffin plan and around which all planning for the national and central area of Canberra has developed.

#### *The bridge as a memorial is unnecessary*

As the son of a migrant, married to a migrant, I recognise the need to commemorate and celebrate our migrant heritage. We should and do celebrate our migrant heritage and the culture, vitality and the success which it has brought to our community and our way of life. This is not the way to do it. In so far as a built commemoration is required, the Australian National Maritime Museum in Sydney already has the magnificent Welcome Wall which meets this need.

The Immigration Bridge Australia proposal is therefore an unnecessary duplication. If however it is thought that a further memorial or commemoration is required, I make a suggestion for a more viable alternative at the end of this submission.

No doubt the Joint Parliamentary Committee will inform itself of net permanent migration figures to Australia and the sheer impracticality of dealing fairly with all of the individuals embedded within this existing and ongoing massive set of statistics in a bridge style memorial as proposed.

It is clear that the bridge proposal is totally impractical in this regard – how will extra names be added in the years to come? To whom will fall that responsibility? When is the cut off? With migration of the order of thousands per year, - 72,000 in 2007-08, this is a significant problem. Will the bridge become a symbol of divisiveness, with 'old' migrants included, but 'new' ones excluded?.....or will we build another bridge.....!?

#### *The cost of upkeep*

As I understand it, Immigration Bridge Australia will endeavour to meet some costs of the construction of the bridge. But who will meet those substantial and perpetual maintenance costs which will be required long into the future?

These costs will be high. Because of the isolation, remoteness and low usage of the facility, vandalism will be high and a major continuing cost as will the cost of

cleaning. We have the precedent of the expensive and magnificent (at the time we constructed it!) Woden football facility which had to be closed and demolished because of vandalism.

Unless very high-quality materials are used, the structure will deteriorate rapidly in such an exposed location. It will become an eyesore. As a young officer in the NCDC, I remember how proud we were of the new Belconnen bus interchange, constructed out of modern (at the time) concrete techniques and synthetic superstructure. Today it is an expensive eyesore and a blot on the landscape. It is a most unpleasant facility to use -- the engineering solution for repair and replacement is still being debated, the replacement and repair cost cannot be afforded.

If the Joint Parliamentary Committee is to undertake a comprehensive examination of this proposal it would be sobering for it to visit such past failures to ensure that they are not repeated. The Immigration Bridge Australia proposal, if it were to proceed, would be such a failure. Who will pay for its inevitable major restoration in 15 years? To whom will fall the decision and the cost for its demolition? (Once created, the handrail of names will become a sacred cow, politically untouchable and a planning policy nightmare!) All of these are expenses which we simply cannot afford and town planning problems which we do not need.

### Alternatives?

At the outset, I asked is there a need for a memorial to Australia's migrant community? It is a most worthy subject for a memorial. However the focus should be on the memorial not on the bridge.

So is there an alternative to the bridge? The answer is most certainly yes -- there can be many solutions for appropriate memorials for this purpose, for example a walkway around the lake shore, incorporating walls, grottos and such structures, in a real physical sense recalling the architecture and cultures of our origins (look at the Greek memorial at the northern end of Anzac Parade as an example of what can be accomplished). For example, Australia Day celebrations in Commonwealth Park which include citizenship ceremonies could be considerably enhanced if a memorial could be constructed nearby enabling our new citizens to immediately be recognised and included in our community by having their names or places of origin incorporated into a memorial. (But note the need to solve the problem of individual recognition because of sheer numbers mentioned above).

Such a proposal would match existing commemorations around the lake and form an important part of the tourist circuit which already exists. It would be picturesque, it would meet the planning and heritage requirements of the lake, there would be easy access for all and there would be easy capacity for expansion. Maintenance would be simple and of low cost and could be easily incorporated into existing contracts. All round, a memorial of this nature would be a much cheaper and more effective and better solution for the requirement of a memorial to our immigrants.

Such a facility could incorporate for example a small sunken stage in an amphitheatre style setting (e.g. Stage 88 is a very successful public venue) -- with commemorative



plaques built for example into the seating, at which civic functions commemorating our diverse and wonderful heritage could be regularly held. Such a memorial would have a genuine duality of function which the bridge proposal lacks. The venue would be alive, it would be used for music, dance, theatre and civic functions. It would be a place of civic congregation and activity and where descendants could commemorate their ancestry. In other words there would be a locus for cultural activity and celebration which a bridge just cannot provide.

I thank you for the opportunity of being able to make a submission to your inquiry and I wish the Joint Parliamentary Committee well with its deliberations.

Cleaver Elliott