

12 March, 2009

The Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital
and External Territories
Parliament House
Canberra

Dear Sir / Madam

Re: Inquiry into the Immigration Bridge Australia Proposal

I wish to lodge an objection to the proposal to build the Immigration Bridge across Lake Burley Griffin.

I came to Canberra in 1951 and have seen the very positive impact the lake has had on the city. It turned a floodplain into a unifying, impressive water feature which is used for the enjoyment of many people. One of the features of the lake is that it is uncluttered. The two existing bridges are spaced well apart and have an unobtrusive profile. The proposed Immigration Bridge will be relatively close to the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge and would detract from the openness of the lake.

The proposed Immigration Bridge will carry the names (and apparently stories) of migrants to Australia. The Immigration Bridge website states there have been some ten million migrants to Australia and there is space for 200 000 name plaques on the Bridge. Not everyone will feel comfortable reading a plaque on a narrow walkway which is 400metres long and 12 metres above the water, particularly on a windy day. In practice, inspection of the plaques will not be open to everybody. I am a descendant of two First Fleeters and I am certainly in favour of commemorating the arrival of migrants in Australia, but not with a bridge across Lake Burley Griffin. I am also intrigued as to who will be responsible for paying for the maintenance and repairs of any damage or vandalism to the Bridge. Not the taxpayer, I hope.

I am also concerned that the proposed Immigration Bridge has implications for the safety of rowers and sailors on the Lake. I compete in rowing regattas and I am also a recreational sailor. Rowers in racing shells face backwards and the majority of the different classes of boats do not have a cox who faces forwards and steers the boat. Consequently in the majority of cases the person sitting in the bow (front) seat of a racing shell has to periodically turn around, take a bearing between the pylons of the two existing bridges and relay instructions to the rest of the crew so that the boat goes between the pylons safely. To add another bridge so close to the Commonwealth Bridge and where the boats have to change course, is increasing the risk of an accident, particularly when several boats are jockeying for space to come between the pylons.

The pylons of the Immigration Bridge will also be a hazard for sailboats proceeding from the West Lake to the West and Central Basins and vice versa. The danger is increased because the boats are converging in a relatively narrow strip of water between the Acton Peninsula and Lennox Gardens. In certain weather conditions, the water can be very rough in that area, with the waves bouncing off the stone walls. These conditions together with the relatively limited maneuverability of the sailboat can make progress through a set of pylons very tricky. It has to be born in mind that not only do sailboats have to tack back and forth into a wind, but they also experience some slippage sideways as the wind hits them side on. The pylons of the Immigration Bridge in that location would create an additional hazard.

The proponents of the Immigration Bridge state that there are to be 200 000 name plaques together with family stories, on the Bridge. With, say 100 000 plaques on each side of a 400 metre bridge, I would have thought there will have to be vertical panels running from the handrail down to the walking deck to accommodate all of the information. This is going to impede the natural flow of the wind, creating eddies and making it even more difficult to sail a boat between the pylons.

For all of the above reasons I am strongly opposed to the proposal to build the Immigration Bridge across Lake Burley Griffin. By all means have something to commemorate the arrival of migrants in Australia, but not with a bridge across the lake.

Yours faithfully

(Michael J. Burgess)