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Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories
Department of House of Representatives
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AUSTRALIA

**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE NATIONAL CAPITAL AND
EXTERNAL TERRITORIES
INQUIRY INTO THE IMMIGRATION BRIDGE AUSTRALIA PROPOSAL**

Introduction

In this submission, I will outline a range of arguments in favour of an appropriate and relevant memorial to all that immigration has added to the life of Australia and its people. The submission will outline a range of reasons as to why the proposed immigration bridge is antithetical to that objective, on the basis of its adverse impacts on the usage and heritage values of Lake Burley Griffin. From that perspective, the submission will then offer comments in respect of the Committee's Terms of Reference for this inquiry.

Celebrating Immigration – a Memorial to What has Been Added

Immigration has been an integral part of the Australian story for as long as humanity has been on the move. Both before and since the beginnings of European exploration and settlement, immigration has had an almost limitless range of influences on the land and on the life of its people.

More recently, in the years since the Second World War, Australian life has been greatly and increasingly enriched by the movement of people from an ever widening range of cultures. As a nation, Australia has been better than most at embracing and absorbing these additions to our national life. We have, as a result, been exceptionally blessed by the arts, style, cuisine, ideas, diversity of beliefs and thought that have become an integral part of who we are. Moreover, we have benefited marvellously from the range and depth of exchange with the cultures that have sent such additions to our national life.

There can be no doubt that we should celebrate, and build monuments to the spirit and courage of those who have given such depth, colour and richness to the Australian community. Among the main purposes of this submission is to express my very strong support for the construction of an appropriate memorial to commemorate the contributions of migrants to Australia.

An essential and dominating theme of any such memorial must be a clear and highly visible focus on all that has been added to the life of our community by immigration.

For this reason, the construction of a bridge in the form and location proposed by IBA, would be a most jarring and inappropriate contradiction.

The Proposed Bridge – an Inappropriate Option

As proposed by IBA, the Immigration Bridge would do more to engender resentment than celebration. In particular, it would detract significantly from a range of uses on Lake Burley Griffin which have been an integral to the life of the lake since we first put water in it.

Most forms of non-motorised recreational boating including, most particularly, sailing, have thrived on Lake Burley Griffin since its earliest days. For all these forms of boating, the common features are that both the air and the water, and their interaction, are a fluid medium, in which precision of movement is always relative rather than absolute.

It is not possible to direct the movement of a boat in the same way one can control a land vehicle. This factor adds greatly to both the likelihood and consequences of risk arising from fixed obstacles and navigational hazards such as would be posed by the pylons of the proposed bridge.

In my own experience driving rescue boats for the Canberra Yacht Club, the complexity of retrieving upturned boats and wet sailors is exponentially compounded when in close proximity to any fixed obstacle, and the highest demand for rescue inevitably arises in weather conditions which exponentially increase the difficulty of manoeuvre, even for a powered vessel.

For much of the year, prevailing and often very fresh westerly winds mean that the only readily available relatively sheltered water is the passage between the National Museum and the area to the north of Lennox Gardens. That need for refuge is at its greatest in the sort of challenging conditions which would radically exacerbate the navigation hazards posed by bridge pylons.

For sailing in particular, movement on the water is far less precise and, in the wind shifts that typify Lake Burley Griffin and are, in some winds, exacerbated by eddies from shore structures around the lake, there is a degree of added challenge and risk that would be posed by the proposed bridge.

There have, over the years, been many national championships conducted on Lake Burley Griffin as well as major events such as the Masters Games. These activities bring life, movement, people and revenue to the ACT and boating organisations such as the Canberra Yacht Club have been encouraged by the authorities to pursue, conduct and participate in these events.

One potential limitation on Canberra's ability to hold major boating events on Lake Burley Griffin is the already relatively limited area of lake available for these activities. The proposed bridge would effectively excise a significant reduction on the available area, as well as imposing the navigational impacts discussed above. Canberra's ability to conduct major events on Lake Burley Griffin would be substantially diminished by the proposed bridge.

The Committee's Terms of Reference

The following paragraphs provide comment on the Committee's Terms of Reference for this inquiry:

1. *The process adopted by Immigration Bridge Australia (IBA) to settle the design for the Immigration Bridge (the Bridge) taking into account:*
 - a. *the heritage values of Lake Burley Griffin and its foreshore, and*
 - b. *the interests of users of the Lake.*

As far as 1a, is concerned, I note that boating, and particularly sailing, is an integral element of the heritage values of Lake Burley Griffin, and has been as long as the lake has existed. Participants have invested considerable commitment in life, use and improvement of the lake and its surrounds. Water sports, particularly sailing, have been a highly prominent, visible and attractive part of the lake throughout West Basin and also from time to time, in Central Basin. The proposed bridge would inescapably curtail boating access and almost entirely obstruct the view from the city and its surrounds of these activities on that part of the Lake that would remain accessible.

In addition to its impact on the boating aspects of the Lake's heritage value, the proposed bridge would be a most discordant blot on the open vistas which characterize how Lake Burley Griffin and its surrounding landscape have developed. The visual impact would simply be to enclose and reduce the current sense of openness and space. Moreover, if the Bridge were to be built in any form that did not very significantly impact boating activity it would need to be of such a height that it would simply be an eyesore, with every adverse aspect of its impact on the land and waterscape exacerbated.

Lastly, I note the proponents' references to the Griffin legacy. Firstly, the geography of Lake Burley Griffin, particularly in the area impacted by this proposal, has evolved in a number of ways which differ quite fundamentally from Burley Griffin's original ideas. This proposal does not accurately restore the legacy. Secondly, the proposed bridge, as an attempt to achieve its part of the Griffin legacy would be a somewhat flawed exception among a wide range of other divergences from that legacy.

It is my submission that IBA's proposal fails to take proper account of the full range of heritage values associated with Lake Burley Griffin, and the proposed bridge would impose a very significant adverse impact on those heritage values

As far as TOR 1b is concerned, most of the preceding content of this submission addresses the impact of the proposed bridge on the interests of users of the lake. I note that the processes adopted by IBA have completely failed to take any meaningful account of those interests.

The question of whether or not the bridge should be built or not has never had any part in what IBA has sought to portray as consultation. Nor has any alternative, which might, like immigration itself, add to life, heritage value, usage and amenity particularly around the lake, ever been entertained by IBA. Rather IBA's discourse has been exclusively predicated on the premise that the bridge is to be built, regardless of objections or alternatives, with its consultation confined solely to design options.

2. *The process that has been adopted by IBA to raise funds for the construction and ongoing maintenance of the Bridge.*

While the proposed bridge should not be built, it is essential that the motivations, goodwill and commitment of those people who have contributed or committed funds towards a memorial to immigration should be respected. In that regard, I believe IBA may be open to criticism as to the level of expectation it has allowed to develop that a bridge will assuredly be built.

There is a clear need to initiate a process of meaningful engagement with stakeholders, the community and particularly those who have contributed funds, to develop options for a more constructive, beneficial and appropriate memorial, which does not impose such an adverse impact. I will certainly be taking the opportunity to make a financial contribution to such a memorial.

3. *The approval process required under the Australian Capital Territory (Planning and Land Management) Act 1988 if an application for approval of the Bridge were received by the National Capital Authority.*

I believe there is a clear need to ensure that, if the NCA is to arbitrate on the approvals required for this proposed bridge, its objectivity must be both demonstrated and enforced. There are clear suggestions in IBA's communications that the option of a bridge as a suitable form of memorial was originally put to IBA by the NCA, and that IBA's role is simply to facilitate something that government is going to build anyway. To the extent these suggestions have any substance, they place the NCA in a clear and inappropriate conflict of interest.

Options to ensure both the substance and appearance of a fair and objective approval process might include:

- referral to another, independent authority, or
- inclusion of sufficient, independent and external participation in the NCA's deliberative processes.

Any approval arrived at solely by the NCA would, however, be irretrievably tainted.

Summary

In summary, IBA's processes in relation to the proposed bridge have been fundamentally flawed and inadequate, particularly in relation to the heritage values of the lake and the interests of lake users. Moreover, the NCA's objectivity is sufficiently prejudiced that its ability to conduct any approval process in a demonstrably disinterested way is fundamentally compromised.

I strongly support and would willingly contribute funds towards construction of a memorial which celebrates immigration, particularly through recognition of all that immigration has added to the life of Australia and its people.

There is a clear need to accord due respect to, and to properly engage, those people who have already committed financial support to the proposal for a memorial to immigration.

By detracting very significantly from the heritage values, life and usage of Lake Burley Griffin, the proposed bridge would be a self defeating, jarring and most inappropriate form of memorial.

A more appropriate form of memorial, more conducive to celebrating what immigration adds to our national life, should be developed.

There is a clear need for specific action to ensure clear independence and objectivity in any approval process in respect of this proposal.

The proposed immigration bridge should not be built.

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