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## **Joint Standing Committee Inquiry into the Immigration Bridge Australia Proposal**

### **National Trust of Australia (ACT) - Response**

#### **Introduction**

The ACT National Trust ('the Trust') appreciates the opportunity to present its views to the Joint Committee on the proposed footbridge to be erected over Lake Burley Griffin from Kurrajong Point west of the southern approach to Commonwealth Avenue Bridge to Hospital Point.

The Trust strongly objects to the current proposal of constructing a bridge across the West Basin of Lake Burley Griffin. This objection has the full consensus of the Trust's Heritage Committee and members of its Expert Advisory Panel. Collectively these people represent expertise and long experience in: heritage management & assessment, architecture, landscape architecture, urban design and history.

The reasons for our objection are outlined below. It should be noted however that the National Trust has no objection to a more suitably designed commemorative place celebrating the contributions that immigrants have made and still make to the culture of Australia.

## 1. National Trust

The ACT National Trust, with a membership of 1,600 is part of the National Trust movement in Australia representing 80,000 members. Our charter states:

- Our **Vision** is to be an independent and expert community leader in the conservation of our cultural and natural heritage.
- Our **Purpose** is to foster public knowledge about, and promote the conservation of, places and objects that are significant to our heritage.
- Our **Organisation** is a not-for-profit organisation of people interested in understanding and conserving heritage places and objects of local, national and international significance in the ACT region.

## 2. The Lake

Professor Ken Taylor AM, one of the foremost authorities on Canberra and its landscape, recently wrote of Lake Burley Griffin:

*“One of the glories of Canberra, perhaps even the jewel in the crown, is Lake Burley Griffin. John Overall described it as the most significant project in the early years of the NCDC: ‘building it would demonstrate once and for all that the [the Commission was] serious about building a National Capital. It is now difficult to image the city prior to 1964 without it. Its central basin forms a serene and grandly elegant state for the dramatis personae of national building and places within a parkland setting: for what the poet Judith Wright refers to as ‘cloud architecture in reflected image.’ The parkland theme, which continues in the eastern and western basins, is emphasised by the tree planting designed to create patterns in the landscape that lead the eye and to enhance landscape spaces between national buildings and integrate them into their setting. The horizontality of the lake and the parkland edge curving and merging into the water are reminiscent of a grand eighteenth century Capability Brown composition, its dramatic effect heightened by the contrast with the magnificent backdrop of outer hills” (K. Taylor: Canberra City in the Landscape (2006).*

### **3. Historical Context**

The proposed project calls for a bridge across Lake Burley Griffin as a monument to Australia's immigrants. Why a bridge in Canberra? There is no historical connection between a bridge across an artificial lake in an inland city and the arrival of migrants to Australia. Most migrants to Australia landed for the first time in the major coastal city ports; Albany, Fremantle, Port Adelaide, Port Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane & Hobart; or came by air first touching Australian soil at international airports. Canberra simply has no historical connection with their arrival nor, in most cases, plays any part in their life experience in Australia other than being the capital city. Other Australian cities which were regular points of entry into Australia have justly recognized the migrants who passed through their streets, either taking up residence or moving out of the cities into the country areas. For example, the Immigration Museum in Melbourne and the South Australian Migration Museum in Adelaide commemorate and document immigration and provide interpretive programs for visitors. A bridge across Lake Burley Griffin with names etched on the handrails falls far short of these institutions in commemorating the vast input migrants have made to the development of the Australian culture.

### **4. Heritage Values and Landscape Impact of the Immigration Bridge**

The ACT National Trust has had Lake Burley Griffin and surrounding foreshores listed as a Classified Place since 1986. In part, our statement of significance reads:

*The Lake and its adjacent foreshores possess historic, scientific, social and aesthetic importance. It was an integral part of the early design for Canberra, and adopted by Burley Griffin as an essential landscape element of his plan. Aesthetically the Lake and its foreshores provide an area of beauty and interest, highlighted by the changing colour of the seasons.*

Our concerns are:

- In recent times the Trust has been concerned about the types of development that have been planned and have been implemented along the Lake's shorelines. In 2008 the ACT Trust included the Lake and foreshores in the national 'Heritage at Risk' programme because of what we considered to be a range of inappropriate development and development plans which would impact on its heritage values – these included the construction of the open car parking areas by Commonwealth Avenue Bridge,

Development Application 53 for the Albert Hall precinct & draft Weston Park Management Plan.

- A Heritage Management Plan of Lake Burley Griffin commissioned in 2008 by the National Capital Authority and written by Godden Mackay Logan, heritage consultants, has not been released for public comment by NCA. The ACT National Trust has asked NCA for a copy of this report but has not received it. The ACT Trust has also asked the Chair of the Inquiry Committee for it to be released and made available for public scrutiny prior to the current deadline for responses (see attachment). The Trust considers that this document, if released, would be a crucial source of information regarding Lake Burley Griffin and would enable us, and other organisations wishing to participate in the inquiry, to produce a more informed and valuable submission.
- The proposed bridge will present a highly visual intrusion across the lake – particularly in the Central and West Basin areas. After about 45 years without a bridge across to Acton Peninsula, the primary heritage issue is whether any bridge at all is a good idea if it adversely impacts on the anticipated Commonwealth Heritage significance assessment of Lake Burley Griffin. There would be significant impacts on the lake view from Commonwealth Bridge as well as impacts on lake foreshores, views across West Basin and from Stirling Ridge thence to the Brindabella Range mountain backdrop, if any structure such as this proposed bridge is put in the way.
- The construction of this bridge would then lead to a loss of associative values for people who value and enjoy the lake and enjoy its visual settings. For example, visual links across the water surface to the surrounding hills which provide the symbolic setting of Canberra first identified by Charles Scrivener. These views are extremely important to Canberrans as the ACT National Trust has recently shown.

Recently the Trust conducted a public survey to determine which viewsapes are most appreciated by Canberrans. Access to the survey was on-line and by contacting the Trust. The number of participants in this survey, which ran for four weeks, was quite astounding – over 750 responses were received from a very extensive questionnaire. The Trust is now in the process of analysing these results. However, a preliminary finding, based on approximately 320 responses, has shown that of the top five viewsapes of the lake, two, the view of the National Museum of Australia from Flynn

Drive and Civic from Lennox Gardens, were in the top five (out of 62). The high response to the survey and these two highly preferred views point strongly towards a very high appreciation of the open vistas Lake Burley Griffin provides. The integrity of the lake landscape settings would be severely compromised if the proposed bridge were to be constructed.

Further, the views from Commonwealth Avenue Bridge to Stirling Ridge would be the one that would be lost if a bridge intervened. The important vistas from Commonwealth Avenue Bridge are to the west, across the west basin, across West Lake to Stirling Ridge and thence on to the distant Brindabellas. The concern of the Trust is this sequence of landscape is too important to be compromised. It may be argued that the views from the new bridge would provide the same views but the concern would be that Commonwealth Avenue Bridge is the view not only of pedestrians and bicyclists but also by motor vehicle passengers – far more than would use the pedestrian bridge.

- The lake provides a unified set of experiences as a person moves around the shore line. Each of the many views to and across the lake are elements of the whole lake setting. Any visual interruption, such as this proposed bridge, will impact on the sense of the flow from one part of the lake to the other. The tangible values and intangible values would then be impaired.
- The Trust believes the bridge will have a strong negative effect on maintaining the Griffin vision for the setting of Canberra surrounding the shores of a central and aesthetic lake body. In fact, the Trust believes that the construction of the bridge departs from the original intentions of Griffin.

The two bridges across Lake Burley Griffin – Canberra Ave aligned with City Hill & Kings Ave aligned with Russel Hill - clearly and symmetrically define the boundaries of the Parliamentary Triangle. The proposed Immigration Bridge set at an angle to the Kings Avenue Bridge and curving to a height greater than Canberra Avenue Bridge would detract from that symmetry. This surely departs from the original Walter Burley Griffin intention of symmetry for the lake aligned with, and embracing the natural landscape elements.

In his 1911 winning entry plan and subsequent 1912, 1913, 1915 plans for Canberra, Griffin drew in the two main bridges we now have and a lower road crossing across the lake in approximately the same area as the proposed Immigration Bridge. However,

scrutiny of these plans reveals that the two main bridges were to be the dominate crossings of the lake and the third, a more subdued lower level crossing, giving way in landscape dominance to the two main bridges. From what is depicted on the website for the proposed Immigration Bridge, the dominance of the landscape would be seriously disturbed with the proposed bridge of equal if not more dominance than the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge.

It should be noted here that while subsequent plans of the city were drawn up over the post Griffin years, most did depict the third bridge but of a less dominant aspect than what is now proposed. However, a departure from the three bridges idea came in 1957 when William Holford modified the Griffin design further and drew in just two bridges. This approach became the blueprint for the next decade of planning and development of the city and in 1958 the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) prepared the ultimate plan for the city by the lake with just the two bridges, Commonwealth Avenue and Kings Avenue. This is what we have today.

## 5. Urban Design

- The proposed bridge is intended to span the lake from Flynn Place west of the southern abutment of Commonwealth Avenue Bridge to Hospital Point below the National Museum.

The bridge is intended as a high level foot bridge with 12m clearance from the water to the deck level. The deck is intended to be roofed with solar panels feeding into the electrical grid.

There have been numerous proposals for bridges over the lake, including a bridge connecting Black Mountain Peninsula to Orana Bay and proposals for two bridges from Hospital Point to Yarralumla. The latter two bridges were proposed by Sir William Holford (William Holford: *Observations on the Future Development of Canberra* (1958)) but were not accepted by the National Capital Development Commission.

At that time the Commission's priority was to construct Kings Avenue Bridge to meet predicted traffic problems created by the transfer of Defence to Canberra (NCDC: Report 30 June 1958), leaving the other bridges described as a 'parkway'

and a 'causeway' subject to further traffic and other studies. The Commonwealth Avenue Bridge was to be designed to complement Kings Avenue Bridge.

In 1962 the Commission published the Master Plan for the ultimate development of the lakeside parks and reserves (*NCDC: A Report on the Development of Canberra for the Five Year Period July 1962-June 1967*) (1962) which provided for the Commonwealth Avenue and Kings Avenue Bridges and for a bridge from Black Mountain Peninsula to Orana Bay as part of a lakeside drive.

While the Tarcoola Reach bridge was never built (and shouldn't be) the Kings Avenue/Commonwealth Avenue bridges provided a simple but elegant frame for the landscape setting of the Parliamentary Triangle. The bridges stress the symmetry and formality of the Central Basin, and in addition provide definition to the East and West Basins where the uncluttered expanses of water further emphasise the symmetry of the Master Plan.

It is a tribute to that Master Plan (and to Holford who was engaged as consultant of the design of the Central Basin landscape) that the lake has endured so successfully over almost 50 years and has achieved iconic status as part of the physical address to the Seat of Government, as the unifying element of the north and south parts of the city and for its own intrinsic beauty.

In the opinion of the Trust anything that intrudes on the simplicity and elegance of the original scheme is to be avoided absolutely, unless there is no feasible alternative. In this case, the imposition of a structure that has no logical connection to the lake system, traffic planning or the central landscape plan is without justification.

Urban design brings together architecture, engineering, landscape architecture as well as other disciplines such as social planning that define our urban environment. The Trust is principally interested in preserving the heritage values of the Lake. However, in examining the proposal for an additional bridge it is also necessary to address other matters relating to its proposed construction and their impact on the lake.

The skimpy material available on the bridge design indicates a roofed structure over the lake supported on pylons with raised abutments at either end. It is

presumed that access from Hospital Point is by pedestrian paths from the Museum of Australia car park. The minimum walking distance by this route is about 230m.

To access the proposed bridge from Flynn Place would require people to walk from the nearest car parks either east of the National Library (670m approximately) or from the car park on the West Basin side of Commonwealth Avenue (760m approximately). Alternatively, it would be necessary to construct pay parking in Flynn Place. The Immigration Bridge drawing shows Flynn Drive pasted out west of Commonwealth Avenue presumably to accommodate a car park for pedestrians accessing the proposed bridge.

The National Trust is of the opinion that a car park in such a prominent position on the lake edge, adjacent to Lennox Gardens would be a visual disaster under any circumstances. On the edge of Lake Burley Griffin it would encroach on and intrude into the landscape in a way totally unacceptable to the parkland theme and integrity of the Lake.

As people approach the Immigration Bridge it would be necessary for them to be raised from ground level to deck level using lifts that provide a continuous accessible path of travel for disabled persons. A similar structure would be required on Hospital Point. Such structures, as with the bridge itself, would need to be substantial load bearing entities, totally out of character with the landscape setting in which it is proposed they be placed.

- The Trust notes that the Immigration Bridge concepts show Flynn Drive terminating at Commonwealth Avenue Bridge, eliminating the road carrying traffic from Parkes onto the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge. The abutments at either end of the bridge will need approaches and will have to be large intrusive structures in order to support the Bridge slip lane. There is no explanation of how this traffic is to be redirected. Presumably this traffic will be redirected through the Commonwealth Avenue/Coronation Drive intersection which would have to be redesigned to provide additional storage lanes in all directions.
- Maintenance issues – the construction of the bridge is funded by public donations throughout Australia – Once the bridge is constructed who will be responsible for financing the upkeep?



## **6. Alternative commemorative place/design**

- The bridge has so far been the only proposal for a commemoration place for immigration into Australia and located in Canberra. There has been no other suggestion of an alternative monument or place design. The Trust considers that the current bridge proposal is unsuitable but recognises the importance and heritage values in having a place where the contributions of Australia's immigrants can be recognized, presented in a public place and celebrated. Such a memorial might be considered within the following parameters:
  - On the shore of Lake Burley Griffin – shore line of National Museum of Australia.
  - Low relief – not a high visual impact.
  - Names of the immigrants etched into suitable material.
  - A garden setting similar in format to Nara Gardens.
  - The memorial has as a central feature a commemorative to the many immigrants who were employed on the Snowy Mountains Scheme.
  - A website providing further information.

**Heritage Committee  
National Trust of Australia (ACT)**

**27 March 2009**



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**Senator Kate Lundy**  
**Chair**  
**Joint Standing Committee Inquiry into the Immigration Bridge Australia Proposal**  
**Parliament House**  
**Canberra ACT 2600**

### **Immigration Bridge Proposal Inquiry**

Dear Senator Lundy

The ACT National Trust will be producing a submission to the Joint Standing Committee Inquiry into the Immigration Bridge Proposal. The deadline for submissions is 27<sup>th</sup> March 2009.

In 2008 the National Capital Authority commissioned Godden Mackay Logan (GML) Heritage Consultants produced a Conservation and Management Plan for Lake Burley Griffin. The National Trust understands that this document is in draft form and being held by the NCA. Last year the Trust requested a copy of this document but we were informed that it would not be released for public comment until mid 2009.

The Trust considers that this document, if released, would be a crucial source of information regarding Lake Burley Griffin and would enable us, and other organisations wishing to participate in the inquiry, to produce a more informed submission.

We therefore ask the Committee to arrange for the Conservation Management Plan for Lake Burley Griffin prepared by GML to be made publically available by 13 March 2009 to assist submissions for the inquiry. If this is not possible, then we recommend that the inquiry is delayed until the draft is available to the public.

Yours sincerely

**Eric Martin AM**  
**President**

6 March 2009