



Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories
Department of House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
AUSTRALIA

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories Inquiry into the National Capital Authority.

I am writing to you regarding your inquiry into the National Capital Authority specifically about their management of designated land under the National Capital Plan. My interest in the management of Lake Burley Griffin and surrounding foreshores dates from the mid-1970s to the present. During that time I have won numerous ACT Rowing Championships, including Champion Single Sculler of the ACT, I have coached various Champion NSW, ACT, National and Australian Representative rowing crews and I was also Chairman of the ACT Rowing Association. In the year 2000 my achievements in Australian rowing were commemorated with me being awarded an Australian Sports Medal.

The specific issue that I would like to raise with you is the NCA's management of Lake Burley Griffin and the surrounding foreshores. My concerns with the NCA date back to 1989 when I was club secretary of Narrabundah Rowing Club and the club sought a site to build a boathouse. During protracted negotiations that my club had with the NCPA, I concluded that they were actively antagonistic towards our club building a boathouse. Given that we succeeded in building that boathouse despite the NCPA, and have subsequently increased sporting opportunities for the Canberra community it is clear that the NCA's lack of vision has severely limited the opportunities for the Canberra Community.

The NCPA adopted three strategies to deny our club a boathouse site. Firstly they ignored us. During the 17 months of our negotiations they never corresponded with us, or replied

to more than a dozen letters that we sent to them about our application. Information about the lack of progress on our proposal was gleaned from telephone calls that we initiated. Their second strategy was to claim that they were having difficulty finding suitable sites for our boathouse on Lake Burley Griffin. . The NCPA procrastinated for 17 months finding a site, after claiming the process would only take 3 to 12 months. The preferred site on our application for a lease was identified as being set aside for rowing boat houses by the NCDC in 1969. That site has recently been offered to one of the school rowing clubs by the NCA. Given that the NCDC nominated and serviced the site for boathouses in 1969, and the NCA is happy to release the same site in 2003, the NCPA's reluctance to release this site in 1989 was inconsistent and arbitrary.

The NCPA's final attempt to kill off our proposal was to suggest that we would not be able to afford to build the boathouse. When we applied for a lease we included a budget that showed the building would cost under \$100,000. The NCPA commissioned the Interim Territory Planning Authority to provide some plans for our shed. We adopted those plans and the ITPA budget which indicated the boathouse could be built for \$92,000. We subsequently provided a detailed builder's quote showing the building would cost \$93,800. The NCPA's strategy was to refute these figures, notwithstanding that one set came from a document they commissioned from the Territory Planning Authority. The NCPA found a building estimator who said that our boathouse would cost \$330,000 (or perhaps more) to build. Subsequently (following pressure from ACT Senators Reid and McMullen) the NCPA conceded that the estimate they commissioned was artificially inflated, and that the building could be built for under \$100,000. When we got our lease following extensive pressure from both ACT Senators we built the boathouse for approximately \$80,000.

During the tenure of our boathouse we have taught thousands of Canberrans to row, produced National Champions and Representatives, won Act Premierships, fostered the birth of three other rowing clubs, as well as contributing significantly to other ACT Sports including kayaking, dragon boating and surf life saving. Clearly if the NCPA had killed off our proposal to build a boathouse Canberra's community and sporting activities

would be significantly poorer today. I believe that the NCA has limited the possibility for Lake Burley Griffin to be a vibrant center of community water-based activities.

Although the example I have described was from the early years of the NCA, there is little evidence to suggest that the organization has changed. The closure of Lake Burley Griffin in March 2001 demonstrated arrogance, indifference to users of the Lake and non-existent communication. The decision was announced on a Friday evening, with the Water Police closing the Lake with lights flashing and sirens blaring at 5pm. The NCA had closed their offices and put the answering machines on. The closure led to the cancellation of the ACT Rowing Championships on 22 and 23 March 2001, at a time when I was coaching several well-performed crews whose season's objective was crushed by the NCA. This was a major anti-climax for these crews. Subsequently the NCA has conceded that the Lake was not dangerous at that time. This closure has undermined the reputation that the Lake has as a great rowing training venue, as a National Rowing Camp had to be cancelled at that time. I suspect that the closure has also undermined the popularity of the Lake as a triathlon venue.

I am also critical of the planning and design options that NCA imposed on our boathouse. I believe that they are expensive for both our club and ACT tax payers and arbitrary in their imposition, and inefficient in the allocation of limited boathouse sites.

I am keen to appear before your committee to expand on these issues

Yours sincerely,

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