

Gina Pinkas

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Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories  
Department of House of Representatives  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary

**Parliamentary Inquiry on the Immigration Bridge Australia Proposal**

I welcome the Committee's Inquiry on the Immigration Bridge Proposal and the opportunity to provide comment. I strongly object to the proposal as outlined in the following submission:

**1. Project's Objective**

The objective for the project should be clearly defined. Is there a need? The question what is its purpose needs to be asked. Then the question to ask is – is this the best way of achieving that objective

If the objective to commemorate immigration to Australia, then I believe the proposal is inappropriate and there are better solutions to achieve that objective as outlined below. The question should also be asked is this offensive to Indigenous People particularly in such a prominent cultural landscape?

If the Bridge is proposed to provide a pedestrian link from the National Museum to the Parliamentary Triangle, then the need for this seems not to have been proven by independent surveys and demand studies. There are many constraints, such as parking and impact on surrounding areas, which would mean this is inappropriate to that location

If the Bridge is proposed to fulfil some aspects of Walter Burley Griffin's design, then as others have submitted, this area of his original design has changed significantly and the Bridge is irrelevant to the original concepts. Also modes of transport have changed rendering this location unsuitable.

If the objective is to enhance the landscape and vistas in Canberra then the proposal fails.

## **2. The Concept**

As a descendant of 18 immigrants to Australia, I have probably more immigrant ancestors than many others. I object to the entire concept of a commercially based memorial to some immigrants on the basis of a random selection based on descendants' willingness or ability to pay for the commemoration. In my view we either commemorate the struggles and achievements of these immigrants wholly or not at all. To single out a minor number of immigrants, based on a commercial proposition with ad hoc selection and then to situate this project in such a prominent national location is totally inappropriate. It is even more inappropriate in that most immigrants never came to Canberra.

As a descendant of First Fleet convicts, I note that recognition is given to the sensitivities of Indigenous People by reducing and hiding, since the Bi Centenary, memorials to the First Fleet in Sydney. I question, therefore, why these same sensitivities are not recognised in this proposal. Invasion of Australia did not stop with the First Fleet. While many of the local Indigenous people are also partly descended from Immigrants who arrived since 1788, I suggest, however, that it is also pertinent for the Committee to seek the views of indigenous people on this matter generally. It is also important to consult local Indigenous people, as I understand the site is an important one to Indigenous People.

## **3. Inappropriate Mode of Delivery**

If it is decided that a memorial for Immigrants is appropriate, then a commercial proposal by one organisation is an inappropriate way to achieve this. I believe that a memorial garden similar to the memorials on Anzac Parade would be more appropriate and a better tourist attraction. Specific immigration groups could be commemorated with specific memorials and stories included in those memorials. This would encourage specific celebrations on special national days and opportunities to recall significant events affecting those groups. This type of memorial could be an education asset for visiting school groups and aid tourism. For example, the very long history of Chinese immigration to Australia could be spelt out and provide a focus for Chinese people and school children.

It is not appropriate for an immigration memorial to be decided on the basis of one specific commercial proposal. Any memorial should be subject to a design competition and a competitive process to deliver. This would achieve the most innovative and best design possible.

I question how such a significant proposal in a most significant location can gain "legs" without a public process for establishing the need and the means of delivery. There are questions of probity raised in that there is no competitive process. Just an organisation coming forth with a commercial proposal and they are provided with an opportunity to build on Commonwealth land in one of the most visually significant areas of Canberra.

The fact that the proposal has got this far without that process is a demonstration of the former Board of the NCA's penchant for filling the National Triangle and adjoining areas with small construction projects without caring for public process, amenity or visual impact on Canberra's landscape setting. The fact that the ACT Government has seen fit to agree to cede Territory Land to the Commonwealth for the project, without a public process in the Territory to consider this is, is also of concern. What other bits of the Territory is the ACT Government giving to the Commonwealth without our knowledge?

The promotion of the project and seeking public funds for an unapproved project could also be an issue of concern in that the project could be viewed by the public as being approved and proceeding.

#### **4. Impact on Lake Use**

As a former manager of the lakes in Canberra, I am fully aware of the recreational and sporting use limitations of the ACT's waterways. While Lake Burley Griffin provides a much loved focus for many of our recreation opportunities, its capacity for water sports is severely limited. East Basin cannot be used for some activities due to the hard edges and subsequent safety issues. The Lake is notorious for wind changes affecting boating and bridges restricting sailing activity. The structure and the pylons of the proposed bridge would impact significantly on boating activities. I support the comment on the impact of the proposed bridge on boating activities outlined in other submissions. The impact for sailing, rowing and other boating activities is unacceptable in our only facility capable of accommodating this level of water sport.

#### **5. Safety**

Other submissions have raised the issue of the bridge being a suicide point. Commonwealth Avenue Bridge has from time to time been the site of attempted suicides. It is a site which generally has some traffic and people passing to report or at times intervene. Lifesaver floats were kept on the bridge for that purpose. The proposed Bridge will be isolated and not have the level of passing traffic and will provide an opportunity for suicide attempts, skylarking or even murders.

The bridge pylons will be a safety hazard for boating. Details have been outlined in other submissions. The bridge will restrict these activities.

#### **6. Use and Parking**

Before any decision is made to proceed with the bridge, demand studies need to be undertaken by an independent body (not the proponent). It is doubtful that the bridge will provide a useful transport method given its limitations. It is assumed that it will provide pedestrian access only to the National Museum from the Parliamentary Triangle. While people who do not have access to car transport may use this, given the lack of a bus, people in cars are most unlikely to do so in my view. There is limited parking in the area at either end of the proposed bridge. If people drove to the attractions of the national triangle and then wanted to visit

the National Museum, the question has to be asked would they park somewhere near the Bridge and walk across the lake or would they drive around to the Museum? Alternatively would they park at the museum and then walk across the lake and then walk to the National Gallery? The Bridge could be an attraction for joggers and people just wanting a nice walk but will its design allow for people stopped reading immigration stories and people walking and jogging past? The end point of the Bridge near the Albert Hall is not a destination or arrival point in itself.

With functions at the Hyatt and the Albert Hall as well as the heavy use of Lennox Park parking near the proposed bridge is very limited. The site is isolated from other infrastructure. The proponent would need to create further parking which would impact on the amenity of the area. Cost of parking and any support facilities eg toilets, should be born by the proponent.

Questions about access for people with disabilities have been raised. Any solution to that issue would increase the visual impact of the proposal.

## **7. Solar Panels and Maintenance**

The cost of this project will eventually be exceeded by the on going maintenance costs. If it is to proceed, capital raised should be sufficient to be invested to cover future maintenance costs and not made a cost impost on the Federal Budget no doubt reducing operational funds for dearly loved National institutions in the Parliamentary Triangle such as the National Library which has already suffered funding cuts. Too often projects built by the private sector at their own cost are poorly planned and constructed and maintenance costs are significant. Given its exposed location, the bridge maintenance costs may be significant in the longer term.

I do not know if the proposal to roof the structure with solar panels is likely or not. However, it should not be agreed. There are far more effective places to provide solar panels in the ACT and the panels would add to the visual pollution of the project. This is a silly suggestion to overcome some of the issues with the project and is at best a PR trick.

## **8. Impact on Vista**

The vista across the Lake to the beautiful blue Brindabellas is one of the joys of living in Canberra. I was somewhat saddened when it was marred by the intrusion of the sculpture rising up from the National Museum. However if I squint I can ignore that. The proposed bridge is another matter. It will totally marr this beautiful vista. The vista across the water to the Brindabellas is flanked by the landscape and shore of the lake. The eye is unimpeded by any structures as it looks up the Lake. The lake and the landscape flow to the blue background. What a wonder in the middle of our National Capital. Any structure crossing the lake at the proposed point would really spoil that view. I am sure that my 18 ancestors would not have wanted to be commemorated by such an intrusive structure.

It is very good that the Committee has held this enquiry and the issue is finally being aired in public. Thank you for the opportunity to provide my views and concerns.

Yours sincerely

Gina Pinkas