

Submission to the

**Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and  
External Territories**

**Inquiry into the Immigration Bridge Australia Proposal**

Submission by Peter J Dalton – Canberra resident since 1976.

I wish to register my firm opposition to the construction of the pedestrian footbridge proposed by Immigration Bridge Australia. My opinions are drawn from attendance at several meetings with officers of the NCA, meetings with Andrew Baulch of IBA and some of his committee members, the content of the IBA website, discussions with the committee of the Canberra Yacht Club and with members of a sub committee established by the NCA for the purposes of community consultation called the Lake Users Group.

**In Summary:**

- 1 I believe the process adopted by Immigration Bridge Australia is flawed, inappropriate and is seriously lacking in proper public consultation by IBA and by the NCA. Claims that it was drawn in the original plans of Walter Burley Griffin are misleading and the particular footbridge is not in the interests of the people of Canberra, let alone in the interests of the lake users. It will ruin the foreshore and is in conflict with several other existing objectives of the NCA.
- 2 The process adopted by IBA to raise funds is open to question on matters of honesty as it contains extravagant claims, some of which are unsubstantiated. The IBA advertisements and web site information imply that the plans for the bridge have been fully designed, approved and that they will proceed once members of the public pay for plaques. This method of publicity serves to place the Commonwealth in an invidious position whereupon it could be subject to pressure to agree with the construction without due planning process, without suitable public approval and without a study to determine actual need. The process adopted in the IBA proposal fails to offer the citizens of Australia an appropriate opportunity to present alternative suggestions for projects or sites in Canberra to record the significance of immigration to Australia and it would only represent the interests of certain minority group of immigrants.

- 3 For the NCA to arbitrate objectively on the IBA submission there must be a transparent and complete cost-benefit analysis of the project to determine firstly if there is real proof of the need for the bridge for practical and logistical reasons. Other alternatives to celebrate immigration must be encouraged for proper consideration, perhaps in the form of a national competition. Emotive reasons to celebrate the importance of immigration to Australia must not be able to cloud the analysis of the actual need for a footbridge.

I respond to the Terms of Reference in the form of order as outlined in the requirements.

**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 foreshores**

Photos of plans for the City of Canberra as drawn by Walter Burley Griffin were published by the NCA in a large pictorial book titled “The Griffin Legacy”. The copies of the original drawings included illustrations for a dam wall near the Canberra Yacht Club which included a road across to Acton Peninsular near the current wharf. Further plans included a road bridge in the same site to divert traffic to by-pass the city and to provide an alternative western access between the southern suburbs and the North West part of Canberra. Griffin extolled the virtues of a fine view of the lake to be enjoyed from the Acton Point. The need for the original Griffin designed western road bridge was eliminated when Parks Way and the Acton tunnel were constructed.

Reference to the “The Griffin Legacy” publication will also show more contemporary plans of the NCA for the lakeside developments that were recently drawn by or for the NCA. These new interpretations now called the “Griffin Legacy” deleted Griffin’s original western road bridge and included a new footbridge about 300 meters closer to the Commonwealth Ave Bridge, to link the area near the Albert Hall with the National Museum.

**Conclusion the footbridge is of no heritage value and its construction would be in conflict with the integrity of the Griffin plan.**

## **Will it adversely affect the foreshore?**

- **The Australian National Museum building won national awards for its architecture as did the Sydney Opera House. The town planners, architects and most citizens of Sydney would never agree to a foot bridge across Sydney Cove from the Rocks to the Opera House as it would ruin the integrity of the Opera House architecture merely for the sake of easier access for some pedestrians from international hotels in the Sydney Rocks area. Why should we spoil our prize building?**
- **The NCA plan in its Griffin Legacy to develop tourist facilities and a restaurant precinct on the north shore of West Basin will be severely compromised. The view from the foreshore across West Basin of a large footbridge 400 meters in length and 12 to 18 metres high, with all its pylons, would ruin the fine water views that were a major reason why Griffin won the international competition to design the National Capital. The footbridge would visually compromise the public enjoyment of the excellent NCA “Griffin Legacy” plans to “Bring the City to the Lake”.**
- **The wide landscape vista westwards from Commonwealth Bridge across the lake to the distant mountains will be ruined. The view from the foreshore parklands at Lennox Gardens north to West basin and the city approaches will also be visually compromised, the bridge creating a conflict of architectural styles compared with both the Commonwealth Ave Bridge and with the National Museum.**

**Conclusion - Damage would occur to the enjoyment of the foreshore**

### **1 b. The Interests of users of the lake**

#### **Would the interests of the lake users would be compromised ?**

- **Particularly in the months of September, October and November strong North Westerly winds regularly blow, gusting at over 50 kph in the afternoons. The yachts have always sought shelter to bale out water or safely lower their sails in the wind shadow of the then Canberra Hospital and now the National Museum. They can often arrive in that haven barely under control.**

- **Sailing school yachts with novice young crews use the area for the same reason. Canberra Yacht Club is the largest inland yacht club and has one of the largest sailing schools in Australia. In Christmas holidays hundreds of young school age children enjoy safe access to the area of the IBA footbridge.**
- **The pylons of the bridge and the confused wind created by the structure will make any sailing in the area difficult and sometimes hazardous, creating sudden unexpected wind shifts and a risk of capsize and or collision.**
- **The NCA is endeavouring to encourage owners of commercial ferries and tourist boats onto the lake as part of plans to enhance the public use of the waterways, offering tourists a vista of the lakeside points of interest of Canberra from the water and to encourage waterbourne travel between major points of interest. A large new wharf was built in 2006/7 at considerable public expense adjacent to Reconciliation Place, improving wharfing facilities there and at the National Museum. More are intended for Kingston Foreshores. If the NCA approved the footbridge it would be in conflict with the NCA's own established objectives of encouraging and licensing more tour boat operators, the need of a ferry service will diminish and thereby reduce the future demand for the attractive tourist ferry services.**
- **Cyclists forming part of the membership of the Lake Users Group, an NCA effort at community consultation, have suggested that the bridge would not be of benefit to commuting cyclists when compared to their current use of the Commonwealth Ave Bridge when travelling to the city or the ANU. Furthermore, proposed public lifts up to the bridge level and covered walkways would create danger for potential public muggings, robberies and more serious personal risk in hours of darkness. Cyclists advise that the proposed design is in breach of relevant standards for public safety.**

**Rowers use the same part of the lake for training and the bridge pylons would present hazards for navigation.**

**Conclusion     Sailors, Hire Boat Users, Rowers, Cyclists and Ferry Operators  
would all be compromised**

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

**The design of the bridge as shown on the website is merely an artistic impression and is not based on qualified professional advice or accurately costed. It serves to mislead members of the public to pay for an what is only a concept based on promises of uncertain fiscal security.**

**I was informed by NCA officers present at the meetings of the Lake Users Group that the IBA has not carried out any geological analysis of the porous limestone that exists in the strata of the lake floor and that the IBA plans are only conceptual. The NCA is aware that the safety of the foundations may be compromised by the unstable strata. It is also understood that an appropriate engineering design study has not yet been carried out and that the design shown on the IBA website is unlikely to meet minimum design standards for a 400 metre span.**

**The basis of the IBA financial backing is lacking in commonsense and is un-realistic. The statement that the financial backing will be provided by member's donations and commercial funding is loosely based on attracting 200,000 supporters. In a city of 300,000 this is impossible and the ability to attract funds from interstate when there are already equivalent means for the placement of immigrants names at suitable public places in Sydney and Melbourne renders the financial viability of the plan to be uncertain.**

**There is no formal design and no accurate costing of the project so there are no accurate budget estimates. In the event of a such an poorly planned approved project failing due to a lack of financial support part way through construction I have serious concerns that IBA would effectively apply pressure to Commonwealth Agencies such as DIMIA to fund and complete the failed footbridge project. This would to leave the public to fund the high cost of ongoing maintenance of such a structure that few people wanted and was only of marginal use. The ensuing fiasco would create un-precedented and fully warranted public criticism and community resentment of the commonwealth government planning processes and fan media criticism of wasteful expenditure on facilities in the National Capital.**

**Experts in tourism have questioned the interest in the public wanting to walk such long distances to and from the National Museum to the several principal tourist attractions in the Commonwealth Triangle. The distance to the entrance of a national museum is too far. The 1000**

**metre distance from the National Gallery to the National Museum via the proposed footbridge exceeds the distance most tourists would walk between points of interest. Tourist studies have proven this to be a fact. The footbridge would be rendered a “white elephant”. This accepted tourist industry fact has been totally ignored.**

**A simple Park and Ride system works particularly well overseas cities and it should do so in Canberra. The “Park and Ride” concept using busses and ferries is cost effective, requires no footbridge, reduces parking and traffic problems and delivers tourists to the entrance of each place of interest in a city without the public being exposed to adverse weather. This fact has been ignored by IBA in establishing a need for the footbridge.**

**IBA websites and other pamphlets indicate high profile persons have indicated “in principle support” of the concept. This perception of public support is publicised to Australian citizens in IBA fundraising promotions without such high profile persons having any accurate knowledge of the facts. These names have been used in publicity in an endeavour to demonstrate a level of public support.**

**Conclusion. The method of promotion of IBA to the public lacks sufficient factual detail to provide financial certainty for the contributors and for the Commonwealth. The claims made of the level of public support are questionable.**

### ***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.]***

**The NCA has clearly demonstrated to the Lake Users Group that it supported the principal of the footbridge project in 2001/2002 by inserting a new footbridge bridge in the publication “ The Griffin Legacy”. The reasons for this may perhaps be found in a corporate desire to develop a number of new projects in the National Capital to maintain it’s own reason for existence.**

**In 2005- 2006 the NCA actively sought the support of the Canberra Yacht Club for the IBA project in a manner that indicated the NCA**

wished to have the bridge built. They facilitated joint meetings with the IBA and the Canberra Yacht Club in an endeavour to garnish the support of the Yacht Club. Officers of NCA indicated their belief that the bridge construction if approved would proceed by 2009 and that the Canberra Yacht Club should submit its recommendations for inclusion in the design.

The NCA may have inadvertently placed itself in a potential position of conflict of interest, shown some a lack of objectivity and could have compromised its own perceived position of acting as an independent arbitrator, such as is normally required in respect to any process for the approval of a non government structure on Commonwealth land. Fair, transparent and objective approval processes should be carried out consistent with the intent and requirements of the Act.

Given the above, the normal approval processes contained in the Act appear to be have been tainted. I ask that the need for the bridge, the true costs of construction / maintenance and the actual benefits of the Immigration Bridge concept, be scrutinized by an external independent committee other than the NCA and that all citizens be given an equal opportunity to propose their own concepts of a project worthy of the celebration of immigration.

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**Peter Dalton**

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