

26 March 2009

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

**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE NATIONAL CAPITAL  
AND EXTERNAL TERRITORIES**

**INQUIRY INTO THE IMMIGRATION BRIDGE AUSTRALIA PROPOSAL**

Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the proposed Immigration Bridge which it seems is intended to stretch over Lake Burley Griffin from Lennox Gardens near the Hyatt Hotel to the National Museum of Australia on the Acton Peninsula.

My submission to the Joint Standing Committee is attached.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Cooke-Russell', written in a cursive style.

Peter Cooke-Russell

**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE NATIONAL CAPITAL  
AND EXTERNAL TERRITORIES**

**INQUIRY INTO THE IMMIGRATION BRIDGE AUSTRALIA PROPOSAL**

**Introduction**

The following submission is raised in response to the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories inquiry into the Immigration Bridge Australia proposal. The terms of reference for that inquiry were received via a media Release issued on 26 February 2009 by the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and external Territories chaired by Kate Lundy.

**Background**

The Media Release states that;

“The Federal Parliament’s National Capital Committee has begun a new inquiry investigating the Immigration Bridge Australia (IBA) proposal. IBA is proposing to build a 400m pedestrian bridge across Lake Burley Griffin to commemorate the migrant contribution to Australia for completion before Canberra’s centenary celebrations in 2013.

The proposed Immigration Bridge will stretch over the lake from Lennox Gardens near the Hyatt Hotel to the National Museum of Australia on Acton Peninsula. IBA is raising funds for the bridge by offering more than 200,000 immigrant families and their ancestors the opportunity to have their names engraved on the handrails of the bridge.”

The joint standing committee’s terms of reference are to inquire into and report on;

1. The process adopted by the 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.
2. The process that has been adopted by IBA to raise funds for the construction and ongoing maintenance of the Bridge.
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 [sic] received by the National Capital Authority.

**Discussion**

**Terms of Reference 1a. The heritage values of Lake Burley Griffin and its foreshore..**

The IBA Newsletter states

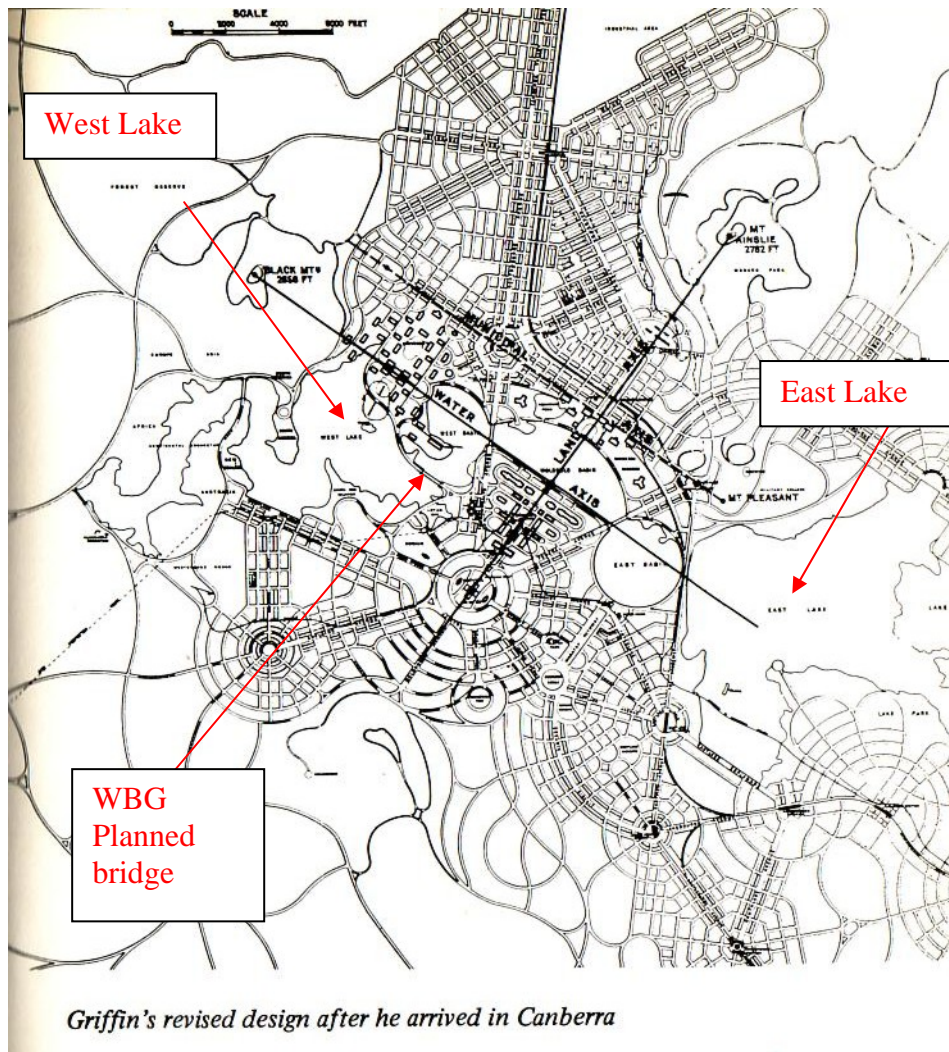
“A bridge across Lake Burley Griffin at this site is part of the **National Capital Plan** and part of the **Griffin Legacy** plans, and Immigration Bridge Australia has the in principle support of the National Capital Authority and the ACT Government. “<sup>1</sup>

This statement is the argument being used by IBA group to justify the location of the proposed IBA. A road bridge near the proposed site is a part of the original Walter Burley Griffin Plan.

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<sup>1</sup> IBA News questionnaire in Website

That plan was modified when Griffin actually came out to Australia in 1913 to see the site and his plan was changed as far as the lakes were concerned in extending the length of West Lake to what it is today. The resultant Griffin design in 1913 is below.<sup>2</sup>



In 1950 the Griffin plan underwent three major changes which were recommended by the National Capital Planning and Development Committee. One of these recommendations eliminated East Lake from the Griffin plan.<sup>3</sup>

Three years later it was recommended that the West Lake also be cut from the plan. This in fact happened but the Parliamentary Works Committee reported to Parliament that West Lake was desirable and practical. It recommended that West Lake be restored to the plan as soon as possible and years later this was done.<sup>4</sup>

Lake Burley Griffin was opened in March 1964. Over the intervening years it has matured and today is a beautiful waterway which provides both a formal and informal landscape in the centre of Canberra filling in what was once a flood plain and uniting the northern and southern parts of Canberra into a unified city.

<sup>2</sup> Lionel Wigmore *Canberra* page 67

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid* page 151

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid* page 152

The four Molonglo River crossings, Lennox Crossing, Commonwealth Bridge, Scotts Crossing and one below a weir upstream from Scotts Crossing were replaced by four high level bridges each with pedestrian pathways, namely Commonwealth Avenue and Kings Avenue bridges with a fifth bridge across the Scrivener Dam. The road bridge in the Griffin plan between Acton and Parkes was not required and its absence over the last 45 years has enabled the West Basin and West Lake to be viewed without hindrance from the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge pedestrian pathway to the Brindabellas.

In essence the heritage value of Lake Burley Griffin is based on the design which was constructed in the fifties and sixties and opened in 1964 and marks the beginning of the heritage value of Lake Burley Griffin and its foreshores. The 1964 design has been altered with the extension of the Parkes Way and re-routing of Lady Denman Drive during the seventies. These alterations reduced the width of the lake at the foot of Black Mountain and between Sullivan's Creek and the Acton Peninsula. It also reduced the foreshore space available for recreation at the northern end of West Basin.

To argue that a bridge should be put across Lake Burley Griffin because it was in the original Griffin plans cannot be justified on that point alone. Apart from the absence of East Lake, the present layout of the lake and its current bridges is very close to the Griffin design. The fact that Acton Peninsula was not directly joined to the southern side of the Lake is because the design of Canberra, as it developed over 50 years from 1913 did not require a bridge. Pedestrian access to the Acton Peninsula, which is sought after by the IBA Group is already provided by the pedestrian pathways on the Commonwealth Avenue bridges. Whilst the walk from Lennox Gardens to Acton Peninsula via Commonwealth Avenue Bridge is longer than that proposed via the IBA, today's expectations that people should be more active in physical exercise is enhanced by the present route.

In summary, pedestrian access to the Acton Peninsula already exists and to build a bridge very close to the Commonwealth Avenue bridges is not necessary and will significantly alter the heritage value by reducing the visual beauty of the lake in a very prominent area.

### **Terms of Reference 1b - the interests of users of the Lake.<sup>5</sup>**

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 it filled in 1964.

Most forms of non-motorised recreational boating including, most particularly, sailing, have thrived on Lake Burley Griffin since its very beginning. 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 and its solar panels.

The complexity of retrieving capsized and swamped 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.

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<sup>5</sup> In part from J.P. Hodgman's submission who feels the same as I do about the dangers that the bridge will impose on yachting activities.

The picture below is from the current IBA website. It provides a good view of the current concept of what the bridge might look like. It has been said that there will be at least 70 metres between the pylons that support the pedestrian part of the bridge. It seems that the IBA Group has omitted to mention the fact that the solar panels placed over the bridge and which are 10 metres wide over a 6 metres wide bridge are supported by pairs of pylons based on the lake bed and are placed at intervals which bisect the distance between the bridge pylons except for the span in the centre of the bridge.



Current IBA picture of the proposed bridge from the IBA website.

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 recreational purposes, 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. This is of considerable concern in the area where the IBA propose to build the 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 and the YMCA Sailing 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.

**Terms of Reference 2 The process that has been adopted by IBA to raise funds for the construction and ongoing maintenance of the Bridge.<sup>6</sup>**

The IBA is a not for profit organization undertaking a community project but there seems to be no opportunity for community involvement in the process other than through financial contributions. There is no evidence that the community has any participation in the election (selection) of persons involved in the administration of the project. There does not appear to have been any published financial statements. One would assume that there would be an obligation to produce such documents and, if it is a genuine community project, then the community at large should be able to view them through the website. Persons subscribing to the project would expect to be informed about how their contributions are being used.

IBA seems to be able to solicit funds for a project which does not appear to have legal status and no formal legal agreement from approving authorities that the project can or will proceed. The Committee should establish under what authority the IBA can solicit funds for a project for which there is no guarantee of approval.

Notwithstanding comment in the previous paragraph, the IBA asserts that "we are going to build a bridge across Lake Burley Griffin" and that "upon completion the Immigration Bridge will [be] presented as a gift to the Nation".<sup>7</sup>

Does this mean that, assuming approvals are forthcoming, the Government which owns and is responsible for Lake Burley Griffin will allow a private organization to undertake a major construction project spanning the lake in one of the most significant parts of the National Capital. The IBA is an organization with no demonstrated experience in work of this nature which is an inherently difficult and unpredictable engineering construction project. The risk of cost and time overruns may be very high and one must wonder how IBA would cope with such situations.

They state that "The cost has been put at \$30m. As a community project funded mainly by a combination of individual contributions (including the History Handrail Program), business sponsorships and income that will be generated as a result of the incorporation of a solar roof in the construction."<sup>8</sup> This appears to be a dubious basis for handling a high risk construction project in which the estimated costs can at best be no more than approximate at this stage of the design process.

The Government should satisfy itself beyond all doubt that it can manage: such an undertaking. Failure will inevitably lead to the Government having to pick up the pieces and accept the subsequent financial and contractual consequences. The logical way would be for the Government itself to undertake the construction, using the money raised by IBA, to ensure that the National Capital interests are protected and that the result meets the Government's overall requirements for the planning and development of Canberra. It is doubted that there is a precedent for allowing a private organisation to undertake such a major construction in one of the most important parts of the National Capital.

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<sup>6</sup> From G. Shannon's submission in part with which I agree.

<sup>7</sup> IBA website, Learn more about Immigration Bridge. Q and A Is this a Government project or initiative?

<sup>8</sup> Ibid Q and A How much will it cost and how will it be funded?

**Terms of Reference 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 [sic] received by the National Capital Authority.**

It is relevant that the media release issued on 26 February 2009 implies that approval has already been obtained in the second paragraph which states

“The proposed bridge **will** stretch over the lake from...”

which seems to indicate that approval has already been given for its location and construction irrespective of what ever results any inquiry or review might produce.

If the bridge is not approved the wording would have been more accurate for it to go along the lines of,

“It is proposed that the bridge span the lake from...”

It would seem that the NCA has already committed itself to supporting the project without the final design and funding being available. Should this be so, any reliance on expecting the NCA to act as an impartial arbiter is wishful thinking.

The current thinking of the IBA Group is put at the beginning of my submission on the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry and that is;

“A bridge across Lake Burley Griffin at this site is part of the **National Capital Plan** and part of the **Griffin Legacy** plans, and Immigration Bridge Australia has the in principle support of the National Capital Authority and the ACT Government.”

This emphasises the point that the NCA is not completely independent in its assessing of proposals in its area of interest/authority.

To my knowledge this review is the first opportunity for the Canberra people to have a say in the process. It strikes me that the process takes little heed of the views of local people and the support for the project seems to be coming from groups and individual who do not live in Canberra and will not have to put up with the eyesore and navigational danger that the IBA Group is trying to impose on Canberra.

## **General Remarks**

### **Alternatives**

I have no objection to a memorial celebrating immigration to Australia. It does not have to be a bridge across water. The first human settlers to arrive in what is now Australia, came by a land bridge.

A good place would be on the banks of Lake Burley Griffin close to the newly opened Citizenship Place in Commonwealth Park. If the Immigration Celebration area was placed to the east of Citizen Place, the bridge across the entrance to the Nerang Pool in Commonwealth Park could provide the over water symbol which seems to be essential in the IBA Group’s thoughts. To have the IBA Group’s project in this area, would provide a logical flow from an Immigration Celebration area across the Nerang Pool Bridge into Citizenship Place.

An alternative would be to enhance the footpath from Commonwealth Avenue Bridge around the northern and western shore of West Basin to the National Museum. Whilst this is a longer route to the National Museum than the proposed Immigration Bridge, it does encourage people to take a little more exercise in walking to a destination.

## Appearance of the proposed bridge.

In its website, the IBA Group states;

“Q. How did the Immigration Bridge project come about?

While the Bridge is a stunning example of contemporary architecture incorporating cutting-edge technology, its elegant and unobtrusive design sympathetically frames the lakeside environment and its surrounds, in particular Canberra’s Brindabella Mountain Ranges.”<sup>9</sup>

Given that the height is needed throughout the length of the bridge to allow existing watercraft activity to continue in that area, the access at both ends of the bridge will require considerable engineering works. The current proposed location of the ends of the bridge do not at present have much space available to accommodate the necessary engineering works to provide access. The composite picture of the proposed bridge does not take account of these requirements in full and consequently leads people astray in appreciating the space required for the bridge.

The horizontal aspect of the footpath no matter how it is constructed will look more like a municipal services and sewerage gantry than an ornamental structure. The addition of a roof over the footpath will add to the height of the bridge and destroy one aspect of Walter Burley Griffin’s concept which was;

“It was essential, said Griffin, that the buildings in any of the major groups- governmental, municipal, educational, or military – be designed with proper attention to size and scale so that ‘from any general view point of the town [they] will work together into one simple pattern [of] fundamental simplicity’.”<sup>10</sup>

The Immigration Bridge in its proposed location will be within a view of the existing four bridges at the same time from various points around the lake. There is no way in which the current design of the Immigration Bridge will work together with the very simple and gracious lines of Commonwealth Avenue and Kings Avenue bridges.

## Conclusion

The bridge proposed by IBA;

- a. does not improve the heritage values of Lake Burley Griffin in that Canberra’s heritage with regard to Lake Burley Griffin essentially stems from the design of the lake as constructed and filled in 1964. Whilst the lake is in general agreement with the basic layout in the Walter Burley Griffin plan, adherence to the plan by placing aspects into it which were not included in the design as it was built in 1964 cannot be claimed to be essential to the heritage of the lake;
- b. does not comply with Walter Burley Griffin’s concept of structures in the central Canberra area working together into one simple pattern of fundamental simplicity; and
- c. will be a significant obstacle to recreational and other aquatic activity and cause significant danger to the safe use of that part of the lake in which it is proposed that the bridge be built.

The financial process that is being followed by IBA are unlikely to raise sufficient funds for the construction and future maintenance of the bridge, without considerable input from both the ACT and Commonwealth governments.

<sup>9</sup> IBA Website Q and A Newsletter 20 January 2008

<sup>10</sup> Pegrum Roger *The Bush Capital* page 161



The approval process to date has had very limited consideration by, and involvement of, the Canberra community. It is of considerable concern that the Terms of Reference for this Review state that “The proposed Immigration Bridge **WILL** [my emphasis] stretch over the lake from Lennox Gardens near the Hyatt Hotel to the National Museum of Australia on Acton Peninsula.”

### **Recommendation**

I recommend that

- a. the proposed bridge be rejected by the appropriate authority and that alternatives be considered; and
- b. the alternative should not interfere with the present beauty, heritage value of Lake Burley Griffin; or the safety of those people who use the lake for tourism and recreational activities.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Cooke-Russell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping underline.

Peter Cooke-Russell

26 March 2009