

Submission to the

Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories

Inquiry into the Immigration Bridge Australia Proposal

By Rupert Summerson

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Immigration Bridge proposal. Apart from letters to the paper, this is the first opportunity to comment. I am a resident of Canberra, a regular user of the lake and a daily traveller over Commonwealth Avenue Bridge.

With regards to the committee's terms of reference, my comments relate particularly to ToR 1.

1. To my knowledge there has been no public discussion on the need to commemorate immigrants and how that could best be achieved. The Welcome Wall at the National Maritime Museum in Sydney already provides such a commemoration. Is there any need for another? All around us are monuments to the work of immigrants in the form of the city of Canberra.
2. A large publicly funded infrastructure project commemorating immigration would be yet another slap in the face of the indigenous people of Australia.
3. While I can appreciate the symbolism involved in a bridge to commemorate migrants, it seems to be an extravagant way to go about it. With our numbers ever on the rise, I would prefer to preserve what remains of our natural environment rather than erecting yet another self-aggrandizing item of infrastructure of dubious value. The views of the lake out to the Brindabellas thousands of other people who cross Commonwealth Avenue bridge every day enjoy would be severely degraded by another bridge nearby, especially one that seems highly unlikely to be aesthetically pleasing. Concrete and solar panels do not harmonise with water, trees and mountains. The solar panels seem to have been bolted on as an afterthought to make the proposal more acceptable.
4. For solar panels to operate efficiently they must be kept spotlessly clean. It seems likely that they will soon be covered with gull and duck excrement. Who will clean them and who will pay for them to be kept clean?

5. The invocation of Burley Griffin's design is disingenuous as his last revised plan of 1918 (Harrison 1995) shows a bridge to the west of Acton Peninsula. In that location it would have been largely hidden from view from Commonwealth Avenue.
6. The concept of the Immigration Bridge linking the National Museum with the Parliamentary Triangle is also flawed. How many people will opt to walk to, say, the National Gallery, a return distance of nearly 3km, on a 30°C summer's day when they could drive?
7. If the bridge is built and then "given" to the nation, who will pay for its upkeep: the National Capital Authority or the ACT Government? As a rate payer in the ACT I would not appreciate being handed an additional impost to maintain a bridge.
8. If the decision is made to construct the bridge, the construction would undoubtedly cut the lake in two thereby preventing the myriad of lake users: sailors, rowers and kayakers from accessing any more than half the lake. Have the views of all the rowing, yachting and kayaking clubs that use the lake been sought directly and plans made to minimise disruption?
9. A previous submission suggested that Commonwealth Avenue bridge is too low to allow yachts to pass under it. That is not the case. My little boat can sail under it with plenty of clearance. The problem is the windy eddies around the pillars making passage hazardous. The presence of another bridge will add another obstacle to be cleared. Has any modelling been carried out to determine if the wind eddies caused by both bridges will interact with each other?

In summary

I do not support the construction of the proposed immigration bridge. The arguments of the proponents are flawed, I believe that the bridge will be visually intrusive and will not in the end perform any useful function. There are many questions about its impact on lake users and on tax and/or rate payers that have been left unanswered.