



Seaplanes on Lake Burley Griffin

Public consultation outcomes

Background

On 8 May 2021, the National Capital Authority (NCA) released a Discussion Paper on a proposal to expand the uses of Lake Burley Griffin to include commercial and recreational seaplane flights.

In releasing the Discussion Paper, the NCA commenced a dialogue with the community about this potential new activity on Lake Burley Griffin. The NCA wanted to understand the community's thoughts about the potential for seaplane operations on the lake, impacts on various lake users, issues of concern, and benefits to Canberra as the National Capital.

The consultation period ran for six weeks, concluding on 22 June 2021. A public notice appeared in the Canberra Times, key stakeholders were directly notified of the release of the Discussion Paper, and multiple social media posts were made throughout the consultation period. During the consultation period NCA officials met with and discussed the proposal with a number of groups and clubs that have a direct association with, and regularly use, Lake Burley Griffin.

Submissions received

The NCA thanks all those who participated in the discussion regarding the potential expansion of permitted lake use to include seaplanes. The submissions and conversations provided a valuable insight into community's use of the lake and details of localised economic and environmental conditions. All submissions have been posted on the NCA website where permission has been given to do so.

The NCA received 107 submissions in response to the Discussion Paper. Submissions were received from various lake based sporting clubs including Dragon Boat ACT, Rowing ACT, Black Mountain Rowing Club, Canberra Yacht Club, ANU Sailing Club, YMCA Sailing Club, Canberra Grammar School, community groups such as the Lake Burley Griffin Guardians, Yarralumla Residents Association, Canberra Ornithologists Group, tourism and business entities and members of the public who utilise the lake and lake foreshore for recreational use. The following statistics demonstrate the diversity of views within the community for the concept of seaplanes utilising Lake Burley Griffin:

- Do not support – 72 submissions
- Support – 21 submissions
- Neutral or mixed response – 8 submissions
- More advice or information required before an informed response can be made – 6 submissions.

In addition to the NCA's formal invitation for submissions, public commentary about possible seaplane operations on Lake Burley Griffin appeared on local media websites and social media pages, including the Canberra Times and the Riotact (a Canberra-based online news and discussion forum). The Riotact poll asked the question '*Should we allow seaplanes to land on Lake Burley Griffin?*'. The poll received a total of 833 responses as follows:

- No, let's keep the lake peaceful and quiet – 408 votes (49%)
- Yes, it's a fun idea that will enliven the lake – 425 votes (51%)

Other online commentary reflected the range of responses received and issues raised through the formal submission process.

What the NCA heard

- The safety of lake users, such as swimmers, rowers, yachters, kayakers, stand-up paddle boarders, windsurfers, and other small watercraft, and how to manage potential conflicts between seaplanes and other lake users, was the single biggest concern raised by the various rowing and sailing clubs. Safety was identified predominantly by those objecting to seaplane operations but was also recognised as requiring resolution by many supporting seaplane operations.
- Tourism and business groups such as Canberra Region Tourism Leaders Forum, Canberra Airport Group, Shaw Vineyards, The Boathouse, Balloon Aloft, GoBoat Canberra, the National Museum of Australia and the Chief Minister noted that seaplane operations would have a positive impact on the local economy by providing opportunities to showcase the city and region.
- Concern was expressed by Canberra Yacht Club, Canberra Grammar School, Rowing ACT and YMCA Sailing Club that physical safety and risks to other lake users may also have flow-on impacts in terms of membership and therefore viability of lake-based sporting clubs. It was suggested that club members may not wish to be exposed to the potential hazard of a seaplane, this could extend to a reluctance of parents to enrol children activities such as learn to sail or school-based rowing programs. This would, in turn, reduce club revenues.
- Seaplane operations would increase activation of the lake and this was supported by GoBoat Canberra, Canberra Aqua Park, Balloon Aloft, Canberra Region Tourism Leaders Forum and the Chief Minister.
- Many clubs and sporting groups were concerned that the risk profile of lake use will change because of seaplane operations, which could give rise to increased insurance premiums for clubs and associations.
- The convenience and time-saving aspects of seaplanes would be appealing to certain commuters and help generate interest in the National Capital.
- Those whose employees use the lake in the course of their employment including Canberra Yacht Club, YMCA Sailing Club and Rowing Australia questioned their ability to provide a safe work environment if seaplane operations occurred.
- Some members of the public noted that seaplane operations are not required when Canberra Airport is only a short drive from the centre of Canberra.
- While monitoring data from the trial showed little impact on the amenity values some groups such as Yarralumla Resident's Association and Lake Burley Griffin Guardians felt that seaplane operations will have noise impacts for both lake users and those using the lake foreshores and parks for recreation. Noise will also adversely impact heritage values of Lake

Burley Griffin, including the 'quiet and still' nature of the lake.

- Existing lake users in particular felt that allowing seaplanes to operate on Lake Burley Griffin may set a precedent that would permit more motorised watercraft, creating further conflict between lake users and increasing impacts from noise and pollution.

Next steps

The response to discussion regarding the potential for seaplane operations on Lake Burley Griffin has been invaluable to the NCA. Feedback from the community has provided a fulsome understanding of the range of issues that need to be addressed as this work progresses.

Consultation has established that while it is recognised that operations would enrich the appreciation of Canberra as the national capital and contribute to a diversification of the local economy, further work is required to address the concerns of existing lake users.

Concerns were raised by some groups including the Lake Burley Griffin Guardians and the ACT Government about the environmental impacts of the proposed operations. It should be noted that one of the proposed operators is actively engaged in the development of electrically powered seaplanes, which would ameliorate several environmental concerns raised during consultation.

The NCA is of the view that the potential impacts of seaplane operations on Lake Burley Griffin can be appropriately managed and that there are significant benefits in creating a unique travel tourism link to the nation's capital.

As always the NCA must focus on Canberra as the national capital being a place for all Australians, while addressing the legitimate and well considered concerns of the local community and current users of the public realm.

Following feedback received through the consultation process the NCA will continue to explore how seaplanes may be facilitated. Of critical note is how to address the potential conflicts between seaplanes and other lake users (both current and potential future users). In this regard, the NCA confirms that further investigation and work is required. As the next step, the NCA will engage a suitably qualified consultant to prepare management guidelines for the shared use and safe operation of Lake Burley Griffin that will apply to all lake users.

The NCA is committed to public engagement and input from the community and we will continue to liaise with relevant stakeholders while further investigations are undertaken.