

Black Mountain Rowing Club Submission on the Proposal for Seaplane Operations on Lake Burley Griffin

Overview of Black Mountain Rowing Club (BMRC). BMRC operates on Lake Burley Griffin (LBG) from a shed beside Taroola Reach on Black Mountain Peninsula. The Club comprises approximately 140 members with the main membership cohort being adults over the age of 27.

BMRC members row seven days a week and 365 days a year, weather permitting. The main operations times are from before dawn until approximately 10:30 am; however, members can and do row at all times of the day. BMRC members predominantly row on the buoyed course on Yarramundi Reach; however, they regularly take the opportunity to row to and from the Club through Central Basin to East Basin under Kings Avenue and Commonwealth Avenue Bridges. Longer rows, such as to East Basin, help members train for ACT and interstate distance events and regattas. The area to the east of Black Mountain Peninsula is often used when weather conditions make it more favourable than the buoyed course.

Differences between rowing and other vessels. The crew of rowing and sculling boats are orientated differently to other vessels such as sailing craft. The backs of the rowers face in the direction of travel which is a key difference. Boats that are steered by coxes and are supervised by coaches have the opportunity to see approaching hazards. However, BMRC predominately operates without coxes, and does not typically have the luxury of -coaches. While BMRC members do occasionally use coxed eights, the majority of boats used are single sculls, double sculls, pairs, coxless quadruple sculls and coxless fours. Therefore BMRC does not routinely have any crew members looking forward in the direction that the boat is travelling.

BMRC Comments on the Discussion Paper. BMRC appreciates that LBG is an asset for the whole community and accepts that new opportunities to use the lake should be considered by the National Capital Authority (NCA). BMRC has a number of comments on the proposal for seaplane operations on LBG as described in the NCA Discussion Paper and these are set out in the following paragraphs.

The lack of detail on seaplane operations on LBG. While there is some detail in the Discussion Paper, the lack of a Best Practice Guide or a risk assessment for LBG seaplane operations limits the ability for BMRC to fully assess the impact of seaplane operations on the activities of the Club¹. As an example, the proposed seaplane runway for westerly landing and easterly take-off appears to present a significant conflict with the main route taken by rowing vessels approaching Central Basin from the west, or departing Central Basin heading east. We note that the Best Practice Guide for the use of Rose Bay places an obligation on seaplanes to 'stay clear of established yacht race areas' which appears to be at odds with the LBG proposal from the seaplane operators². BMRC expects that the management of this conflict would need to be resolved before any proposal for seaplane operations could be addressed, and would also be described in a Best Practice Guide with respect to rowing and not just sailing.

¹ Areas of uncertainty include who has right of way/usage? Are designated rowing traffic areas off limits to seaplanes? What happens if seaplane in distress and needs to make emergency landing in rowing only zone?

² Roads and Maritime Best practice guide for the use of Rose Bay page 4

Mixing seaplanes with rowing vessels. The Discussion Paper notes seaplanes operate in a number of high traffic areas, such as Rose Bay and the Moruya River. However, it is unclear if these operations involve any interaction with rowing vessels, which may present some unique challenges. Rowing vessels may be more difficult to see with their low profile compared to other craft. Similarly, the limited forward visibility of rowers should be assessed\ examined when considering the impact of seaplane operations on LBG.

BMRC assumes that seaplane operations would be at their peak during the peak usage times for rowing on the lake ie, summer and in particular at those times where there is a high numbers of school children rowing who may not be as aware or competent . There is also a risk with visiting schools during January holidays who are not familiar with course or LBG. Similarly, increased operations on weekends in summer could clash with the ACT regatta season.

Unpredictability of operations. BMRC expects that the timing of seaplane operations on LBG will not be to an exact schedule. Even against the schedule proposed by Sydney Seaplanes, BMRC anticipates that operational and weather conditions will lead to occasional delays, resulting in aircraft arriving or departing at times outside the schedule, and potentially surprising rowers operating on or near the seaplane manoeuvring area or the proposed seaplane runway. Seaplanes may also arrive on one seaplane runway, but depart on a different seaplane runway, which makes these operations hard to predict. The risk is self-evident and should be addressed before any seaplane operations on LBG are considered.

Impact on elite rowing. The Discussion Paper makes reference to the elite rowing programs that are undertaken on LBG. BMRC benefits from the elite program in a number of ways. A BMRC rower is a current member of the Australian Olympic Rowing Team and the existence of the program in Canberra is a key motivation for many Club members. BMRC would be disadvantaged if the establishment of seaplane operations on LBG impacted the elite program to the extent that it was relocated away from Canberra.

Any expansion of operations or infrastructure, such as mooring, into Tarcoola Reach. While BMRC appreciates that the current proposal for seaplane operations is based on using a jetty at Museum Point, BMRC would like to register a concern with any possible expansion of operations to involve Tarcoola Reach. There is considerable rowing traffic through Tarcoola Reach, and it has already been the scene of a number of safety incidents. The complexity of operations on Tarcoola Reach has also already been increased by the location of the slipway on Black Mountain Peninsula. BMRC would be very concerned by any proposal to expand operations into Tarcoola reach, such as by establishing a seaplane mooring or similar infrastructure.

Summary. In Summary, BMRC is a small but active club where predominately adult rowers train and compete on LBG. The proposal for seaplane operations on the lake presents a number of operational concerns and risks, the most significant appearing to be the establishment of a seaplane runway to the West of the National Museum. Risks such as this, under other operational uncertainties should be addressed to the satisfaction of lake users before a final decision is made on seaplane operations.

Leigh Gordon

On behalf of BMRC

22 June 2021