

Seaplanes On Lake Burley Griffin

Joint Response from Balloon Aloft Canberra Pty Ltd and Dawn Drifters Pty Ltd

Background To Ballooning In Canberra

Balloon Aloft Canberra has conducted balloon operations in Canberra continuously since 1986.

Dawn Drifters has conducted balloon operations in Canberra continuously since 1997.

Between one and four balloons operate in Canberra every morning that weather permits throughout the year. Additional balloons operate at the weekends. This means balloon flights occur in central Canberra on up to 250 mornings per year. There are also occasional afternoon flights.

During the March annual Canberra Balloon Spectacular the two businesses currently operate up to 9 balloons in company with 30 to 40 visiting balloons.

Balloons Are A Part of the National Capital

Ballooning has become an iconic and vital part of the Canberra's image and marketing appeal. We note the banner in the NCA's Seaplanes discussion paper web page features numerous balloons flying past the National Library and Parliament House.

It is our desire and plan that the association of Canberra with balloons will continue to grow. This has been particularly evident in persistent and structured social media exposure which presents Canberra to tourism organisations and the public around the world. Images from balloons vary every day, are unique in the way they showcase Canberra and the ease with which they generate attention and reposts.

General Questions Asked By The NCA

The discussion paper asks for some specific responses about the benefits to Canberra of seaplanes operating from Lake Burley Griffin and what should be the NCA's main considerations.

This response does not propose to address those issues in any detail except that as aviation tourism operators in Canberra, who have a product that has become synonymous with Canberra, we are very supportive of the proposal. We believe that seaplanes would positively benefit Canberra and that noise, general disturbance and safety considerations have been addressed adequately in the May 21 Discussion Paper. What has not been addressed is possible airspace conflict with balloon operations.

Airspace Considerations

We have conducted a detailed review of balloon operations in Canberra from GPS logs that are maintained for commercial balloon flights.



Approximately 95% of those flights utilize airspace that would not be available if seaplanes were operating at the same time.



There is nowhere else in Canberra suitable for balloon operations and of course our flight paths are chosen where possible to highlight the Lake and NCA managed parliamentary region.



When balloons operate in central Canberra Air Traffic Control allocates a block of airspace for their use. Balloons cannot navigate around other aircraft or hold position and wait like powered aeroplanes and helicopters.

Due to required minimum separation standards we do not see how balloon operations could continue if the controlled airspace was required for seaplane operations (other than taxiing).

The Canberra Balloon Spectacular could not occur at the same time as seaplane operations.

Proposal To Avoid Balloon and Seaplane Conflict

Balloon operations are completed by 0930 local time each morning.
0930 is the standard airspace closure time for balloons during the Balloon Spectacular.

Our proposal to ensure that balloon operations can continue in Canberra is that seaplane operations do not occur prior to 0930 local time on any day. Seaplane operations later than 0930 may affect balloon flights from time to time but the overall impact would be negligible.

It is noted that the proposed operating times, other than the general 0900 to 1700 by South Coast Seaplanes, is unlikely to impact balloon operations. Our request is that the limitation on early morning operations is embedded in any approvals so that should seaplane operations prove commercially viable, and we hope they do, the operating hours do not creep to earlier times that would conflict with balloon operations.

We welcome any questions and request involvement if appropriate in ongoing discussions.

John Wallington
Director and Chief Pilot

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10 June 2021

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