

COMMERCIAL SEAPLANE OPERATIONS ON LAKE BURLEY GRIFFIN AND THE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR CANBERRA WINDSURFERS AND WIND SPORTS

Introduction

This submission is on behalf of many Canberra windsurfers and 'wing foilers' that use West Lake which is now proposed for seaplane operation. There is well-founded concern that the seaplane operations will greatly impact the Canberra windsurfing community, by **practically** if not officially restricting the use of West Lake from public use for these long standing recreational activities, with also concerns over safety due to the high speeds obtained by modern windsurfers and the limited visibility windsurfers will have of a seaplane in both its landing and take-off.

Key Points

To proceed with a take-off and landing area as currently proposed poses a safety risk to existing long term water users. This could be readily avoided if Central Basin (or Kingston Foreshore) was utilised for the sea plane operations.

This safety risk will diminish windsurfing on Lake Burley Griffin which has been a popular activity for decades.

Outcome Sought

Canberra windsurfers request sea plane operations not be conducted in West Lake which is the main water area for a variety of water activities. This area has the best winds as it is least obstructed by the surrounding landscape. Canberra windsurfers are against any exclusion zone or restriction, which will inevitably arise on a small body of water which is really what West Lake is.

Pilots would also not be familiar with the high speeds of the Canberra windsurfing community. The use of hydrofoils is very new. The sport of 'wing foiling' – explained further below - has only come about in Australia in the last two years and is already very popular in Canberra. The physical and mental demand of these wind sports requires full concentration; there will not be capacity to readily observe an overhead approach by an aircraft or an aircraft seeking to take-off. These factors impose a safety risk. It is acknowledged that these sports are also conducted in Rose Bay in Sydney, however that is quite different location to here and local sailing patterns are also different here. This

Background

Canberra windsurfers have been active for many decades and are as much a part of the history and of Lake Burley Griffin as are more formalised sports. Canberra windsurfers are represented indirectly through sailing clubs as a Lake User. The popularity of windsurfing in Canberra has been rising rapidly in recent years with the use of hydrofoils and the new sport of 'wing foiling'. While there is not a formal association, there are currently over two hundred members of the Canberra Windsurfing Facebook group and many more people that are not part of this group.

Canberra windsurfing styles of long ago

Photograph 1 is Canberra windsurfing from 1984. There is strong history of wind surfing of the Lake and it still brings spectacle and interest. However, this is not what modern windsurfing is on Lake Burley Griffin today as the sport has evolved into a much higher speed sailing activity.



Photograph 1: Windsurfing old style.

A picture of modern windsurfing on Lake Burley Griffin

These photographs show the type of equipment now in regular use. Photographs 2 and 3 shows a 'Foiling Windsurfer' and Photograph 3 shows a 'Wing Foiler'. The now common use of hydrofoils (the equipment in photograph 2 beneath the board) has seen a significant resurgence in Canberra windsurfing.



Photograph 2: Windsurfer with hydrofoil on West Lake, who has been at very high speed (up to 30knots or about 55km/h). Note the full concentration on the act of sailing.



Photograph 3: Windsurfer with hydrofoil making a turn. Note the full concentration on the act of sailing.



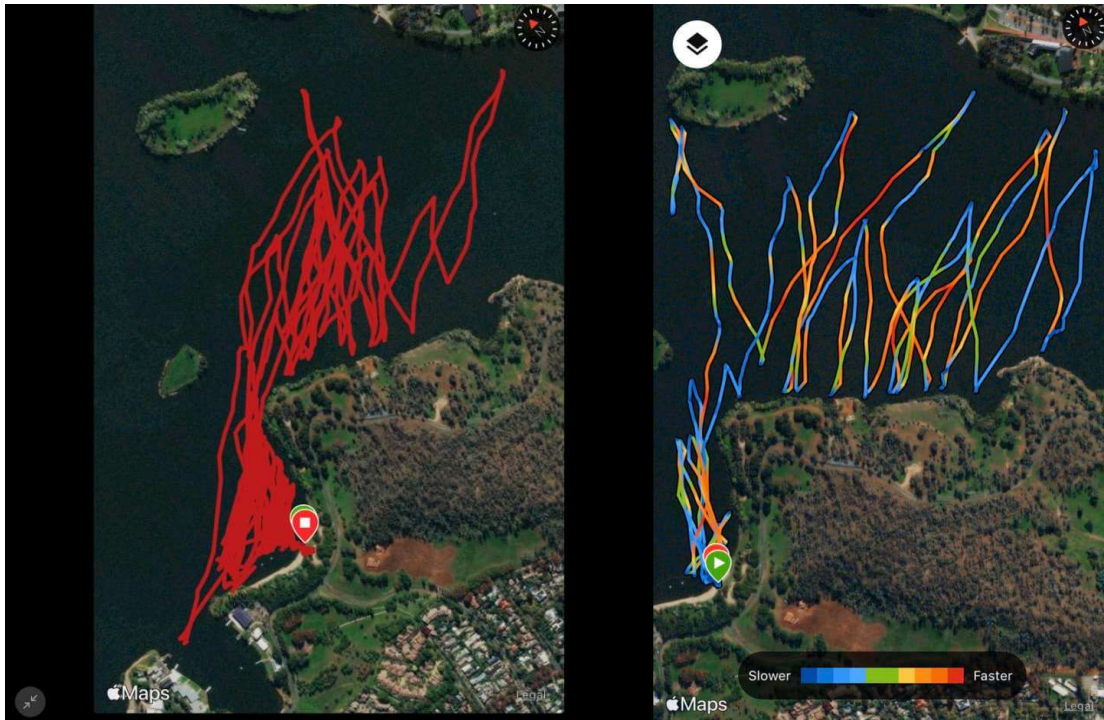
Photograph 4: 'Wing Foiler' on West Lake. Note the full concentration on the act of sailing.

Understanding the sailing patterns of Windsurfers on West Lake

By far the most ideal conditions for Canberra windsurfing are in the winds in West Lake. This is because the wind is steady in direction and consistency; they are not the strongest winds, but they are consistent which is the great attraction. The winds in West Lake are least affected by the surrounding landscape which makes West Lake 'valuable' for sailing activities including windsurfing. Casual family or beginner windsurfing is generally around Yarralumla Beach and from there into West Lake is a common route.

Modern windsurfers and wing foilers use hydrofoils and can obtain much high speeds and rapid acceleration. Due to this, a significantly greater size of water area is quickly covered compared to any other sailing craft.

Photographs 5 and 6 below are typical Global Positioning System (GPS) tracks showing the passage of a single windsurfer, over the area of West Lake. Note the wide area of West Lake which is sailed and the 'back and forth' pattern which represents high speed runs. This is a much more rapid sailing than a conventional dinghy or trailer sailer.



Photographs 5 & 6: Typical sailing pattern of a single windsurfer from Yarralumla Bay into West Lake

Blue Gum Point into West Lake

Windsurfers normally sail from Blue Gum Point and into West Lake. Photograph 7 below shows the popularity of this sailing pattern, with a full car park at Blue Gum Point.



Photograph 7: Windsurfers and wing foilers parked at Blue Gum Point and sailing in West Lake.

Widely dispersed windsurfing in West Lake

Windsurfers and wing foilers sail in a dispersed pattern at high speed if there is wind, or at very little speed in no wind. The dispersed pattern is an important distinction from other sailing on the Lake. Much other sailing follows a set course with boats in close proximity to each other. Windsurfers are deliberately more spaced apart due to their high speed and desire for continuous 'clean air'.

There are limited photos of windsurfing as a group as, well, most of us are out windsurfing. The two photographs below should give an appreciation of the dispersed spacing of high speed windsurfing. Both photographs show windsurfers in the 'Westerly Take off and Easterly Landing' area proposed for seaplane operations.



Photograph 8: Windsurfing in West Lake. Note the dispersed spacing of sailors who are going back and forth across West Lake, making a turn at each end. This sailing pattern is due to the common summer wind direction.



Photograph 9: This photograph, although less clear, shows a mix of windsurfers and ‘wing foilers’ in West Lake in a light wind.

Risks with Canberra Windsurfers and seaplane operations

From the above commentary and pictorially from Photographs 5, 6, 8, and 9, it is readily apparent that the windsurfing on West Lake is directly in the path of the proposed sea plane landing and take-off area. The proposed Westerly Take off and Easterly Landing area is at Diagram 1 below.



The overriding importance of continuing existing water activities and safety of Lake Users

New endeavours are welcomed by the windsurfing community. Windsurfers, for example, provide spectacle for Go Boats. Collectively they add character to the Lake and ensure the Lake continues to be well used.

New activities, like seaplane operations, should not be at the expense or substantially compromise long standing existing activities on the Lake, which includes windsurfing.

Safety on the water is most important. Accidents can happen quickly. Many incidents on the Lake are not observed or attended by the Water Police.

Safety concerns arise as:

- Modern windsurfers, foiling windsurfers and wing foilers are high speed (i.e. greater than 30 knots or 55 km/h) on West Lake
- Windsurfing and wind foiling sports are dispersed over a large water area in West Lake due to speed travelled
- Generally the sailing pattern is back and forth across the proposed seaplane landing/take-off area in West Lake
- The minute to minute sailing patterns in West Lake is more unpredictable than other sailing craft (a set racing course is not being followed)
- The physical and mental act of windsurfing and wing foiling in West Lake does not allow for observation except at eye level and directly ahead and to one side (the windward side)
- When there is no or little wind in West Lake, windsurfers and wing foilers are even less able to make progress than conventional sailing craft

It is apparent from Diagram 1 that there is possibly limited evasion area for the pilot if take-off or landing was unexpectedly crossed by several windsurfers, at high speeds and in a dispersed pattern.

Windsurfers who are fully concentrated on their task may make a quick turn into the path of a seaplane landing or taking off, as they will be unlikely to observe the aircraft. This is probably as windsurfers frequently make high speed turns, as that is part of the fun of the sport.

There is no doubt that in many circumstances and on many bodies of water it is readily possible to operate sea planes together with windsurfers and other fast water craft.

Summary

To proceed with a take-off and landing area as currently proposed poses a safety risk to existing long term water users. This could be readily avoided if Central Basin (or Kingston Foreshore) was utilised for the sea plane operations.

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