

FEASIBILITY STUDY YARRAMUNDI REACH ROWING COURSE



Client: The National Capital Authority

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FEASIBILITY STUDY

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



In 2006, the National Capital Authority completed the Central National Area - Western Foreshores and Environs Planning Framework. The Framework considered, among other things; land and water use in the western reaches of Lake Burley Griffin. The Framework identified that upgrading the existing rowing course in Yarramundi Reach to an international standard course would have a significant influence over other water and land based activities. The Framework recommended that the proposal be investigated to determine if an upgrade is in fact possible, so that future planning and development can properly account for it.

In 2006, the NCA engaged Tecknos to undertake investigations into the potential of Yarramundi reach to accommodate a rowing course suitable for staging national and international events. This study included surveying, heritage and cost planning sub-consultants sufficient to explore the physical, constructional, heritage and cost implications of upgrading the existing course in Yarramundi Reach to an international standard. It also included an exploration of issues emerging from the study itself, the Planning Framework and other related matters to assess the potential opportunities and constraints of the study area. The study concludes that a master plan and ongoing management decisions within the study area should take into consideration the potential future opportunities for an international rowing facility in Yarramundi Reach.

The study investigated two options for accommodating an international standard course. It concludes that from a physical planning and design perspective there would appear to be no insurmountable technical or course layout obstacles to upgrading the existing 1800m course to a 2000 metre world championship standard. The study notes the potential for impacts on the natural and cultural heritage values of the area and recommends detailed investigation to identify and protect these.

The study also concludes that any upgrade should consider its suitability for use by other aquatic sports such as sprint canoeing and triathlons and take account of water based craft operating on the lake. Further, the study established that the lake edge reshaping and the provision of facilities for a course upgrade would cost in the order of \$37 to \$47 million subject to the preferred alignment. The study notes that a detailed siting and design exercise could reduce this cost.

The study concludes that rowing events of a national and international standard would attract large visitor and media participation, particularly in the instance of major events being staged. It would enhance rowing opportunities in the region and positively influence the perceptions of Canberra in its role as the National Capital both nationally and internationally.

2. INTRODUCTION

Rowing became a popular recreational activity in Canberra not long after Lake Burley Griffin was filled. It attracts participants ranging from school age (the largest single group) to seniors and elite AIS athletes all using the existing permanently buoyed course in Yarramundi Reach (refer Study Area). Lake Burley Griffin is currently home to eleven rowing clubs – their number only limited by existing facilities. Canoeists and distance swimmers also make use of the existing course although there are limitations in relation to the length and width of the current course.

The history of proposals to extend the Yarramundi Reach rowing course is approximately two decades long. Whilst past proposals have suggested extending the existing 1800m buoyed course to a proposed 2150 m length and providing width, subsurface conditions and associated infrastructure to meet all the criteria for an international standard course, past investigations and analysis has been limited.

Given the significance of such a proposal and the influence it would have on other activities within the Yarramundi Reach area, the NCA resolved to revisit the proposal to ascertain not only the likely feasibility but what this would mean for other land and water based uses/activities within the area.

The aim of this feasibility study is to investigate the proposal - including inputs derived from consultation, planning issues, course layout, construction, environmental and heritage impacts, and cost.

3. THE STUDY

3.1 Project Brief

The primary objective of this study has been to determine the design parameters and likely cost of developing an international championship rowing course in Yarramundi Reach but not to prepare actual design proposals. The study also provides an understanding of the key issues of planning and design influencing the existing and potential expansion of the rowing facilities in the Reach.

This study is intended to determine the suitability of the Reach to accommodate an upgrading of the existing rowing facility and sets the stage for decisions to be made in regard to the future use of the Reach for this purpose. In addition, the study identifies a range of activities (both existing and future) that are compatible for collocation with the rowing use. The resulting “Opportunities” plan (refer Section 9 below) proposes a number of propositions for consideration under a future detailed master planning exercise; specifically to identify the most appropriate land uses and ongoing management arrangements for the Yarramundi site.

The study provides sufficient information to enable decisions to be made in regard to the need for continued detailed investigations of an upgraded course in Yarramundi Reach.

The study aims to provide an accurate determination of the FISA course layout rules for a world championship course, the plotting of options overlaid on aerial photographs and then an examination of the impacts such a course might have with regard to several specific criteria: the lake itself, surrounding foreshore areas, construction cost as well as heritage and environmental constraints. In addition an initial stakeholder consultation process was undertaken to understand possible responses that might be associated with a proposed course upgrade. Given the heritage significance of the area this was supplemented with input from a specialist heritage consultant.

3.2 Project Team

Andrew Smith	NCA (Director of Projects)
Bruce Chalmers	NCA (Project Manager)
Sri Tharan	NCA (Contracts Manager - Lake Burley Griffin and Scrivener Dam)
Ros Ransome	NCA (Heritage Officer)
Andrew Metcalf	Tecknos Architecture (Principal Consultant)
Ken Taylor	Heritage (Heritage Sub-Consultant)
Alex Feng	Donald Cant Watts Cork (Cost Sub-Consultant)
David Sloan	LandData (Surveyor)

3.3 Sources

A range of documents exist that are relevant to the study, including:

National Capital Plan

Australian Capital territory (Planning and Land Management) Act

CNA West Planning Framework and Consultation Report

Lake Burley Griffin Management Plan, 1995

NCA Environment Policy

NCA Lake Policy

NCA 2007 (Draft) Heritage Assessment for Lake Burley Griffin

Memorandum of Understanding between the NCA, Environment ACT and the Department of Environment and Heritage in relation Threatened Species and Endangered Ecological Communities

Action Plans for threatened species or ecological communities within the Study Area (Environment ACT)

Yarramundi Reach Water Supply Master plan - Draft (DUS/Bill Guy and Partners)

National Museum of Australia - Site Investigation - Infrastructure

National Museum of Australia - Site Investigation - Geotechnical Investigation

FISA Rules of Racing – Appendix 1 (Courses)

4. STUDY CONTEXT

4.01 Study Area

The study area encompasses the entire western end of Lake Burley Griffin extending up to Parkes Way to the north and west. It includes a range of lake edge land, which for the most part is non-urban open space. This land adjoining Yarramundi Reach comprises:



Southern edge: National Zoo and Aquarium
 Government House (“Yarralumla”)
 Westbourne Woods
 Royal Canberra Golf Course

Eastern Edge: Yarralumla Nursery
 Weston Park
 Black Mountain Peninsula

Northern Edge: Road Corridor (Lady Denman Drive and Parkes Way)
 Black Mountain

Western Edge: Yarramundi [including Burringiri Cultural Centre and Lindsay Pryor National Arboretum), protected natural temperate grasslands

The existing 1800 metre rowing course runs through the long axis of Yarramundi Reach and is not suitable for staging international or World Championship events in its present configuration.

Existing land uses within the study area include Lindsay Pryor National Arboretum, Weston Park, Royal Canberra Golf Course, Government House, Scrivener Dam and associated maintenance facilities and site offices, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Centre - Burringiri.

The predominant land use activities include cycling, lake based recreational and sporting activities, such as rowing, sailing, canoeing, fishing and swimming. The foreshore areas are very popular for informal recreation although vehicular access is restricted to weekends in the case of the western edge of the Reach.

Yarramundi was once earmarked for the National Museum of Australia and a visitor centre remains on site, including an administration building and a theatre/exhibition building. These buildings are now leased and occupied by the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Centre: Burringiri.

4.02 Planning Context

4.02.1 National Significance

In its overall prescription for national significance, the *National Capital Plan* (p.5) lists the following requirements and objectives in the planning and development of Canberra:

The pre-eminence of the role of Canberra and the Territory as the National Capital.

The reservation and enhancement of the landscape features, which give the National Capital its character and setting.

Respect for the key elements of Walter Burley Griffin's formally adopted plan for Canberra.

Creation, preservation and enhancement of fitting sites, approaches and backdrops for national institutions and ceremonies as well as National Capital Uses.

The development of a city, which both respects the environmental values and reflects national concerns with the sustainability of Australia's urban areas.

The Yarramundi Reach study area falls within the scope of these requirements and objectives.

4.02.2 Statutory Planning Framework

The planning, development and management of Canberra and the Territory is undertaken within the framework of the:

legislative requirements of the *Australian Capital Territory (Planning and Land Management) Act 1988*;

objectives of the *National Capital Plan*;

matters of national significance; and

matters required to be included in the *National Capital Plan* to enhance and protect the special character of the National Capital.

The broad Land Use Policies set out in the *National Capital Plan* for the study area relate to policies on non-urban land use. The non-urban land uses contribute to the scenic backdrop and natural setting for the Central National Area and urban areas of the National Capital.

The land uses identified in the study area under the *National Capital Plan* are:

National Capital Use (Government House), Yarramundi Reach Open Space (Park).

Restricted Access Open Space (Royal Canberra Golf Course).

Administrative and Utility Service (Yarralumla Nursery).

Lying within the National Capital Open Space System (NCOSS), the Lake is part of the nationally significant open space framework, visual backdrop and landscape setting for the National Capital, and contributes to the system that protects the environmental quality of the city. The Lake's overall management is guided by the principles and policies of the National Capital Plan and the Lake Burley Griffin Management Plan 1995. This plan acknowledges a range of uses for the Lake, consistent with the policies of the National Capital Plan.

The above policies direct that the water quality and hydraulic operation of the Lake be maintained in a manner that protects the Lake and its foreshores, as well as their visual and symbolic roles. Should the water quality of the Lake not be managed effectively, these functions and values could be compromised, leading to stakeholder and community dissatisfaction.

4.02.3 CNA Western Foreshores and Environs (Draft) Planning Framework

On 24-25 December 2001 bush fires destroyed a significant area of pine forest and native landscape in the area of Yarramundi Reach near Scrivener Dam including a small triangular plantation on national land off Lady Denman Drive. There has been considerable debate since then concerning the options for replanting vegetation lost on both National and Territory Land and the future land use of these areas.

The fires in January 2003 extended the debate and led to the initiation of a review the current land use provisions for both the National Land areas damaged by the 2001 fires and of adjacent Territory Land (in Designated Areas). A comprehensive study by the National Capital Authority of the western reaches of Lake Burley Griffin and environs commenced in January 2004 to review existing planning policies and prepare a Planning Framework to set the strategic planning direction for the development and management of the Designated Areas at the western end of the lake including Yarramundi Reach.

The *Planning Framework* concluded that the area:

"... should continue to contribute to the "green heart" of the city (with an emphasis on public access). The land (and water) should be developed as a metropolitan-scale recreation or urban edge park, integrating new and existing land uses and facilities to encourage active and passive recreation and tourist uses in a manner that optimises opportunities offered by the areas central location, unique heritage and waterway frontages."

The *Planning Framework* also noted:

The important visual role of the site due to its visibility across the lake from the Central National Area, Yarralumla and Government House.

The inlets of the Yarramundi shoreline (Acacia to the north, and Yarramundi to the south) provide important habitats for waterbird species, both common and rare including the Latham's Snipe *Gallinago hardwickii* (in Acacia Inlet).

A general lack of services, vehicular access and parking at Yarramundi Reach.

4.03 Heritage Protection

The study area contains a range of known (and possibly unknown) natural and cultural heritage places that are protected under the provisions of the National Capital Plan and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, (the EPBC). The development of an international standard rowing facility at Yarramundi Reach will need to address the obligations imposed both of these statutory frameworks.

The EPBC is the primary legislation dealing with the Commonwealth’s responsibilities for heritage places. It has a number of elements that are relevant to the consideration of the impact of upgrading the existing buoyed rowing course in Yarramundi Reach. The National Capital Authority has commissioned consultants to prepare a Heritage Assessment and Management Plan for Lake Burley Griffin and adjacent areas of National Land. The Assessment has identified the following natural and cultural heritage values within the study area for the rowing course:

Natural Temperate Grasslands	Endangered Ecological Community - EPBC
Striped Legless Lizard (<i>Delma impar</i>)	Vulnerable species - EPBC
Latham’s Snipe (<i>Gallinano hardwickii</i>)	Migratory species - EPBC
Indigenous sites (twelve)	Registered - ACT Heritage Register - EPBC
Lake Burley Griffin Conservation Area	Indicative Historic Place – Commonwealth List/Register National Estate
Government House – Yarralumla and Surrounds	Listed - Commonwealth List/Registered - Register National Estate
Weston Park and Yarralumla Nursery	Registered - Register National Estate/Provisionally Registered - ACT Heritage Register
Westbourne Woods Area	Registered - Register National Estate

4.04 Site Characteristics

Prior to the 2001 fires a large section of the western edge of the study area had been planted for the production of commercial softwood. These areas were located between Denman Drive and the Tuggeranong Parkway, encompassing Roman Cypress Hill, and extending south to the By Drive.

The area previously planted with pines by ACT Forests was bare following the fires and was subsequently overtaken by weeds and uncontrolled pine regrowth. The NCA removed woody weeds and pine wildings to address fire hazard issues and regrowth in previously deep ripped forested areas.

Vehicular access to Lindsay Pryor National Arboretum and Acacia Inlet headland is only available on weekends. The toilet block at Acacia Inlet has recently been reopened with the reinstatement of a temporary water supply from Black Mountain Peninsula. This same supply has recently been extended to serve Burringiri although it is not considered a long term solution as it is connected to a major reservoir bulk supply main at Black Mountain Peninsula.

Importantly, Yarramundi is the last major National Land site reserved for National Capital Use in the Central National Area.

