

1926.



THE PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA *Brought up by*
Senator Barnes

Pursuant to Statute

By Command

In return to Order

G. Monahan

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON *Clerk of the Senate*
11th Aug.
1926.
PUBLIC WORKS.

REPORT

~~MINUTES OF EVIDENCE~~

~~MINUTES OF EVIDENCE~~

RELATING TO THE PROPOSED

ERECTION OF COTTAGES AT CANBERRA.

MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS.

(Fifth Committee.)

GEORGE HUGH MACKAY, Esq., M.P., Chairman.

Senate.

Senator John Barnes.
 Senator Patrick Joseph Lynch.*
 Senator Herbert James Mockford Payne.†
 Senator Matthew Reid.

House of Representatives.

Robert Cook, Esq., M.P.
 The Hon. Henry Gregory, M.P.
 Andrew William Lacey, Esq., M.P.
 David Charles McGrath, Esq., M.P.
 Alfred Charles Seabrook, Esq., M.P.

* Resigned 30th June, 1926. † Appointed 1st July, 1926.

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EXTRACT FROM THE VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

No. 70, DATED 21ST JULY, 1926.

3. PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE—REFERENCE OF WORK—COTTAGES AT CANBERRA.—Mr. Marr (Minister representing the Minister for Home and Territories) moved, pursuant to notice—

- (1) That, in accordance with the provisions of the *Commonwealth Public Works Committee Act 1913-1921*, the following proposed work be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for investigation and report, namely:—The Erection of Cottages at Canberra.
 (2) That the Committee have leave to meet whilst the House is sitting.

Mr. Marr having laid on the Table plans, &c., in connexion with the proposed work—
 Debate ensued.

Question—put and passed.

LIST OF WITNESSES.

	Page
Anderson, Reginald Hamp, Accounting Officer for the Thousand Homes Scheme, State Savings Bank, South Australia	
Butters, John Henry, Chairman, Federal Capital Commission, Canberra	
Casbourne, Thorold Robert, Chief Architect, War Service Homes Commission, New South Wales	
Dunlop, John Charles, Managing Director, Dunlop Home Builders Ltd., Melbourne	
Fox, John Walker, General Manager, Fox, Ey, and Thomas Ltd., Adelaide	
Harrison, Sir John, Deputy Chairman, Federal Capital Commission, Canberra	
Knowles, George Shaw, Assistant Secretary, Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, and Chairman, Public Service (Canberra) Committee	
Leith, George Burridge, Chief Architect, State Savings Bank, Victoria	
Lynch, Patrick Edward, Secretary of the Carpenters and Joiners' Union, South Australia	
Marchant, Samuel Bowering, representative of Monolyte Constructions (Victoria and South Australia) Ltd.	
Moore, Louis Colectin, member of the firm of James Moore and Sons, Melbourne	
Norrell, James Charles, Deputy Commissioner, War Service Homes Commission, New South Wales	
Parkes, Stanley Thomas, member of the firm of Oakley and Parkes, Architects, Melbourne	
Rolland, Henry Maitland, F.R.V.I.A., A.V.I.E., Architect, Federal Capital Commission, Canberra	
Rosenthal, General Sir Charles, F.R.I.B.A., F.R.V.I.A., Melbourne, F.I.A., Sydney, President of the Federal Council of the Australian Institutes of Architects	
Solly, Edward William Harold, Quantity Surveyor, Department of Works and Railways	

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS.

CANBERRA COTTAGES.

R E P O R T.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, to which the House of Representatives referred, for investigation and report, the question of the erection of cottages at Canberra, has the honour to report as follows :—

INTRODUCTORY.

1. In planning for the opening of Parliament at Canberra in 1927, it was originally intended that, in the first instance, each Department should be represented at the Federal Capital by a small nucleus staff or secretariat. In January of this year, however, the Federal Capital Commission was informed by the Government that it was proposed to make a change from the secretariat scheme to what is called the second stage scheme, which involved the transfer and housing of 450 officials in addition to the Parliament and printing staffs instead of about 160, as estimated under the secretariat idea.

2. To meet this necessity for early provision of more cottages, the Commission engaged architects, prepared designs, and on the 25th March, 1926, invited tenders for the construction at Canberra of brick or concrete cottages, in any number from 1 to 500.

3. On 20th May, 1926, a notification appeared in the *Commonwealth Gazette* that the following tenders had been accepted :—

- (a) Bruce, Eden, and Griffiths, of Bankstown, New South Wales—for erection of brick cottages not exceeding 100 in number, of various types and at schedule prices.
- (b) W. H. Mason, of Queanbeyan, New South Wales—erection of 100 brick cottages of various types and at schedule prices.
- (c) Monolyte Constructions (Victoria and South Australia) Limited—erection of 100 concrete cottages of various types and at schedule prices.

4. This notification attracted the attention of this Committee, and on 21st May, 1926, a letter was dispatched to the Minister for Home and Territories in which it was stated, *inter alia* :—
“ Section 14 (4) of the Seat of Government Administration Act No. 8 of 1924, reads as follows :—

‘ 14 (4.) The provisions of the Commonwealth Public Works Committee Act shall apply in relation to works and buildings proposed to be constructed by the Commission in like manner as they apply to public works proposed to be constructed by the Commonwealth.’

and Section 15 (1) of the *Commonwealth Public Works Committee Act* 1913-1921 reads as follows :—

‘ 15 (1.) No public work of any kind whatsoever (except such works as have already been approved by Parliament or which are authorized during the present session, and except works for the naval or military defence of the Commonwealth exempted by Order in Council from the operation of the Act) the estimated cost of completing which exceeds Twenty-five thousand pounds, and whether such work is a continuation, completion, repair, re-construction, extension, or new work, shall be commenced unless sanctioned as in this section provided.’

The Committee is unanimously and strongly of opinion that the carrying out of the work such as that indicated, involving a large expenditure of public money, is a distinct evasion of the Act, and some members were desirous of ventilating the matter on the floor of the House. At my suggestion, however, they have consented to defer any such action for the present, and I am taking this opportunity of bringing the matter under your notice in the hope that the Committee may obtain your assurance that this project will be referred for its investigation before the work is put in hand."

5. On 13th July, 1926, a communication was received from the Minister for Home and Territories, intimating that the question of whether the work contemplated was one coming within the scope of the *Commonwealth Public Works Committee Act 1913* had been referred to the Crown Law Office, and a ruling had been received that it did.

6. On 21st July, 1926, accordingly, on the motion of Mr. Marr, the House of Representatives adopted the following resolution:—

- (1) That, in accordance with the provisions of the *Commonwealth Public Works Committee Act 1913-1921*, the following proposed work be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for investigation and report, namely:—The erection of Cottages at Canberra.
- (2) That the Committee have leave to meet whilst the House is sitting.

ESTIMATED COST.

7. The amount involved in this project is at present impossible to ascertain. The Chairman, Federal Capital Commission, stated that two contracts for 100 cottages each, and a third contract for certain cottages "not exceeding 100" had been entered into; but until it had been determined how many cottages of each type will be required the amount of each contract could not be stated.

The average contract price for the whole of the brick types works out at £1,243, and the average cost of concrete types at £1,225, so that it may be assumed that in the event of 300 cottages being constructed the expenditure will approximate £371,100.

COMMITTEE'S INVESTIGATIONS.

8. The Committee took evidence from the Chairman and one of the members of the Federal Capital Commission, the Commission's architect and late quantity surveyor, the President of the Federal Council of the Australian Institutes of Architects, the Chief Architect, State Savings Bank of Victoria, the Chairman of the Public Service (Canberra) Committee, one of the successful tenderers for these cottages, private architects, builders, and others. In addition, the Committee visited Adelaide, inspected the dwellings being constructed by the State Bank under the "Thousand Homes" scheme, took evidence from a representative of the bank, and a member of a private contracting firm. A visit was also paid to Sydney, where an inspection was made of brick houses being erected by the War Service Homes Commission, and evidence obtained from the Deputy Commissioner and Chief Architect of that Commission. A visit was also paid to the "Ideal Home" exhibited in Sydney.

NECESSITY FOR COTTAGES.

9. To effect the transfer to Canberra in 1927 of the number of officials stipulated by the Government, the Committee realizes the necessity of providing an adequate number of suitable dwellings, and sympathizes with the Commission in the gigantic task with which it is confronted. At the same time, the fact cannot be overlooked that the Commission made its task more difficult by omitting to avail itself of the opportunity which was offered through the Public Service (Canberra) Committee of obtaining information from public servants as to their requirements, and of the assistance which would have been given by the investigations of the Commonwealth Public Works Committee if the project had been dealt with in accordance with the Commonwealth Public Works Committee Act and referred before contracts had been entered into.

TYPES OF COTTAGES.

10. Early in June public servants were each supplied with a pamphlet setting out the conditions under which they could obtain dwellings, and containing illustrations of types of cottages which the Commission was prepared to build.

11. The designs submitted for selection aimed at the construction of modern high-class brick or concrete dwellings, with 9 feet ceilings and tiled roofs, and containing a living room, three bedrooms, and kitchen, bathroom, and laundry. Water, sewerage, and electric light are provided for, but not gas.

PUBLIC SERVANTS' OBJECTIONS.

12. The Chairman, Public Service (Canberra) Committee, as representing the Public Service, pointed out several features which are regarded by the officials as objectionable, the principal being—

- (a) Front door and main entrance direct into living room.
- (b) Rooms too small.
- (c) Connexion between kitchen and bedrooms is through living and other rooms.
- (d) Insufficient verandah space.
- (e) Porches (where provided) too small to be used for sitting out or as playgrounds for young children.
- (f) Too few types have sleep-out verandahs.
- (g) Unsatisfactory arrangement of kitchens.
- (h) Ranges badly placed and too small.
- (i) Absence of overhanging eaves.

13. Some of these objections may even now be overcome in respect of the majority of the houses, although probably at added cost; but the Committee considers that portion of this extra expense might have been avoided if action had been taken earlier to ascertain and provide for the official those conveniences to which as occupier and purchaser he is entitled.

COST OF HOUSES.

14. It was ascertained in evidence that the contract prices of the brick types set out in the pamphlet were:—

Type No. 1 ..	£1,218	Type No. 5 ..	£1,314	Type No. 9 ..	£1,300
„ No. 2 ..	1,126	„ No. 7 ..	1,211	„ No. 10 ..	1,183
„ No. 3 ..	1,319	„ No. 8 ..	1,209	„ No. 11 ..	1,165
„ No. 4 ..	1,295				

The schedule price for concrete cottages of all types being £1,225.

EXTRAS.

15. To each of these prices, however, the Federal Capital Commission added an amount of £125, to provide for—

Fuel store and tool shed	£50
Formation of footpaths to front and rear	25
Preparation for and planting hedge of front fencing line	5
Contingencies and unforeseen expenses which will not be charged if not incurred	45
	£125

OVERHEAD CHARGES.

16. To these figures it was stated in the pamphlet that the Commission intended to add 7 per cent. as an overhead charge, including interest during construction. On representations being made, however, this charge was subsequently reduced to $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.

FENCING.

17. It was also stated in the pamphlet that the above charges did not include fencing, which would be charged for at the rate of 5s. per foot, involving a charge of approximately 3s. 6d. per fortnight for twenty years on an average block.

LAND.

18. The residential blocks set apart for public servants are of an average size of something under a quarter of an acre, and have been valued up to £400 per block. On the price of the block he selects the occupier will pay a rental of 5 per cent. per annum.

RATES.

19. The Committee was informed in evidence that the public servants will also be expected to pay rates in respect of the premises they occupy, but what that amount will be is not ascertainable, as the rates have not yet been fixed.

COST OF DWELLINGS TO OCCUPIERS.

20. Taking all these factors into consideration, it will be seen that the cost to the official of the house he selects will be, in respect of the following types, as follows:—

Type Number.	Contract Price.	Commissioners' Price, with Additions.	Overhead and Interest.	Fencing and Land per annum approx.	Total.
	£	£	£ s. d.	£	£ s. d.
1	1,218	1,345	60 10 6	20	1,405 10 6, plus £20 p.a., plus rates
2	1,126	1,250	58 5 0	20	1,306 5 0, " " "
3	1,319	1,445	65 0 6	20	1,510 0 6, " " "
4	1,295	1,420	53 8 0	20	1,483 18 0, " " "
5	1,314	1,440	64 16 0	20	1,504 16 0, " " "
7	1,211	1,335	60 1 6	20	1,395 1 6, " " "
8	1,299	1,425	64 2 6	20	1,489 2 6, " " "
9	1,300	1,425	64 2 6	20	1,489 2 6, " " "
10	1,183	1,300	58 19 0	20	1,368 19 0, " " "
11	1,165	1,300	58 10 0	20	1,358 10 0, " " "

21. To enable the officials to obtain these cottages on rent purchase terms, it has been arranged that the Commonwealth Bank will advance up to 70 per cent. of the cost of the dwelling, the advance to be repaid in monthly instalments with $5\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. interest over a period of 35 years. In cases where officials are unable to deposit 30 per cent. of the cost of the house, the Commission will advance, for a period of five years, 30 per cent. less a deposit, and charge interest thereon at 7 per cent.

22. In a case where an official desires to rent his house only, the Committee was informed in evidence that, the rate of interest to be charged had not yet been fixed, but information was furnished showing the rental payable, making provision for interest charges at $5\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. to $5\frac{3}{4}$ per cent. These particulars are as follow:—

RENTAL OF COTTAGES (BRICK OR CONCRETE).

Interest at $5\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. 5·25

Reserve for external and special maintenance 50

Insurance 20

Sinking Fund instalment to repay principal when invested at 5 per cent. in 60 years 283
6·233

Administration charge to cover cost of leasing, inspections, accounts, and collecting, 5 per cent. 312

Margin for contingencies, including money lying idle between changes of tenancy or for overhaul — 4 per cent. 25

Calculated	Adopted	£ s. d.
6·795	6·8	or 6 16 0 per cent. p.a.

If interest charge is $5\frac{3}{8}$ per cent. add 125 plus 5 per cent. plus 4 per cent. = 137

.. 6·932 .. 6·95 or 6 19 0

If interest charge is $5\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. add 25 plus 5 per cent. plus 4 per cent. = 275

.. 7·070 .. 7·1 or 7 2 0

If interest charge is $5\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. add 5 plus 5 per cent. plus 4 per cent. = 545

.. 7·340 .. 7·35 or 7 7 0

23. Under these circumstances, it will be seen that for a brick or concrete dwelling an official will be called upon to pay:—

For Type 2 (cheapest house)—

£ s. d.

If $5\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. interest charged, £88 16s. 6d. p.a., plus £20 for land and fencing, plus rates ..

= 108 16 6 p.a. plus rates

If $5\frac{3}{8}$ per cent. interest charged, £96 0s. 2d. p.a. plus £20 for land and fencing, plus rates ..

= 116 0 2 " "

For Type 3 (dearest house)—

If $5\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. interest charged, £102 13s. 7d. p.a. plus £20 for land and fencing, plus rates ..

= 122 13 7 " "

If $5\frac{3}{8}$ per cent. interest charged, £110 19s. 8d. p.a., plus £20 for land and fencing, plus rates ..

= 130 19 8 " "

24. These payments are admittedly too high for the average public servant who will be occupying the cottages. Apparently it has been taken for granted that all public servants draw large salaries, or else insufficient thought has been given to the lower-paid officials. This was borne out by a remark made by one member of the Federal Capital Commission during the course of his examination, that "it is quite alarming to me to be informed that a number of public servants to be transferred are on as low a salary as £4 17s. 6d. per week." The Federal Capital Commission, however, claims that, having invited tenders in the open market, these are the lowest prices at which houses of the class designed can be built, and as it is called upon to deal with the matter on a purely business basis and has no authority to grant any preferential rates to public servants, these are the lowest prices at which these houses can be made available.

25. An endeavour was made by the Committee to ascertain the relative costs of houses in Melbourne as compared with Canberra. The Chairman, Public Service (Canberra) Committee stated that, from information furnished by the owners, it was shown that the average cost of timber house owned by public servants in Melbourne was £782, whereas the average cost of the same sized houses in Canberra (brick) was £1,408. The average cost of brick houses owned by public servants in Melbourne was given as £1,144, and the average cost at Canberra of houses giving equivalent accommodation, £1,727.

26. The Chairman, Federal Capital Commission, in giving evidence, stated that the cost of buildings at Canberra offered to public servants was not unduly high. He intimated that, in an endeavour to obtain information as to the relative building costs in Melbourne as compared with Canberra, tenders were called in Melbourne for Type 9 of the Canberra houses, which the Commission is having erected for £1,300. It was stated that the lowest tender received in Melbourne for that house, upon exactly the same specification and plans, was £1,525 10s.

27. Investigations made by the Committee, however, showed that tenders were not publicly invited, but that four contractors, who had the plans for one night only, were asked to give a price for a single house of that type, having first been informed that no business would result. Under these circumstances, the Committee considers that the prices given cannot in any way be taken as a fair test, in view of Mr. Butters' subsequent statement that building material at Canberra costs approximately 20 per cent. more than in Melbourne, and building trades labour costs approximately 12 per cent. more.

28. In an endeavour to obtain a proper comparison of Melbourne and Canberra costs, the Chief Architect, State Savings Bank of Victoria, was supplied with plans and specifications of the Canberra cottages, and asked to favour the Committee with an estimate of the prices at which he could build houses of similar accommodation in Melbourne, on his own and on the Federal Capital Commission's specification. The information furnished by him is as follows:—

Type Number.	Canberra Cost.*	Estimated Cost in Melbourne on State Savings Bank Standard Specification.	Estimated Cost in Melbourne on Federal Capital Commission's Specification.
	£	£	£
F.C.C. 1	1,345	1,100	1,150
F.C.C. 2	1,250	1,000	1,050
F.C.C. 3	1,445	1,200	1,250
F.C.C. 4	1,420	1,200	1,250
F.C.C. 5	1,440	1,200	1,250
F.C.C. 7	1,335	1,100	1,150
F.C.C. 8	1,425	1,175	1,225
F.C.C. 9	1,425	1,200	1,250
F.C.C. 10	1,310	1,050	1,100
F.C.C. 11	1,300	1,050	1,100

* "Canberra cost" includes fuel store, tool house, and gravel footpaths, but does not include fencing.

The above estimates are for erection of single houses and based on current market rates for labour and material, and provision of all utility services and fencing.

Variation in costs is approximately 20 per cent.

If houses were erected in groups (under one contract) of twenty or more houses, estimated costs would be reduced by 5 per cent.

29. On this information, and the evidence given by Mr. Parkes, of the firm of Oakley and Parkes, who have actually done work for the Commonwealth and for private clients at Canberra, the Committee is satisfied that the completed cost of houses at Canberra may be taken at 20 per cent. higher than for a similar house in Melbourne.

REASONS FOR HIGH COST.

30. The reasons for the higher building costs at Canberra are somewhat difficult to determine, but may broadly be said to include the following factors :—

- (a) Higher cost of bricks, which are supplied to the contractors by the Commission at 96s. a thousand for common bricks at the kiln, whereas in Melbourne bricks are obtainable at 67s. a thousand at the kiln.
- (b) Freight on materials which have to be brought from Sydney.
- (c) Less efficient labour, because the better class of labour finds adequate employment in the cities.
- (d) Higher rates paid to some classes of labour to attract them to Canberra. Some plasterers were paid £8 10s. per week.
- (e) Paucity of housing accommodation for workmen, necessitating the contractor covering himself against expense of providing same.

HOW COSTS MIGHT BE REDUCED.

31. On the prices shown, it is evident that most of the public servants will have to pay more for their homes at Canberra than they do in Melbourne. The Committee therefore suggests how, in its opinion, the cost of building homes at Canberra can be to some extent reduced, with a consequent saving to the occupants.

SMALL CONTRACTS.

32. Evidence placed before the Committee indicated that the idea of greatly cheapening the building of houses by letting contracts for large numbers was a fallacy where a variety of types had to be provided, and better results follow from the employment of small contractors, who will tender for the erection of dwellings in numbers up to five. Under a system whereby the Commission would, in addition to the bricks and other items it now supplies, also buy in bulk and supply to the small contractor such items as timber, tiles, standard doors, baths, basins, stoves, locks, &c., and generally assist him by making available fortnightly progress payments on work done, it is thought considerable economy in construction could be effected.

33. Notwithstanding the satisfaction expressed by the Chairman of the Commission at the prices at which work is being carried out, the Committee is strongly of opinion that such prices can be substantially reduced, and urges that the Commission should bring construction costs at Canberra to within 5 or 7½ per cent. of costs in Sydney or Melbourne.

COST OF LAND.

34. In the course of its investigations, the Committee learned that the cost to the Commonwealth of the land on which public servants' cottages are being erected averaged £5 per acre. In 1921 the then Federal Capital Advisory Committee recommended that a fair valuation for officials' residential blocks would be £30, but the Minister, on the recommendation of the Surveyor-General, agreed to fix a rate of £100 a block. The price now being charged is as high as £400 a block, or £1,600 per acre. Although realizing that considerable sums have been spent on subdivision, the construction of roads, provision of water and sewerage, and electric light, the Committee, in the light of Mr. Butters' declaration that "the Commission does not either seek or hope to make a penny out of this housing scheme," considers that the valuation placed on residential blocks for officials is too high, and that further consideration should be given to its reduction.

FENCING.

35. It is also considered that the price of 5s. per foot allowed for fencing in the pamphlet, although it was subsequently stated by Mr. Butters in his evidence that it had been reduced to 4s., is still much too high and should be reduced, seeing that fencing costs in other States vary from about 2s. to 2s. 6d. per foot.

EXTENDED TERMS.

36. It was explained in evidence that in the case of brick or concrete houses rental purchase terms are made to extend over a period of 35 years. Most witnesses were inclined to agree that structures of the class under consideration, faithfully built and carefully maintained, would usually have a life of 100 years, and under these circumstances the Committee considers that payments might be spread over a period of 45 years. In the event of the Commonwealth Bank raising any objection on this score, it is thought that it would not be difficult for the Commonwealth Government to come in as guarantor for the extra period, as the risk is negligible, and the concession would make the payments easier for the occupiers.

37. On a basis of interest charged at 5½ per cent., the figures furnished by the Commission for repayment in 35 years were as follows:

Instalment	£6·70 per cent.
Insurance	·2
Administration, 6 per cent. on rental	·42
	7·32 or £7 7s. per cent. per annum.

38. If, as recommended, the terms be extended for 45 years, the relative charges would be—

Instalment	6·26 per cent.
Insurance	·2
Administration, 6 per cent. on rental	·38
	6·84 or £6 17s. per cent. per annum.

INSURANCE.

39. A further saving might be made if a reduction were effected in the insurance rate intended to be charged.

The Committee was informed that in the case of the War Service Homes Commission, insurance is charged at the rate of about 1s. per cent. instead of 4s. per cent. put down by the Commission, and that the fund is in a very sound condition. Under these circumstances, the Committee is unanimously of opinion that arrangements should be made for the Federal Capital Commission to carry its own fire insurance, thus giving the least possible rate to the occupiers of these homes.

EXTRA SERVICES.

40. A further reduction could be effected in the capital cost of the houses by eliminating, at the option of the purchaser, the services proposed to be provided for the £125 added by the Commission to the contract cost of the cottages, leaving such services to be provided by the occupier under adequate supervision.

OVERHEAD AND SUPERVISION CHARGES.

41. In the opinion of the Committee, the overhead and supervision charge, originally fixed at 7 per cent. and later reduced to 4½ per cent., is still too high, and it is considered that this could easily be reduced to 2½ per cent. without loss to the Commission.

HOUSES FOR LOWER-PAID OFFICIALS.

42. The question of providing comfortable homes for persons on low salaries is one that is attracting attention in all parts of the world, and has not yet been satisfactorily solved. It is obvious that, to bring the prices more within the reach of those officials, something must be sacrificed in the quality of the houses provided. The Committee was much impressed with the brick homes it saw in Sydney, which are being provided by the War Service Homes Commission at prices ranging from £750 to £850, on terms which provide for repayment of principal and interest at the rate of £3 19s. 4d. per month. The houses are attractive in appearance and internally comfortable, and the Committee is unanimously of opinion that brick dwellings of this standard might with advantage be provided for many officials receiving salaries of £400 per annum and under.

43. In addition, the Committee considers that officials in receipt of salaries of £400 per annum and under should be allowed to select timber dwellings, provided that not more than 5 per cent. of such dwellings be allowed in any brick area.

CONCRETE HOUSES.

44. The Committee was unfavorably impressed with the prices at which the contract was let for the construction of solid wall concrete houses by the Monolyte Construction Company. With solid concrete walls, there is said to be always a danger of damp penetration and condensation of moisture on the interior walls, although the evidence of the Chief Architect, State Savings Bank of Victoria, indicated that no difficulty had yet been experienced in the houses built by the Monolyte Company at Sunshine. At Sunshine, however, concrete houses containing 1,285 square feet of space were erected for £900, whereas at Cambera, while the larger concrete houses are being built at a lower cost than similar brick houses, the smaller types having areas of 1,200 to 1,300 square feet are costing £1,225.

45. After considering all the circumstances of the case, the Committee is unanimously of opinion that the contract price for the solid wall Monolyte concrete houses is excessive, and urges that an effort be made to reduce the cost of the smaller class of home to at least 15 per cent. below the cost of similar brick houses.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS.

46. Briefly summarized, the recommendations of the Committee are as follow :—

- (a) Encourage the building of cottages in numbers up to five by small contractors (paragraph 32).
- (b) Bring construction costs within 5 per cent. or $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. of Sydney prices (paragraph 33).
- (c) Reduce valuation placed on residential blocks of public servants (paragraph 34).
- (d) Reduce cost of fencing (paragraph 35).
- (e) Extend period of rental purchase to 45 years (paragraph 36).
- (f) Arrange for Federal Capital Commission to carry its own fire insurance (paragraph 39).
- (g) Eliminate at option of purchaser £125 charge for extras, leaving occupier to provide them under supervision (paragraph 40).
- (h) Reduce overhead and supervision charges to $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. (paragraph 41).
- (i) Provide for officials receiving salary of £400 and under brick cottages of the standard of the War Service Homes Commission (paragraph 42).
- (j) Allow officials in receipt of £400 and under to select timber dwellings provided that not more than 5 per cent. of such dwellings are allowed in any brick group (paragraph 43).
- (k) Reduce cost of the smaller types of concrete houses to at least 15 per cent. below the cost of similar brick houses (paragraph 45).

G. H. Mackay
G. H. MACKAY,

Chairman.

Office of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works,
Federal Parliament House, Melbourne,
11th August, 1926.