

1940.

THE PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

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PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
PUBLIC WORKS.

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EIGHTEENTH GENERAL REPORT.

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MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS.

(*Ninth Committee.*)

THE HONORABLE JOSIAH FRANCIS, M.P., Chairman.

*Senate.*

Senator Charles Henry Brand.  
Senator Gordon Brown.  
Senator Walter Jackson Cooper.

*House of Representatives.*

Thomas Joseph Collins, Esq., M.P.  
Charles William Frost, Esq., M.P.  
The Hon. Edward James Holloway, M.P.  
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John Lloyd Price, Esq., M.P.

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# THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS.

## EIGHTEENTH GENERAL REPORT.

To His Excellency General the Right Honorable Alexander Gore Arkwright,  
Baron Gowrie, V.C., P.C., G.C.M.G., C.B., D.S.O., Governor-General and  
Commander-in-Chief in and over the Commonwealth of Australia.

May it please Your Excellency :

In accordance with the requirements of Section 11 of the *Commonwealth Public Works Committee Act 1913-1936*, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works has the honour to submit the following report of its proceedings for the year ended 31st December, 1939 :—

### CONSTITUTION AND PERSONNEL.

1. Members of the Ninth Committee were appointed and the names published in the *Commonwealth Gazette*, No. 73 of 9th December, 1937. Since that date there has been no alteration in the personnel of the Committee.

### QUESTION BEFORE THE COMMITTEE.

2. When the Committee presented its last General Report the following project was under consideration, namely :—

Repatriation General Hospital Randwick, New South Wales—Erection of a new hospital.

3. Since then the following matters have been submitted to the Committee for inquiry and report, namely :—

- (a) Erection of Administrative Offices, Darwin, Northern Territory ;
- (b) Erection of a Hostel, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory.

### COMPLETED INQUIRIES.

4. The Committee has dealt with two of these questions and has presented reports in connexion therewith, namely :—

	Estimated cost.
	£
(i) Erection of Administrative Offices, Darwin, Northern Territory ..	60,000
(ii) Erection of Hostel, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory ..	42,400

### SUMMARY OF COMPLETED INQUIRIES.

#### (i) ERECTION OF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES, DARWIN, NORTHERN TERRITORY.

5. This was a proposal to erect on a site which had been acquired by the Commonwealth facing the Esplanade and bounded by McLachlan, Mitchell and Peel streets, Darwin, a modern office building to accommodate Government Officials working in various buildings throughout the town.

6. The building was to be of two storeys and designed on an "H" plan consisting of a central block 156 feet long by 46 feet wide, and two wings each 112 feet long by 40 feet wide. It was to be of steel-frame and concrete construction, with steel roof trusses and a Marseilles pattern tile roof.

7. After making due allowance for corridors, &c., the floor space available for office accommodation would be 8,500 square feet in the central block and 5,095 square feet in each wing—a total of 18,690 square feet, or sufficient accommodation for 85 officials in the central block, and 51 in each wing.

The estimated cost of the proposal was set down at £60,000.

8. While this project was being investigated evidence was obtained that it was proposed to provide an automatic telephone exchange as an annex at the rear of the Administrative Offices. It was intended in the initial stage to provide equipment to serve 300 subscribers, but arrangements could be made without difficulty to cater for a greater number as occasion demanded.

The estimated cost of this proposal was given as £13,900.

9. After due consideration of all aspects of the question, the Committee recommended—
- (a) That more commodious and modern office accommodation be provided as early as practicable.
  - (b) That of the proposed building the central block only be erected at present.
  - (c) That no action be taken to install an air-conditioning system.
  - (d) That eaves and hoods projecting 4 feet from the walls be adopted.
  - (e) That timber be used as sparingly as possible, and that only of the type shown to be definitely white-ant resisting.
  - (f) That metal sashes be used in window frames.
  - (g) That fibrolite louvres be used instead of timber as proposed.
  - (h) That provision be made for lavatories on island blocks.
  - (i) That there is no necessity for the use of non-actinic glass in the windows.
  - (j) That an automatic telephone exchange be installed as proposed.
  - (k) That the exchange building be placed in such a position, and at such a distance from the administrative offices, as to mask that building as little as possible from the prevailing winds.
  - (l) That before any action is taken to implement the report of the Darwin Development Committee, or to take any steps towards the adoption of a long-range scheme for the re-planning of Darwin, an effort should be made to enlist the services of a competent town-planner.

The administrative building as recommended is estimated to cost £32,500.

(ii) ERECTION OF HOSTEL, CANBERRA, AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY.

10. It was represented that urgent need existed for an establishment to house lower-paid public servants, and this proposal, submitted for the consideration of the Committee, was for the erection of a hostel on a site bounded by Canberra-avenue, Empire Circuit, Dominion Circuit and Franklin-street, Forrest, Australian Capital Territory, which would provide accommodation for 130 guests at a tariff not exceeding 36s. a week.

11. The building proposed was to be of two stories, designed on a "W" plan, with a central lounge, dining, kitchen, and staff block, and two wings containing the bedrooms.

It was proposed that the building should be constructed of brick, rendered externally and plastered internally and to be roofed with tiles.

The estimated cost of the proposal, including electric light, power, water and sewerage services, hot water, kitchen refrigeration and heating equipment was set down at £42,400. In addition it was estimated that the cost of furnishing the establishment would involve an amount of £5,500.

12. After hearing the evidence submitted, the Committee selected a new site for the hostel, and requested the preparation of an amended design to suit that site. This being considered satisfactory, the Committee recommended—

- (a) That urgent necessity exists for the provision of more accommodation within the reach of officials in the lower salary ranges.
- (b) That steps be taken as early as practicable to provide accommodation for approximately 130 guests in a hostel of such a class as will admit of the maximum tariff not exceeding 36s. per week.
- (c) That the building be located in the area bounded by Brisbane-avenue, Macquarie-street, Darling-street and Young-street.
- (d) That for the purpose of study, two rooms with facilities for heating be provided.
- (e) That provision for storage of trunks, &c., be made in a less valuable portion of the establishment.
- (f) That the original estimate of £42,400 for the building be not exceeded.
- (g) That the establishment be run without loss to the Commonwealth.

INQUIRY INCOMPLETE.

13. Inquiry in respect of the undermentioned public work is incomplete—

Repatriation General Hospital, Randwick—Erection of a new hospital.

14. A large amount of evidence has been obtained by the Committee in connexion with this proposal which involves the provision of a new hospital of 450 beds at a cost originally estimated at £165,000, but which would now probably be considerably larger. The site of the proposed hospital is vested in the Government of New South Wales, and negotiations between the Commonwealth and the State, with a view to the Commonwealth obtaining a satisfactory title to the land have been proceeding for some time without reaching finality.

15. In an effort to expedite action in the matter a letter was addressed by the Chairman of this Committee to the Minister for Repatriation on the 2nd May, 1939, in the following terms, namely :—

With reference to the resolution carried in the House of Representatives on the 8th December, 1938, requesting this Committee to investigate and report upon a proposal to provide a new hospital at the Repatriation General Hospital, Randwick, I am desired by the Committee to inform you that after visiting the existing institution and hearing the views of the various witnesses examined it is apparent that if the present and prospective needs of patients and staff are to be catered for in a satisfactory manner then additional and more convenient accommodation will be essential.

It was represented to the Committee that in addition to returned soldiers all necessary accommodation and treatment is provided for members of the naval, military and air forces of the Commonwealth, permanent or trainees. With the advance in age of ex-A.I.F. men and the enlarged Defence programme it is anticipated that the numbers requiring treatment will progressively increase so that the question becomes one of increasing urgency.

The Committee, however, feels unable to submit to Parliament a comprehensive report in this matter until it has satisfactory information in regard to the Commonwealth's rights in respect to the land upon which it is proposed to erect a new hospital and fuller details of the building it is proposed to construct.

#### SITE.

In respect of the site it has been adduced in evidence that the Commonwealth is now in enjoyment of a permissive occupancy only, the terms and conditions of occupation being based mainly on letters which passed between the Prime Minister and the Premier of New South Wales in 1928, covering "terms of agreement". One clause provides for the renewal "as occasion requires", and it has been urged on the Committee that as between Governments this might be interpreted as giving the Commonwealth the right to occupy the land as long as it might be required for the treatment of repatriation cases, and that the Commonwealth might safely proceed.

It is within the knowledge of the Committee, however, that in former years one of the State Governments agreed to the Commonwealth erecting a building on State land and just when the Commonwealth was about to commence operations there was a change of Government in the State, and the new Government demanded a sum of £60,000 for the land, which led to the abandonment of the project.

As a basis of title of the Randwick Hospital area my Committee regards the existing arrangements as uncertain and precarious and does not feel disposed to recommend the expenditure of some hundreds of thousands of pounds in permanent improvements on land held under a doubtful right. Moreover, the most effective use of the property might necessitate the demolition or remodelling of certain buildings on the land a course obviously impracticable while these buildings are State property.

In view of the uncertainty as to the Commonwealth's right to the permanent occupation of the property my Committee considers that it cannot proceed further with the consideration of this urgent project until all doubts as to the site are definitely settled.

About eighteen months ago a sub-committee of the Commonwealth Cabinet was empowered to enter into negotiations with the State Government for the acquisition of the fee-simple of the hospital area by the exchange of portion of the old Randwick Rifle Range, but various circumstances have conspired to prevent these negotiations reaching finality. At the present time the State Minister who was engaged in the early negotiations is abroad and the corresponding Commonwealth Ministers have either relinquished office or are engaged on other duties, so that to continue the negotiations on the former basis would probably necessitate opening the business *de novo*. For this reason the Committee recommends for your consideration that the State Government be invited to nominate appropriate State Officials who in conference with corresponding Commonwealth officials might arrive at a basis of exchange which could be recommended to the respective Governments for adoption.

#### BUILDING.

As regards the building proposed to be erected, no plans have been submitted to the Committee to show the class of structure contemplated and no detailed estimates of cost are available. To enable this Committee to furnish Parliament with a report sufficient to so acquaint Members with all the circumstances of the case as to ensure that the Government may rely upon its adoption without adverse criticism, it is urged that instructions be issued to the Department for the preparation forthwith of sketch plans showing—

- (1) Elevation and ground plan of the complete building projected ;
- (2) Elevation and ground plan of the section of that building which it is desired should be provided at once ;
- (3) Layout of the Randwick area showing the position on the site the completed building will occupy and an indication of the first section to be erected.

It is also desired that an estimate be furnished of the cost of the completed building and of the section now recommended.

The Committee was informed in evidence that Ministerial approval had been given to utilize the services of Mr. Leighton Irwin, a well-known hospital architect of Melbourne and Sydney, to assist the Repatriation Commission in its preliminary study of the subject.

The Committee, in view of the statements made that the departmental officials are working to capacity on the large number of defence and other works in prospect, agrees with the recommendation of the Repatriation Commission that it would be of advantage to the Commonwealth to retain the services of Mr. Irwin as Consultant. He has specialized in hospital architecture and equipment, and he might with advantage be engaged as Consultant in connexion with the planning and layout of this hospital.

It is respectfully urged that you give this matter your careful and immediate attention, with a view to plans and estimates of cost being prepared and transmitted to this Committee as early as possible.

(Sgd.) JOS. FRANCIS, Chairman,

Subsequently the Committee sought and obtained an interview with the Minister for Repatriation, at which the Minister traversed the correspondence which had passed between the Commonwealth and State Governments, explained the difficulties which had arisen, the stage which the negotiations had reached, and promised to endeavour to expedite action in the matter.

No definite result having followed, a further communication was forwarded to the Minister for Repatriation on 8th December, 1939, as follows :—

REPATRIATION GENERAL HOSPITAL, RANDWICK, NEW SOUTH WALES.

I refer to my letter to you of 2nd May last, and to the interview which representatives of this Committee had with you in Sydney on 11th August, 1939, seeking your good offices in an effort to arrive at finality on the question of a title to the site on which the above building stands.

After exhaustive inquiries the Committee is satisfied that a new hospital is necessary, and that a commencement should be made as early as practicable in the provision of a permanent section of, say, 200 beds. The existing situation is suitable, but the Committee is not able to present its report to Parliament until the question of the tenure of the site is settled, and the Committee has had an opportunity of scrutinizing the plans of the building proposed—both of which matters are awaiting decision by the Government.

In August, negotiations were proceeding with the State Government of New South Wales for the exchange of the fee simple of the hospital site for part of the Randwick Rifle Range area, but no intimation has yet been received from you, as promised, as to the result of such negotiations. From other sources the Committee has learned that, owing to the fact that Australia is now at war, it is unlikely that the Defence Department will part with any of its lands and it is assumed that the exchange proposal must be regarded as abandoned. To acquire the fee simple of the Randwick Hospital site, the Commonwealth could resort to compulsory acquisition under the Lands Acquisition Act, but that course would probably evoke a claim for something like £70,000.

The weight of evidence obtained by the Committee is to the effect that Randwick is the most suitable and convenient site for a Repatriation Hospital, and while the fee simple of the land is to be preferred, still, having regard to present urgent needs, and to the fact that the outcome of the present war will assuredly ultimately mean a definite increase in the number of patients to be treated by the Repatriation Commission, the Committee is of the opinion that the Commonwealth Government might properly proceed with the erection of necessary hospital accommodation if it could obtain a tenure of the land which, although short of freehold, would give reasonable security.

It is therefore recommended that the Commonwealth Government should approach the State Government of New South Wales with a request that the State Government agree to lease to the Commonwealth the whole of the land now occupied by the Repatriation Commission and utilized for hospital purposes, for a period of 25 years, with the right of renewal for such further period, as the Commonwealth may need same for the purpose of providing medical treatment for members of the Commonwealth Forces who served in the present or any previous war.

Upon a satisfactory solution of the site question being secured, the Committee would reiterate its request of 2nd May, 1939, that it be furnished, as early as practicable, with sketch plans showing—

- (1) Elevation and ground plan of the complete building projected ;
- (2) Elevation and ground plan of the section of that building which it is desired should be provided at once ;
- (3) Lay-out of the Randwick area showing the position on the site the completed building will occupy, and an indication of the first section to be erected ;

and that an estimate be furnished of the cost of the completed building, and of a section to accommodate 200 beds, which, it has been represented, would be sufficient to meet present urgent needs.

As the completion of its work on this project has been considerably delayed through the inability of the respective Governments to arrive at agreement in respect of the site, I should be grateful if you would give this matter your careful and early attention.

(Sgd.) JOS. FRANCIS, Chairman.

WORKS NOT REFERRED FOR INVESTIGATION.

16. Section 15 (1) of the Commonwealth Public Works Committee Act provides that—

The Minister or any Member of the House of Representatives may move that any proposed public work, the estimated cost of which exceeds £25,000, shall be referred by that House to the Committee for report,

but complaints have been voiced in the Senate and in the House of Representatives that the Government is embarking on many costly works concerning which the Parliament has had no detailed information. It was pointed out that the Public Works Committee was constituted specifically for the purpose of collecting and supplying to Parliament details of works for which Parliament was asked to vote funds so that Parliament should exercise more direct control over public expenditure.

17. All members of Parliament must agree that there is urgent necessity for Parliament to be kept continually advised of the manner in which the money it appropriates is being expended, but failing investigation and report by the Public Works Committee members have not the opportunity, nor have Ministers the time to scrutinize the details of such expenditure and satisfy themselves that the work is necessary, and is planned with due regard to efficiency and economy.

During a period of abnormal expenditure it is all the more imperative that there should be the closest scrutiny of new Government works.

The Committee believes that all Commonwealth works of magnitude—excepting only those where secrecy is desirable for military reasons—should be subjected to examination by a Parliamentary Committee, and is of opinion that if this were done, public confidence would be assured and any possible suspicion allayed.

18. Attention was drawn in the House, to the immense Capital Expenditure Programme for the year 1939-40, which involves a total liability of £43,976,025, embracing—

	£	£
Department of Defence .. .. .	33,941,420	
Department of Supply and Development .. .. .	4,077,794	
Department of Civil Aviation .. .. .	718,211	
Postmaster-General's Department .. .. .	3,305,585	
Commonwealth Railways .. .. .	153,000	
Territories of the Commonwealth .. .. .	1,052,000	
Council for Scientific and Industrial Research .. .. .	115,300	
Australian War Memorial .. .. .	137,715	
Other Departments .. .. .	475,000	
		43,976,025

and it was urged that the Public Works Committee should be directed to investigate at least the more important of the works projects included in this sum so that Parliament might be informed of what was required and what will be achieved by the expenditure proposed.

#### EXTENSION OF SCOPE OF THE COMMITTEE.

19. It is within the knowledge of the Committee that various bodies are being set up in order to assist the Government in dealing with the many and intricate problems which arise in connexion with the prosecution of the war.

Much work could be done usefully and economically by this Committee, which has the machinery and personnel available for making investigations. The Victorian Parliament recently enlarged the powers and duties of the State Public Works Committee to enable it to—

“Inquire into and report upon any proposal or matter which the Governor-in-Council thinks proper to refer to the Committee”.

It is recommended that the Commonwealth Government should consider taking steps to enlarge the scope of this Committee on similar lines.

JOS. FRANCIS,  
Chairman.

Office of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works,  
Parliament House, Canberra,  
8th March, 1940.