

1943-44.

DEPT. OF THE SENATE	
No.	1307
Presented	20 JUL 1944
<i>John Edwards</i>	
CLERK OF THE SENATE	

THE PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON PUBLIC WORKS.

NINETEENTH GENERAL
REPORT.

By Authority:

L. F. JOHNSTON, Commonwealth Government Printer, Canberra.
(Printed in Australia.)

F.3540.

THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS.

NINETEENTH 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 pursuance of 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:—

1. The Committee's Eighteenth General Report covered activities for the year ended 31st December, 1939. Partly owing to the outbreak of war, few projects have been remitted to the Committee for investigation since then, and a hiatus has occurred in the Committee's operations; this report therefore is designed to cover the period from 1st January, 1940, to the date of the adjournment of the Seventeenth Parliament on 30th March, 1944.

NINTH COMMITTEE.

2. Subsequent to the presentation of the Eighteenth General Report, the Ninth Committee dealt with two projects submitted to it for investigation, namely:—

	Estimated cost.
(a) Repairs and Improvements to the Wharf at Port Augusta, S.A. . .	36,500
(b) Erection of Repatriation Hospital, Randwick, N.S.W. . .	189,750

SUMMARY OF INQUIRIES.

(a) REPAIRS AND IMPROVEMENTS TO THE WHARF AT PORT AUGUSTA, S.A.

3. The wharf was originally built by the South Australian Government in 1886 at a cost of £37,931 and under the *Northern Territory Surrender Act 1903*, was handed over to the Commonwealth Government on 1st January, 1914.

Under the provisions of the *Commonwealth Railways Act 1917-1936*, the Commonwealth Railways Commissioner is required to maintain the wharf in a state of efficiency.

4. As inspection had revealed several weaknesses, a proposal was submitted for the renewal of approximately 310 piles, the renewal of timber above and below water, the widening of the wharf by about 4 feet to protect the toe of the stone-pitched bank, and the strengthening of the design of the wharf to enable it to carry a load of approximately 500 lb. to the square foot.

5. The estimated cost as submitted to Parliament was set down at £34,700 and the time fixed for completion twelve months from date of commencement. During the taking of evidence it was explained that an additional amount was later included for labour costs, which brought the estimate up to £36,500.

Recommendations.

6. After carefully analysing all the evidence obtained in the matter, the Committee submitted a series of recommendations as follow:—

- That repairs are urgently necessary and should be put in hand without delay;
- That the most satisfactory scheme is that providing for the renewal of the structure and the widening of the wharf by four feet;
- That timber piles be used;
- That timber decking will meet all requirements;
- That fendering be omitted;
- That the work to be undertaken be carried out by day labour;
- That the dredging to be undertaken by the South Australian Authorities will provide ample depth of water for ships likely to be using the wharf;
- That no good purpose would be served or material economy effected by any shortening of the length of the present wharf;
- That the wharf is conveniently situated, and, with the work now proposed to be undertaken, will provide all essential facilities, and generally may be regarded as being quite satisfactory.

(b) ERECTION OF REPATRIATION HOSPITAL, RANDWICK, N.S.W.

7. The institution known as the Prince of Wales Repatriation General Hospital at Randwick, N.S.W. occupies portion of an area of 183 acres at the corner of Avoca and High streets, Randwick, on which were buildings formerly used as an asylum for destitute children. The land is vested in the Government of New South Wales. It was from time to time leased to the Repatriation Commission, and the last written lease expired on 31st December, 1937. Subsequently it has been used by the Commonwealth under a permissive occupancy.

8. To provide accommodation for the increasing influx of patients to be treated, a number of detached wards of timber and fibro walls and corrugated fibro roofing was erected, together with laboratory, nurses' quarters, operating theatre, laundry, and a great many other subsidiary buildings—all of a light construction

MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS.

(Eleventh Committee.)

ROWLAND JAMES, Esq., M.P. (Chairman).

Senate.

Senator William Edward Aylett.
Senator Charles Henry Brand.
Senator Charles Adcock Lamp.

House of Representatives.

William Patrick Conelan, Esq., M.P.
Honorable Eric John Harrison, M.P.
Daniel Mulcahy, Esq., M.P.
George James Rankin, Esq., M.P.
Honorable Sir Frederick Harold Stewart, M.P.

and of a temporary nature. So the position was that on the area occupied by the Repatriation Commission, the permanent buildings mainly of stone construction, and comprising the Main Administrative Block, Kitchen Block, X-ray Department, Sisters' Quarters, and Medical Superintendent's Quarters, remained the property of the State, whilst the other buildings as indicated above, mostly of a temporary nature, are the property of the Commonwealth.

9. With the increasing need for accommodation, and owing to the inadequacy of the existing hospital the Committee was asked to investigate a proposal for the erection of a new hospital to contain 450 beds. The estimated cost of the proposal was set down at £189,750.

10. During the course of its investigations, the Committee informed the Minister for Repatriation:—

"As a basis of title of the Randwick Hospital area the 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 re-modelling of certain buildings on the land—a course obviously impracticable while those buildings are State property.

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

11. Protracted negotiations between the Commonwealth and State Governments followed without concluding a satisfactory agreement in regard to the site.

12. Meanwhile the war had broken out and the Government was faced with the possibility of having to construct a large hospital for defence personnel as well as the Repatriation hospital at Randwick, and War Cabinet appointed a special committee to report as to the possibility of constructing one hospital on an appropriate site in New South Wales which could be used for defence purposes during the war, and for repatriation purposes after the war.

13. On 12th August, 1940, the Public Works Committee was informed of the War Cabinet's decision to acquire an area of land at Yarralla, Concord, N.S.W., and to erect thereon a permanent hospital, plus additional hutments. It was added that the intention of the War Cabinet was that as soon as possible after the war the Repatriation Hospital at Randwick be moved to Yarralla.

Recommendation.

14. In view of these circumstances, the Committee reported to Parliament under date 14th August, 1940, that the necessity for the provision of extensive permanent accommodation for Repatriation purposes at Randwick no longer existed.

15. The Ninth Committee ceased to exist on the dissolution of the Fifteenth Parliament, on 27th August, 1940.

TENTH COMMITTEE.

16. Members of the Tenth Committee were appointed on 11th December, 1940, and their names were published in the *Commonwealth Gazette*, No. 253, of 19th December, 1940.

17. Prior to entering upon their duties each member made and subscribed the Declaration required by the *Commonwealth Public Works Committee Act 1913-1936*.

18. At the first meeting of the Committee, Senator O. H. Brand was elected Chairman and Mr. R. James, M.P., Vice-Chairman.

19. During its existence the following matters were referred to this Committee for investigation and report, namely:—

	Estimated cost.
(a) Erection of Abattoirs, Canberra ..	55,000
(b) Erection of Temporary Office Buildings, Canberra ..	80,000
(c) Newnes and Baerami Shale Oil Proposals—	
Newnes	1,118,000
Baerami	2,914,000

SUMMARY OF INQUIRIES.

(a) ERECTION OF ABATTOIRS, CANBERRA.

20. This was a proposal for the provision of modern abattoirs of conventional standard. The building was to be of brick with concrete floors and walls; the roof of timber with a few structural steel members and covered with corrugated asbestos. The two chilling rooms proposed were to be insulated and cooled by means of four separate units.

Provision was made for the accommodation of the men employed at the abattoirs, together with laundry, shower room, lavatory accommodation, dressing room, individual lockers, and a dining room. An office for the Superintendent and one for the Meat Inspector, with separate lavatory accommodation, were also to be provided. The various pens for cattle, sheep and pigs were proposed to be roofed over to provide protection from the weather while awaiting slaughter.

The estimated cost was given at £55,000.

Site.

21. The site proposed comprises an area up to 10 acres, situated between the Molonglo River and the railway line at Cooma, adjacent to the railway line from Canberra to Queanbeyan, and is distant about 1½ miles on the Canberra road from Queanbeyan and 6½ miles from Civic Centre.

Recommendations.

22. After hearing all the evidence submitted the Committee recommended—

- That the existing abattoirs are out of date and inadequate to supply Canberra's growing demand for beef, mutton, pork, &c., and should be abandoned;
- That new abattoirs be provided but that the cost be restricted to £36,000.
- That failing the practicability of (b), the advisability of securing meat supplies for the Territory from other approved abattoirs be explored;
- That on the completion of the abattoirs any meat killed there and branded with the requisite stamp be eligible for sale in the Territory;
- That the control of the abattoirs and the distribution of meat in the Territory be placed under the control of a Departmental Committee and that such Committee be obliged to submit to Parliament each year a profit and loss account showing the operations of the establishment.

(b) ERECTION OF TEMPORARY OFFICE BUILDINGS, CANBERRA.

23. This proposal aimed at the construction of two new Secretariat buildings, each to contain two floors with necessary accommodation in the basement for boiler rooms, cleaners' rooms, &c. A net office space of 40,000 square feet was to be provided, plus a Minister's suite of 800 square feet. The specification provided for brick walls, wooden floors, and concrete foundations. It was stated accommodation would be provided for between 300 and 400 officials.

The estimated cost was set down at £80,000.

Site.

24. The sites suggested were on the slopes of Camp Hill in line with the existing East and West Blocks, and immediately to the rear of Provisional Parliament House.

Recommendations.

25. After duly considering all the arguments adduced the Committee recommended—

- That the erection of further temporary buildings in Canberra is inadvisable, and that any additional office accommodation required be provided in a permanent structure;
- That advantage be taken of the existence of the foundations for the Permanent Administrative Offices to erect thereon a section of that building sufficient for present purposes and which later could be incorporated in the permanent structure;
- That as an alternative the completion of the Melbourne Block at Civic Centre be proceeded with.

(c) NEWNES AND BAERAMI SHALE OIL PROPOSALS.

26. The most widely known of our deposits of shale, and the most extensive yet discovered in New South Wales is that known as the Newnes-Capertee deposit. For some years efforts have been made to extract the oil contained in this deposit with varying success.

27. In 1937, Parliament ratified the National Oil Proprietary Limited Agreement Act under which capital was to be provided by the Commonwealth and New South Wales Government, and the National Oil Proprietary Limited to the extent of £668,000, with the object of producing 6,000,000 gallons of motor spirit and 19,000 tons of fuel oil per annum.

Further sums were made available at subsequent dates until the venture was capitalized at £1,800,000, of which the Commonwealth had provided £1,300,000.

28. Later, estimates submitted by the company and the Government directors on the Board indicated that a further amount of £1,137,634 was needed to bring the venture to the stage at which an output of approximately 17,000,000 gallons of crude oil, and 9,350,000 gallons of petrol per annum might be expected.

New Proposal.

29. By arrangement with the Government of the United States of America, and at the request of the Commonwealth Government, a Mission of American experts arrived in Australia towards the end of 1942, to inquire into the development of liquid fuel from deposits of shale in this country.

30. The proposal submitted by them was to accelerate the present scheme of production at Newnes (now known as Glen Davis) to 17,000,000 gallons of crude oil per annum, and, by the addition of plant, to bring the total production to 39,200,000 gallons of crude oil per annum from which would be produced approximately 29,400,000 gallons of petrol per annum, together with diesel oil, gas oil, wax, fuel oil and coke.

31. In addition, it was recommended that the shale deposits at Baerami should be developed to produce 37,500,000 gallons of crude oil per annum, from which would be extracted 22,303,920 gallons of petrol, together with other products.

Estimated Cost.

32. The estimated cost of the additional plant and capital required at Glen Davis was set down at £1,118,000.

Of this amount it was explained that it was expected that the United States Government would make available under Lend-Lease Agreement machinery to the value of £500,000.

33. The opening up of the Baerami deposit was estimated to cost £2,014,000 of which it was expected that the United States Government would make available under Lend-Lease Agreement machinery to the value of £600,000.

Total Capital Cost.

34. In submitting its report, the Committee drew attention to the capital cost involved in the Glen Davis project alone—

	£
Already advanced by the Commonwealth	1,300,000
Additional amount approved to enable output of petrol to reach 9,350,000 gallons per annum	1,137,634
Additional Commonwealth contribution to Fish River Water Supply Scheme	239,637
To increase petrol production to 22,400,000 gallons per annum as proposed by the American Mission ..	1,118,000
The capital provided by the Commonwealth at Glen Davis will then amount to	3,795,171
In addition the New South Wales Government has advanced	166,000
And the National Oil Proprietary Limited has invested	325,000
Making the total capital in the venture	4,286,171

How the Committee Viewed the Project.

35. In the body of its report the Committee pointed out:—

"During the course of its inquiries it was increasingly borne in on the Committee that this project could not be considered from the ordinary commercial standpoint, but must be regarded from a national point of view. The Committee has formed a definite conclusion that petrol of a satisfactory quality can be produced from Glen Davis shale, but the cost, having regard to the loss of Customs revenue, would be at least twice that of imported petrol. On economic grounds, the establishment of the industry is not warranted, and it could be justified only on the importance for national considerations of developing an Australian oil industry. The extent to which Australia can afford to exploit its own oil resources at this cost must depend upon national policy, and would appear to be outside the scope of this Committee's inquiry."

Recommendations.

36. After considering all aspects of the question the Committee recommended:—

- (a) That attention be concentrated on increasing the output at Glen Davis, and no action be taken to develop Baerami for the present;
- (b) That a pilot retort of the Renco type be erected at Glen Davis for trial under working conditions;
- (c) That such parts of the equipment for the Renco retort as are available in Australia be impressed, unless utilized in essential war work;
- (d) That approval be given to the expenditure of £402,537 as the Commonwealth's quota towards the completion of the Fish River Water Supply Scheme;
- (e) That an endeavour be made to induce the New South Wales Government to bear a greater proportion of the expenditure involved in this proposal;
- (f) That necessary action be taken to accelerate the development of the housing scheme at Glen Davis;
- (g) That on the termination of the agreement, about September, 1948, for the disposal of the Glen Davis petrol in bulk to Pool Petroleum Proprietary Limited, the matter of marketing Glen Davis petrol be reviewed;
- (h) That preliminary overtures be opened with Commonwealth Oil Refineries Limited to secure their participation in the distribution of Glen Davis products;
- (i) That fresh arrangements be entered into with the National Oil Proprietary Limited to give the Commonwealth a proportionate share of profits if and when the venture shall have become a successful commercial proposition;
- (j) That Parliament authorize this Committee to extend its inquiry as to the possibility of developing other shale deposits in Australia, and, at the same time investigate the possibility of extracting oil from coal;
- (k) That provided machinery to the value of £500,000 is supplied under the Lend-Lease Agreement, all arrangements be made to obtain the equipment necessary for the development of Glen Davis for the production of 39,900,000 gallons of crude oil per annum to produce 32,400,000 gallons of petrol per annum, but that the order for Renco retorts be not decided upon pending the receipt of reports that the pilot plant to be installed at Glen Davis has proved that the Renco retort is suitable;
- (l) That the Minister in charge be furnished with a progress report at least quarterly, setting out work done, particulars of production and prices received for products.

LULL IN COMMITTEE'S ACTIVITIES.

37. On account of lack of references received from Parliament, no meetings of the Committee were held from 22nd August, 1941, to 18th February, 1943. During this period the Secretary of the Committee was seconded for duty as Secretary, Man-power and Resources Survey Committee, and on the termination of its activities, as Secretary, War Expenditure Committee.

The Clerk to the Committee was absorbed into the general staff of the Joint House Department.

38. On the dissolution of the Sixteenth Parliament on 7th July, 1943, the Tenth Committee ceased to exist.

ELEVENTH COMMITTEE.

39. Members of the Eleventh Committee were appointed in the Senate on 30th September, 1943, and in the House of Representatives on 7th October, 1943. Their names were published in the *Commonwealth Gazette*, No. 225, of 21st October, 1943.

40. At the first meeting of the Committee on 14th October, 1943, members made and subscribed the Declaration required by the *Commonwealth Public Works Committee Act 1913-1936*, and Mr. R. James, M.P., was elected Chairman and Senator C. A. Lamp, Vice-chairman.

41. Since its appointment, the following works have been referred to the Committee for investigation and report, namely:—

- (a) Additions to the Government Offices known as "West Block", Canberra;
- (b) Erection of Arbitration Court Building, Melbourne;
- (c) Erection of a new Hostel, Canberra;
- (d) Baerami Shale Oil Proposal.

COMPLETED INQUIRIES.

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

(a) Additions to the Government Offices known as "West Block", Canberra	Estimated cost. £
(b) Erection of Arbitration Court, Melbourne	64,000
	118,500
	172,500

SUMMARY OF COMPLETED INQUIRIES.

(a) ADDITIONS TO "WEST BLOCK", CANBERRA.

43. With the growth of departments and the increase in the number of officials accommodated in the Secretariats, these buildings originally intended only for skeleton staffs for a limited period, have proved quite inadequate, and resort has been had to various expedients to meet the difficulty. Corridors and balconies have been converted into offices, small additions have been made, but even this has not given the desired relief, and private premises have been leased in various parts of the city.

44. The proposal submitted for consideration aimed at the extension of West Block towards the south-west in the form of a wing comprising first, second and part of third floor level with, and in architectural harmony with, the existing building.

The total floor area within the external walls was proposed to be 20,610 square feet, and would provide accommodation for about 120 persons.

45. The estimated cost of the proposal as submitted to the Committee was set down at—

General building works	£
Preparation and levelling of site	37,384
Hot water heating	3,754
Pneumatic tube service	5,453
Carrier system	650
Spiral staircases between first and second floors	1,500
Sound proofing of ceilings	200
Extra drainage, wash basins, &c.	800
Small service lifts between first and second floors	200
Electrical work	30
	4,000
	54,000

Recommendations.

46. After inspecting the premises and considering the evidence submitted the Committee recommended:—

- (a) That steps be taken at the earliest possible moment to ameliorate present overcrowded conditions in the Department of External Affairs;
- (b) That the most satisfactory prospect of obtaining reasonable and early relief is by the extension of West Block as proposed;
- (c) That high priority be allotted to the project and assistance secured from the Allied Works Council to enable the extension to be completed with expedition;
- (d) That the approval given by Parliament in 1936 for the erection of Permanent Administrative Offices be implemented as soon as practicable;
- (e) That a complete survey of the requirements of all Departments concerned be made by an inter-departmental committee with a view to the allotment of the space that will be available in West Block amongst all Departments;
- (f) That additional space is desirable for research work in the Department of External Affairs, and it is suggested this be taken into consideration by the proposed departmental committee;
- (g) That the suggestion that some accommodation be provided in Canberra on the lines of Postal Institutes in capital cities does not come within the scope of the present reference, but is a subject that might well engage the attention of the appropriate authority.

(b) ERECTION OF ARBITRATION COURT BUILDING, MELBOURNE.

47. This was a proposal to erect in Melbourne a building to accommodate the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration which for some time has been functioning in rented premises.

48. An area of land having a frontage of 66 ft. 5½ in. to Little Bourke-street by a depth of 125 ft. along Little Queen-street and facing the High Court Building was purchased by the Commonwealth in 1939 for the sum of £12,500.

On this block it was proposed to erect a building of reinforced concrete frame on a stone base, and with cream brick veneer to north, west, and for approximately 20 feet of the east elevations.

49. Two alternative plans were submitted for the consideration of the Committee. Scheme 1 provided for a building with basement, ground floor, mezzanine floor, and first, second, and third floors to cost approximately £70,000. Scheme 2 contemplated, in addition, fourth, fifth and sixth floors, which would be available as general Commonwealth Offices, and was estimated to cost £118,500.

Recommendations.

50. After inspecting the existing accommodation and hearing the evidence of a representative cross-section of the persons using or associated with the Court, the Committee recommended:—

- (a) That steps be taken to provide more suitable accommodation for the Arbitration Court in Melbourne as early as practicable;
- (b) That provision be made in the new building for four court rooms;

- (c) That the building to be erected be taken to the full height of six stories allowed in the area in which it is located;
- (d) That a reference library be provided in the building;
- (e) That a librarian be appointed whose services would be available to parties appearing before the Court;
- (f) That ample accommodation be provided in the Court for representatives appearing before the Court;
- (g) That the Judges' Bench in the main Court be of a size capable of accommodating five Judges if necessary;
- (h) That a cloak room be provided;
- (i) That the second floor be replanned to admit of better access to the general office.

INQUIRIES INCOMPLETE.

51. Inquiries in respect of the undermentioned public works are incomplete:—

Erection of a new Hostel, Canberra.
Baerami Shale Oil Proposal.

WORKS NOT REFERRED FOR INVESTIGATION.

Attention has on a previous occasion been drawn to the fact that complaints have been voiced in the Senate and in the House of Representatives that the Government has embarked on costly public works concerning which Parliament has had no detailed information.

Under the original Commonwealth Public Works Committee Act, No. 20 of 1913, which was modelled on the New South Wales act, it was mandatory for the Government to refer to the Committee for investigation and report to Parliament all public works the estimated completed cost of which was £25,000 or over, excepting such works for Naval or Military Defence as might be exempted by Order in Council from the operation of the act.

In 1936 the act was amended and the mandatory clause replaced by section 15 (1.) of the present act which provides that—

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

This in effect completely nullifies the original purpose of the act, which was that Parliament should be kept continually advised of the manner in which the money it appropriates is being expended, and practically subordinates the activities of the Committee to the will of the Government rather than to the wishes of the Parliament.

It is obvious that members have not the opportunity, nor have Ministers the time to scrutinize the details of all such expenditure and satisfy themselves that the work is necessary and is planned with due regard to efficiency and economy.

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

AMENDMENT OF THE ACT.

It is now over 30 years since the original Act was passed, and conditions and money values which have changed in three decades suggest that the time has arrived when the act and regulations might reasonably be overhauled with the object of bringing them more into keeping with modern conditions.

RETIREMENT OF SECRETARY TO THE COMMITTEE.

The Committee, having received an intimation that the secretary, Mr. Gerald Whiteford, is about to retire from the Public Service, desires to place on record its appreciation of the excellent manner in which he has carried out the arduous duties associated with the activities of the Committee and the interpretation of the act.

Many intricate and difficult matters have been referred to this and previous Committees by the Parliament, and his courtesy, efficiency and great knowledge

of the detailed work of the Committee have greatly facilitated its deliberations, materially assisting it in making many valuable recommendations from time to time.

After service with the State of New South Wales from 1897 and with various Commonwealth Departments from 1901, Mr. Whiteford was appointed as secretary to the Committee at its inception in 1915, and this Committee expresses its regret that his long and honorable career is coming to a close.

R. James
R. JAMES, Chairman.

Office of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on
Public Works,

Parliament House, Canberra.

19th May, 1944.