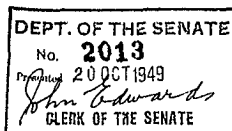


THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS



R E P O R T

relating to the

proposed erection of a

COMMONWEALTH OFFICE BUILDING

at

H O B A R T,

T A S M A N I A.

For Senator ^{O'Sullivan} Nash -

I bring up the Report of the
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works,
relating to the following work :-

Proposed erection of a Commonwealth Office
Building at Hobart, Tasmania -

and I move that the Report be printed.

20 OCT 1949

Passed

COMMONWEALTH OFFICES, HOBART.

R E P O R T.

C O N T E N T S.

S E C T I O N I.

I N T R O D U C T I O N.

Introduction

Paragraph in Report.

1

S E C T I O N II.

P R O P O S A L R E F E R R E D.

The Original Plans

2

S E C T I O N III.

T H E P R E S E N T P R O P O S A L.

The Amended Plans

4

S E C T I O N IV.

T H E C O M M I T T E E ' S I N V E S T I G A T I O N S.

General

7

The Building -

Design

8

Composition of the building

10

Light Courts

11

Basement

17

Lower Ground Floor

18

Ground Floor

19

The Upper Floors

20

Height of the building

21

Construction

22

Architectural finishes

23

Mechanical services -

Mechanical ventilation

24

Heating

25

Lifts

28

Lighting

29

Sewerage

30

Necessity for the building

31

Present Accommodation

33

The Taxation staffs

34

Commercial needs

35

The Site

37

The Air terminal

40

Amenities

47

The estimated Cost

49

The Effect on housing

50

S E C T I O N V.

T H E C O M M I T T E E ' S R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S.

List of decisions

53

COMMONWEALTH OFFICES, HOBART.

====00====

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 an Office Building to house Commonwealth Departments in Hobart, has the honour to report as follows:-

S E C T I O N I

INTRODUCTION.

1. Some years ago the necessity to provide a block of offices to house Commonwealth officials became urgent, and, in 1944 a site in Collins Street, known as Hamilton's building was acquired for the purpose. Before the scheme had been developed, however, it was decided to provide for a larger proposal, and a further acquisition was made of the adjoining site, at the corner of Collins and Argyle Streets, known as Tregear's Building.

S E C T I O N II.

THE PROPOSAL REFERRED.

THE ORIGINAL PLANS.

2. The proposal for office accommodation on the larger site was developed, and plans were prepared for a modern building comprising Basement, Lower Ground Floor, Ground Floor, and Six upper floors. The proposal was referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works on 1st July, 1949, the Minister for Works and Housing explaining that the building would be steel-framed, encased in concrete, with reinforced concrete floors and beams, and the two street facades faced with Tasmanian sandstone with granite base.

3. The building was planned to provide 90,000 sq.ft. of usable office space, and the estimated cost was stated to be £809,040.

S E C T I O N III.

THE PRESENT PROPOSAL.

THE AMENDED PLANS

4. When the Committee took its first evidence on the subject, on 17th September, 1949, an amended set of plans was submitted setting out provisions for a similar building on the site chosen, but including certain rearrangements of essential services, such as lifts, toilets, stairs, etc., and alterations to

the Ground Floor plan to allow for the accommodation of Trans-Australia Airlines on that floor. Amongst the facilities required for the airline terminal it was necessary to plan a bus dock to take the passenger buses and freight vehicles, and this was added to the plans.

5. The building is planned to accommodate the staffs of the Commonwealth Government Departments at present in rented premises in various parts of the city, and the space to be provided will be sufficient to house 1130 persons.

6. The amendments to the plan do not affect the estimated cost, the total of which was set down as £809,040, including the building and engineering services. The time required to complete the building was estimated at approximately $3\frac{1}{2}$ years from the date of approval of the proposal.

SECTION III.

THE COMMITTEE'S INVESTIGATIONS.

GENERAL.

7. The Committee considered the original plans and took evidence in Melbourne from officers of the Department of Works and Housing who submitted the amended plans with detailed explanations of the items included in the altered proposal. Evidence was also taken from other officials concerned with the project in Melbourne and Hobart, and from representatives of various organisations in Tasmania. A visit was paid to Hobart in order to secure the evidence desired and to inspect the site, the present buildings upon it, and the conditions under which the staffs are being housed.

THE BUILDING.

Design.

8. The general design of the building, as presented by the plans and illustrated by the perspective, indicates a structure of modern and pleasing appearance, compact and useful for its purpose, but relieved of plainness by slight variation in line and an interesting fenestration. The truncation of the corner, while being of assistance to traffic in the busy streets, makes the amended plan compare more than favourably in appearance with the original one.

9. The Committee is satisfied that the design is suitable and will provide a structure worthy of the city and convenient for the members of the staff as

well as the public who will use it.

Composition of the Building.

10. The building comprises a basement, lower ground floor, ground floor and six upper floors, with a building area of 16,370 sq.ft. being 87.6% of the site, and having a total net usable office area of 91,680 sq. ft.

11. Light Courts - The plans include two main light courts. Court No. 1, rising from the level of the floor of the Lower Ground Floor, is of an area of 1,683 sq.ft. and Court No.2, rising from the level of the ceiling of the Ground Floor, is of an area of 640 sq.ft. in all a total of 2,323 sq. ft. or 12.4% of the site area. At the rear of the building it is proposed to demolish the existing old two storey structure in the P.M.G. yard, and thus obtain full day-light source from this area.

12. The question of the provision of light courts was discussed at some length with independent architects and witnesses, and the suggestion was put forward that the considerable area they cover could be much more profitably used under present day building conditions. It was pointed out that, in a building of the width planned in this proposal, very little light will reach the inner offices, and partitions and passages will cut down the illumination very considerably. The natural light in Hobart is very frequently poor, and artificial light will be necessary in many of the offices all the time, and even in the outer offices in the late afternoons and dull days. In addition it is pointed out that many modern buildings are being constructed to make use of space formerly regarded as essential for light courts. Fluorescent lighting, coupled with mechanical or other types of adequate ventilation will provide conditions which are generally more comfortable and healthy than those it is possible to attain in many of the spaces where natural lighting is attempted.

13. In Hobart at the present time, it was stated in evidence, a building is being erected for the Commonwealth Bank, and light courts are being entirely eliminated, the lifts and other services being placed near the walls which have no windows, while fluorescent lighting and ventilation provide for the comfort of occupants. The city by-laws have been amended recently to permit use of artificial light throughout city buildings.

14. The proposal for the Commonwealth Offices provides for the two light courts on the sides facing adjoining buildings, and, as it appears likely that these buildings will not be raised from their present height for many years, it would be possible to use light from those sides if desired for the upper floors, without the light courts.

15. From the aesthetic point of view nothing would be lost by building over the spaces provided for the light courts, and no alteration would be made to the facade, because the courts are on the sides of the structure which face adjoining buildings. From the psychological aspect little would be lost also, as the view to be obtained from the offices looking on to the light courts would be depressing and restricted by the adjacent walls, though a more distant view would be obtainable from some of the upper floor windows until the neighbouring buildings are increased in height. It is also evident that elimination of the light courts would allow through access, and more efficient use of various parts of the building.

16. Further evidence was taken from the Director of Architecture, who is responsible for planning the building, and he expressed the view that the light courts should be retained, and that it would be unwise to eliminate sources of natural light and ventilation, which would be particularly useful in case of breakdown of the equipment in the building. The Committee considered these views together with all the other factors involved, but it is not convinced that the light courts will be of very considerable value in the Hobart area, though the position might be viewed differently in cities further north on the mainland. It is impressed with the fact that, apart from the necessity to make best use of the site, artificial light and ventilation will be necessary, and is actually planned for most of the rooms, so that extension of those provisions to the remainder of the rear portions of the building will not cause great difficulty. It is therefore recommended that, in view of the frequent necessity to use artificial light in the Hobart climate, and the fact that mechanical ventilation is already planned for the building, the two light courts should be eliminated and adequate fluorescent lighting and ventilation ensured. It is also recommended that, when subdivision of floors is being planned, it should be carried out in such a manner that, in case of a breakdown, doors may be opened and a certain

amount of through ventilation obtained from the street frontages.

17. The Basement - The basement extends over the whole of the site and will be used for defence protection, car parking, and for the installation of the necessary mechanical equipment servicing the whole structure. The inclusion of a car park in the basement is regarded by all the witnesses as essential for a large modern building in such a busy section of the city, and it was calculated that a great deal more space would probably be required to deal adequately with the vehicles used by the occupants of the building.

18. The Lower Ground Floor - As well as an additional amount of garage space and areas to allow for technical requirements, this floor provides for 4,310 sq.ft. of office space and storage room for files.

19. The Ground Floor - The total usable area of the Ground Floor is 12,070 sq.ft. and it is planned to devote 4,920 sq.ft. of this to house T.A.A. offices and associated services, while 7,150 sq.ft. will be set aside for office area for Departments associated with the public. As several important departments, whose activities place them in constant touch with the public, will be accommodated in this building, the allocation of space on the Ground Floor will have to be carefully planned. In this connection the space proposed for T.A.A. can probably be revised as a result of the recommendation made by the Committee in a later paragraph referring to the air terminal.

20. The Upper Floors - All floors above the Ground Floor - the First to Sixth Floors - have an effective usable area of 12,550 sq.ft. each, providing a combined total of 75,300 sq.ft. for the accommodation of the various departments. Each floor is adequately served with toilets for male and female staffs, while, on the Sixth Floor, it is proposed to provide staff amenities including canteen, kitchen, library, recreation rooms, locker rooms and toilets. It will also be possible for the staff to obtain access to the roof area from the Sixth Floor.

Height of the Building.

21. The building has, as far as possible, been designed to conform to the Hobart City Ordinances limiting the height to 80 ft. Owing to the contour of the ground it has been necessary to plan the height of the building to slightly exceed the maximum at some points, in order to avoid the elimination of one cor

plete floor. The matter has been discussed with the City Council authorities who agree that there should be a certain amount of latitude permitted, under the circumstances, and the parapet has been planned to be set back in order to provide the desired light angles.

Construction.

22. The building will be of rigid steel frame construction encased in concrete, and will have reinforced concrete walls with an internal terra cotta skin wall for insulation. It is designed to have the additional strength required to meet recommendations on Civil defence, and it will have reinforced concrete floors, ramps, stairs, etc., and will be of fireproof construction throughout. All permanent internal sub-division walls will be of terra cotta lumber generally plastered. Roofs will be flat, waterproofed with mineral asphalt or bituminous felt surface, insulated with thermo-tile, and provision will be made below the roof grading for an insulation membrane. Internal sub-division walls will be demountable units of metal, timber or terra cotta lumber.

23. Architectural Finishes - The materials chosen for the external faces are of a lasting quality and have been considered from the aesthetic angle befitting a project of this nature. The base of the building is to be formed from the pavement level to first floor line in Tasmanian selected granite, including piers along Collins and Argyle Streets facades and the main entrance. Above the first floor line the building will be faced in Tasmanian Freestone. The rear wall faces and those to the light courts are designed to be finished in cement rendering. All window frames throughout the building are to be of extruded aluminium sections.

Mechanical Services.

24. Mechanical Ventilation - It is planned to provide mechanical ventilation for the car parking areas, mechanical equipment room, office space, cafeteria and kitchen. A balanced plenum and exhaust system in the Mechanical Equipment Room will enable air to be circulated in the car parking areas and controlled automatically by a carbon monoxide recorder to avoid concentration of air beyond a safe level. It is also planned to supply mechanical ventilation to the whole of the Ground Floor, the Lower Ground Floor, and all those office spaces on the First to Sixth Floors inclusive which are too far removed from windows to receive adequate natural ventilation.

25. Heating - It is proposed to heat the office spaces of the whole of the building by means of cast iron, column type radiators connected to a hot water system. The hot water would be supplied from two oil-fired, multi-tubular, steel encased hot water boilers, which would be fully automatic with safeguards against ignition and flame failure.

26. The Committee made inquiries regarding the possibility of using electricity for heating in view of the abundance of electric power in Tasmania and the desirability of saving oil fuel. Information was obtained which indicated that at the present time oil fuel systems are advised because they are the most economical, but it is felt that, with further research into the efficiency of the present electrical systems, it should be possible to obtain suitable apparatus which would prove equally efficient and economical. The Committee therefore recommends that, before the building is fitted with the apparatus proposed, the question of using electrical apparatus should be further investigated.

27. Evidence was received regarding certain grounds for complaints which arise in some buildings from the manner in which the heating apparatus is controlled and regulated. It appears that the standard temperature generally required for office buildings in America is considerably higher than that considered comfortable in Australian buildings. It is felt, however, that in many Australian buildings the temperature is maintained at too high a level. Although this is recognised mainly as a matter in the hands of the operator of the mechanical ventilating equipment, the Committee recommends that attention should be paid, when installing the apparatus, to the necessity of providing effective controls, and that adequate supervision should be maintained over the operator when the equipment is working.

28. Lifts - It is proposed to provide three passenger lifts and one goods lift, as well as a file hoist. Evidence taken in this regard indicated that the passenger traffic anticipated would necessitate the installation of the three lifts planned, and they are to be centrally situated in the building with a suitable lift lobby on each floor.

29. Lighting - For spaces in the Basement and Lower Ground Floor which will not be used for offices it is proposed to instal incandescent lighting which will be of 10 to 15 ft candles intensity. In all the office areas it is planned to

instal a modern type of fluorescent lighting of 15 to 20 ft. candles intensity. The Committee agrees that it is desirable to instal fluorescent lighting in all the offices.

30. Sewerage - The Committee was informed by the City Council authorities that the levels of the sewers in the streets are such that pumps will be necessary in the Basement and possibly in the Lower Ground Floor to raise sewage to the level required to reach the mains. The Committee therefore recommends that the question of sewerage connections should be adequately discussed with the city authorities while the building is still in the planning stage.

NECESSITY FOR THE BUILDING.

31. During its visit to Hobart the Committee inspected office accommodation at present in use by officials of the Commonwealth departments, and took evidence regarding the rented premises in use. The Committee was informed that, at the present time accommodation, including office, storage and garage space for Commonwealth Departments and activities is leased in Hobart to the extent of 91,064 sq. ft. at an annual rental of £12,954.5.4.

32. An estimate supplied to the Committee of space required in the new building, excluding provision for T.A.A. shown in the later plans, indicated that 103,300^{sq.ft.} would be required to house the officials needing accommodation in a short time. It appears evident, therefore, that the 91,680 sq.ft. planned in the new building will not be sufficient to adequately house all the Departments at present needing space, and some sections would still have to remain in rented premises.

Present Accommodation.

33. Evidence was received by the Committee showing that the floor space available to Commonwealth departments in Hobart is totally inadequate, and the accommodation for many departments is almost intolerable. The Department of Health is functioning in buildings in the Customs House which are most unsuitable. The Department of Social Services is at present occupying two floors of a warehouse in Murray Street, while the Staff of the Attorney-General's Department are distributed in several different buildings. Other officials are housed in hutments, the old skating rink, and in churches.

The Taxation staffs.

34. During its inspection of some of the staff accommodation at present being used the Committee noted the very cramped conditions under which many of the Officials are working. Some sections of the Taxation Department are particularly crowded and the staff so crowded together that efficient work cannot be maintained. Records of an important character have to be kept in stacks where they cannot be safely stored or easily referred to, while the risk of fire is too great to be disregarded. Responsible officials have no room for confidential negotiations, and amenities for the staff are almost non-existent. As it will be some years before any relief in the nature of a permanent building can be available, the Committee recommends that some kind of emergency accommodation be sought or built, so that the work of the Taxation Department and other badly housed departments can be efficiently maintained until the proposed new building is completed and ready for occupation.

Commercial needs.

35. Evidence taken by the Committee indicated that serious inconvenience and difficulty are being experienced by all kinds of private persons and firms needing accommodation in the city. The space at present occupied by the Commonwealth departments is urgently needed for business activities, and there is a general desire for the Government to proceed with the proposed building as soon as possible.

36. The only opposition to the proposal comes in connection with the desire to hasten the home building programme as much as possible. None of the witnesses expressed any opposition to the proposal except on the basis of its competition for materials and labour with home building projects. After reviewing present accommodation and future requirements the Committee is satisfied that there is an urgent need for the building.

SITE.

37. The site, which is on the corner of Collins and Argyle Streets, Hobart, has a total area of approximately 18,638 sq. ft. It is situated in a busy section of the metropolis and will be in a position convenient to the public as well as to the occupants of the building. Certain variations in alignment

of the frontages of the existing buildings will need straightening, and negotiations between the Department and the City Council have resulted in agreement on the question. The new structure will therefore be erected on the amended alignment.

38. Investigation of the land indicates that freestone is encountered at about 10ft from the surface, with an overlay of gravel wash in which water can be expected. It will therefore be necessary to take special precautions in regard to water-proofing the basement, lift over-runs and pits. Evidence shows that this condition is met with in many of the buildings in Hobart, and the Committee is assured that the necessary precautions will be taken, and that there will be no difficulty in erecting the building in a manner which will eliminate any danger from seepage. In addition it has been planned to include a float-operated sump pump to pump away all drains, and to prevent serious flooding in case of sprinkler operation or pipe burst.

39. From the point of view of construction of the building and general convenience of the public, the Committee is satisfied that the site is suitable for the purpose.

The air terminal.

40. The use of portion of the Ground Floor of the building on this site for the air terminal connected with the operations of T.A.A. will create some very serious problems, and, during its visit to Hobart, the Committee was informed of the difficulties involved.

41. The amended plans submitted to the Committee included provision for a large section of the Ground Floor to be allocated to T.A.A. and space was set aside for passenger and public accommodation, as well as for the increasing freight traffic. The Argyle Street entrance was planned both for a down ramp to the car park in the basement, and also for a bus dock for the airways traffic. The bus dock allowed for one bus at a time, and it was pointed out to the Committee that this would be quite inadequate, as it is frequently necessary to use two buses for passengers in addition to two or three freight vehicles.

42. The City Council authorities stressed the traffic difficulties and congestion which would result in Argyle Street which already carries a regular bus route, and it was pointed out that the long airways buses would have to

back into the dock, frequently at hours when traffic was at its peak. It was therefore urged that some method of alleviating the congestion should be planned for the building.

43. A possible solution of the difficulty appeared to be to make an opening from the rear of the building into the space planned for the bus dock, so that the traffic could come in from Elizabeth Street, through the lane between the G.P.O. and the present Commonwealth Bank, and go out into Argyle Street through the bus dock. This proposal was investigated from many angles, but it was stated by the Postal Officials that the lane in question would probably be closed to traffic in a few years' time when rebuilding operations connected the G.P.O. with the present Commonwealth Bank.

44. Difficulties would also be met in adjusting the levels of the site to allow the traffic to use the route proposed. It was also stated that up to 150 G.P.O. vehicles per day used the lane and if airways passenger and freight traffic were to be added, considerable delays would be frequently experienced.

45. As a consequence of the difficulties involved the Committee made inquiries with a view to indicating an alternative site for the air terminal. Some possible sites were inspected and considered, but the only one which appealed to the Committee as eminently suitable for the purpose was one situated in Collins Street, between Campbell Street and Lower Park Street. The Committee was informed by the City Council authorities that a bus terminal for the main city services had been considered in that area but had been finally rejected, and there appeared to be no opposition to the use of a suitable site on Council owned land in the area.

46. After a great deal of consideration, therefore, the Committee recommends that, although booking offices for T.A.A. might still be retained in the proposed new building, the terminal for passengers and freight should be provided elsewhere. It also recommends that negotiations should be undertaken with the City Council with a view to obtaining a suitable site for an air terminal in the area indicated between Campbell and Lower Park Streets.

AMENITIES.

47. In view of the fact that a large percentage of employees in Hobart live close enough to the city to go home to lunch, the question of the provision of a cafeteria in the new building was considered with care. The Committee was

informed that it is the practice of many of the staffs of the departments to go home to lunch, though it is considered that the number staying in the city would be much greater if more attractive facilities were available. It was generally agreed that the present provisions in the city are not adequate, and some arrangements should be planned in the new building to cater for those who have to remain in the city.

48. The Committee therefore recommends that provision should be made for a cafeteria in the building, but that the extent of the equipment provided should be determined after further study of the staffs likely to be housed in the building, and the number of persons likely to patronise the undertaking.

THE ESTIMATED COST.

49. The estimated costs of the structure as at June, 1949, based on current prices and the use of local materials wherever possible, is set down at £809,644, but it was stated that, owing to constant changing circumstances governing building costs today, this estimate may be subject to variation when the work is proceeded with. The details of the total are as follows:-

Building, including excavation, retaining walls and other site works		663,040
Engineering services -		
Hot water radiation system	24,000	
Ventilation and heating	30,000	
Lavatory exhaust system	3,000	
Oil fired boiler and reticulation to 70 points	2,700	
Fire sprinkler system	4,800	
Cafeteria kitchen equipment	<u>4,500</u>	69,000
Electrical installation		37,000
Lifts - 3 passenger, 1 goods, 1 fire hoist		<u>40,000</u>
Total inclusive of all contingencies		<u>£809,040.</u> =====

EFFECT ON HOUSING

50. It was submitted to the Committee that, as the majority of homes being erected in Tasmania are of timber construction, the demand for sand, cement, aggregate and steel for housing projects is small, and the proposed building will be constructed of materials which are not used to any extent for homes.

51. Some opposition to the proposal was expressed on the ground that, in spite of restricting the constructing materials to those least likely to be in short supply for housing, a certain amount of the remaining materials, as

well as some of the labour required, would result in competition with home building. The Committee considered these views, but, on the other hand it was also informed that the supply of many of the items of materials which were most difficult to obtain is now being relieved by importations from abroad. It was also pointed out that 85% of all materials in the State are allocated exclusively to house building projects, and the materials for the proposed structure would have to be taken from the remaining 15%, while it is likely that labour for the project will come from the mainland. Contractors for extensive works like the one under review have employees trained in the type of work involved, and introduction of such labour would avoid most of the interference with home building from that source.

52. The Committee is satisfied that it is essential to press forward with urgent governmental works, at the same time as homes are being built for the people, if balanced progress is to be maintained and future difficulties minimised. It is therefore recommended that the proposed work be proceeded with when the final planning has been completed.

SECTION V.

THE COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS.

LIST OF DECISIONS.

88. The following is a summary of the decisions arrived at by the Committee after consideration of the evidence:-

	Paragraph
(1) There is an urgent necessity for the building	26
(2) The design is suitable for the structure	9
(3) The site is suitable for the building	29
(4) The airways terminal should be located elsewhere	46
(5) Negotiations should be undertaken with the City Council to obtain suitable site for an air terminal	46
(6) Fluorescent lighting is desirable for all offices	29
(7) The two light courts should be eliminated, adequate ventilation and fluorescent lighting ensured, and sub-division of floors should be planned to allow a certain amount of through ventilation in emergencies	16
(8) Use of electricity instead of fuel oil for heating should be further investigated	26
(9) Special supervision should be maintained over the operation of equipment regulating the temperature of the building	27
(10) Requirements for sewerage installation should be discussed with the city authorities	30
(11) A cafeteria is desirable, but the extent of it should be further studied before installation	48
(12) The effect on housing will not be great and the work should be proceeded with	52

C. A. LAMP.

CHAIRMAN.

Office of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works,
Parliament House,

CANBERRA.

19th October, 1949.