

1954-55.

THE PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON PUBLIC WORKS.

REPORT

RELATING TO THE PROPOSED ERECTION OF

NEW STUDIOS FOR THE AUSTRALIAN
BROADCASTING COMMISSION

AT

FORBES STREET, SYDNEY, N.S.W.

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MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS.

(FIFTEENTH COMMITTEE.)

(Senators appointed 10th August, 1954, Members of the House of Representatives appointed 11th August, 1954.)

JOHN OSCAR CRAMER, ESQUIRE, M.P. (Chairman).

Senator JUSTIN HILARY O'BYRNE (Vice-Chairman).

Senate.

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Senator EDMUND BEDE MAHER.

House of Representatives.

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EXTRACT FROM THE VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, No. 40,
DATED 10TH NOVEMBER, 1954.

8. PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE—REFERENCE OF WORK—STUDIOS FOR AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING COMMISSION, SYDNEY, NEW SOUTH WALES.—Mr. Kent Hughes (Minister for Works) moved, pursuant to notice, That, in accordance with the provisions of the *Public Works Committee Act 1913-1953*, the following proposed work be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for investigation and report, viz. :—
Erection of New Studios for Australian Broadcasting Commission at Forbes-street, Sydney.
Question—put and passed.

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THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS.

AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING COMMISSION STUDIOS, SYDNEY.

REPORT.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works to which the House of Representatives referred for investigation and report the question of the erection of new studios for the Australian Broadcasting Commission at Forbes-street, Sydney, New South Wales, has the honour to report as follows:—

SECTION I.—INTRODUCTION.

HISTORICAL.

1. National broadcasting was introduced into Australia nearly 23 years ago, since when it has developed rapidly. In the earlier days the necessary broadcasting studios were obtained by the adaptation of existing office and warehouse space. As the service grew, the necessary additional accommodation in Sydney was obtained where it could be found. Owing to the shortage of space in the war and post-war years this meant taking up accommodation in a number of different and quite widely separated buildings in the city.

2. The need for a single broadcasting centre to include all the studio and office requirements in one group became apparent quite early, and, in 1936, a suitable site for the building was acquired at Forbes-street, East Sydney. By 1939 plans for the new studio building were completed, and tenders were about to be called when the whole project was suspended on account of the war.

3. In the difficult and disturbing times following the war, it has not been found practicable up to this date to undertake any major building operations. The National Broadcasting Service, however, has continued to expand, and at this stage the studio and office activities in Sydney are spread in eleven different buildings located in various parts of the city, some over a mile from the broadcasting centre at Forbes-street. The main broadcasting centre now on the Forbes-street site was constructed during the war as an emergency operational position, built into solid rock, and covered with over 8 feet thickness of solid concrete to resist bomb attacks and permit essential services to be maintained.

4. The accommodation was therefore built to contain little more than the bare essentials, and space was necessarily very limited. Subsequent additions to this building have made it possible to carry on with the absolute minimum of accommodation, especially in respect of the general conditions and the acoustic performance of the studios, which are appreciably below those required for permanent accommodation.

5. The continuing growth of operational activities makes the provision of a new operational centre for broadcasting services in Sydney a matter of prime urgency, and steps have been taken to push forward plans for minimum immediate requirements in a first stage of a complete scheme to provide suitable buildings on the Forbes-street site.

SECTION II.—THE PRESENT PROPOSAL.

THE BUILDING.

6. The proposal envisages the erection of a 4-story building over the existing underground structure built during the war. It will provide for the urgent requirements of the Australian Broadcasting Commission, and, whilst it has been planned to function as a complete

and self-contained unit, its erection on the site will conform to the planning in the ultimate scheme, and will not restrict future development.

7. It is proposed to erect the building on the site which is bounded on the north by Premier-lane, on the west by Forbes-street, and on the south-east by Clapton-place, with private property adjoining the southern boundary. There is a considerable fall from south to north, and the levels of the floors will be in suitable positions to make the best use of the land in the final scheme.

8. The building will be of steel frame construction, cased in concrete, with reinforced concrete floors, stairs and roofs. Special provision will be made for floating construction of certain slabs and walls in the studio area, and for treatment of various parts of the building where the acoustic demands of broadcasting are critical and exacting. On the four new floor levels and the roof structure there will be a total floor area of 20,516 square feet, yielding a net floor area of 15,260 square feet.

ESTIMATED COST.

9. The estimates of cost are taken out on present day figures, and are as follows:—

Building	£	117,650
Engineering services		31,850
		<hr/>
		149,500
		<hr/>
Extension of master control room to ultimate size as requested by Postmaster-General's Department—	£	
Additional building	7,200	
Extra engineering services	1,800	
		<hr/>
		9,000
		<hr/>
		158,500

The possible effect of marginal increases cannot be gauged at present, but it is anticipated that there may be an increase of 7½ per cent., representing approximately £11,900, making the total £170,400.

SECTION III.—THE COMMITTEE'S INVESTIGATIONS.

GENERAL.

10. The Committee studied the plan and visited Sydney to inspect the site and the present organization. Evidence was taken from the responsible officials of the Department of Works and the Postmaster-General's Department, and also from the General Manager of the Australian Broadcasting Commission; from officials of the Sydney City Council, and from other architects and technical experts in a position to give the Committee information to assist in its decisions.

NEED FOR BUILDING.

11. The General Manager of the Australian Broadcasting Commission submitted comprehensive evidence informing the Committee regarding the early history of the broadcasting service and its development on a

national basis. He accompanied the Committee on its inspection of the present accommodation, and with other senior officials, explained the use of the present accommodation and expensive equipment, demonstrating the difficult conditions under which the work is being carried on, as well as the urgent need for additional accommodation to cope with present and future requirements.

12. As stated earlier in this report, the Committee was informed that the studio and office activities of the Commission are scattered in various parts of the city in eleven different buildings. At present there is a total of sixteen studios which are housed in no less than nine of the buildings, creating many difficulties in operation, administration, and standard of service.

13. There have been no buildings erected for Australian Broadcasting Commission purposes during the last 23 years, and the studios, nearly all of which are adaptations of existing office premises, have inherent weaknesses of shape and construction. It is consequently almost impossible to make first-class studios of them, even if large sums of money are spent in the process.

14. Because of their dispersal throughout the city, the studios are very extravagant to operate, both in staff and facilities, as compared with a similar number of studios grouped in one centre. The dispersal of the staff throughout all these buildings leads inevitably to loss of efficiency, due to difficulties of contact between sections of the staff who must work together, but who cannot be located in the same building.

15. Conditions in the present buildings on the site are difficult, owing to overcrowding and the necessity to adapt for constant use the war-time accommodation built only for emergency purposes. The members of the Committee saw for themselves the way in which this national service is being maintained by people required to work for long periods under cramped, difficult, and, in some cases, most oppressive conditions.

16. *Technical Requirements.*—In the preparation and building up of broadcast programmes there is considerable activity additional to the actual broadcasting over the networks of the final programmes. It is essential to have a system which will ensure that each individual component is accurately routed from its source to its proper destination. For this purpose there is an operational centre consisting of a switch room, carrying all the necessary switching and control equipment and a few small announcing-type studios. The chief function of the operational centre is to effect the necessary changes in programme source smoothly and without error. No matter how remote any individual technical function may be, control equipment is required in the switchroom for almost every technical facility provided in the system.

17. Under the terms of the *Broadcasting Act 1942-1951* the Postmaster-General's Department is responsible for the transmission of the programmes supplied by the Commission, involving the provision of the entire technical services. This includes the provision of equipment and maintenance staff for the studios, transmitter stations and a Commonwealth-wide network of channels and lines connecting the studios with the stations. Broadcasting transmitting stations have been established in 65 places throughout the Commonwealth, and sixteen of them are in New South Wales for the transmission of the Australian Broadcasting Commission programmes. To link these sixteen stations with the Sydney studios 3,000 miles of programme channels have been provided, with associated equipment in 40 telephone exchanges throughout the State. The switching and control centre in a capital city is the "nerve centre" of the National Broadcasting Service in that

particular State, but the operation of the Sydney centre is unsatisfactory as it exists to-day, because there is not sufficient room for equipment required to connect all the studios and to operate the switching of the interstate programme channels. Plant and equipment costs are unnecessarily high, because of the need for additional equipment at remote studios, and maintenance is rendered difficult and costly.

18. The initial request, in connexion with the new switching and control centre, was for an area of 600 square feet located in its final position, but capable of expansion to an ultimate 1,500 square feet. It is now represented as being extremely desirable at this stage to provide the complete area, so that the arrangement of space for the equipment can be permanently fixed, permitting internal expansion to each section without subsequent costly re-location, alteration, and re-wiring, with its inevitable dislocation and expense. The Committee agrees that this space is necessary and recommends that it be included in the proposal as suggested.

19. *The Recording Centre and Library.*—The advent in post-war years of tape recording has revolutionized the technique of broadcasting, as an increasing proportion of programmes is being pre-recorded rather than being broadcast "live". This has resulted in the rapid development of many new types of programmes, and a demand for more storage space. As the lack of sufficient recording facilities is having a very restrictive effect on the development and standard of the programmes, the provision of accommodation for an expanded recording centre is also a matter of prime urgency.

20. The disc record library is at present located at 171 William-street, some distance from the studios, and in an area which is not protected from dust. In addition to dust damage, the remote location of the record library involves a considerable amount of undesirable handling of records, and results in waste and damage in transit. The loss of irreplaceable records is a serious consideration, and it is most desirable that the record library should be located in air-conditioned premises near the operational studios.

21. It is therefore represented that the new wing should include the central switchroom, network studios and recording centre, disc recording library, recording and transcription section, and studio superintendent's staff whose activities are directly concerned with studio and recording operations. The Committee is satisfied that there is a need for the accommodation proposed, and that planning and construction of the building should be regarded as an urgent matter.

22. *Future Planning.*—Provision of this new building, consisting of four stories over the existing rooms, will do little more than assist in maintaining more efficient and satisfactory broadcasting services, and will still leave many sections of the organization scattered in the various buildings in the city. In order to secure maximum efficiency, economy of operation and administration it is essential to group all the broadcasting activities in one centre, and it was with this object in view that the present site was originally purchased in 1936.

23. Several sets of plans have been prepared over the past years, providing sufficient area for all present commitments and anticipated expansion, as far as future expansion could be foreseen. In the difficult and disturbing times following the war it was not found practicable to undertake any major building operations, and the present proposal is advanced to provide for immediate and urgent requirements while full plans for complete use of the site are being prepared. The present proposal has been planned to function as a complete and self-contained unit, and to fit in with the erection of buildings to be developed in the future.

24. No attempt was made in this immediate proposal to plan in detail the future development of the site, except to establish that this building would not restrict future development. However, the Committee felt that it was essential to obtain as much information as possible about future needs in this area before approving of a building here. Evidence was sought, therefore, both from the Australian Broadcasting Commission and from independent witnesses, to indicate the manner in which the site could be used, and the type of services likely to be located in this vicinity. Very rough sketch plans were produced showing a complete programme in which the present building would form one wing of a three-stage building covering the whole site. It was stated that the completed scheme would be able to house all the broadcasting activities, and allow transfer of all present sections from their various city locations to this group. This would free premises in the city for commercial use and save payment of rentals which total £24,000 per annum at the moment but which are likely to increase to £30,000 before long.

25. It was stated that, after the first stage now proposed is erected, it will be necessary to proceed without delay to provide the second stage, which would include new studios to replace the present ones so that the space could be vacated as soon as possible, and the studios grouped effectively in one location. None of the present studios has been planned and built for broadcasting purposes, and they are not satisfactory, efficient, or adequate.

26. *Television.*—The Committee made inquiries in connexion with the advent of television in an attempt to gauge the possible effect of the introduction of television on requirements for broadcasting purposes. It was felt at the outset that, although there was no doubt that the proposed first stage building is urgently needed, there might not be so much need for a full building programme in the future, if television reduced considerably the demand for sound broadcasts. A good deal of evidence was taken in this regard, so that opinions of experts in this field might be obtained to guide the Committee before any decision was made which might definitely commit this site for the future.

27. Some differences of opinion were expressed in forecasts of possible future requirements, but it appears that, although the peak of sound broadcasting might be reached shortly in Australia, and television is expected to expand rapidly when it is introduced, the demand for sound broadcasts will remain strong. This is likely to be the case particularly with rural broadcasts and certain types of broadcasting not suitable for television.

28. The Committee sought to ascertain whether portions of the second stage of the scheme would be suitable for use in connexion with television activities if circumstances proved that the demand for broadcasting diminished to any marked degree. The consensus of opinions seems to be that television would require a type of studio which would have to be situated outside the confines of the city, and the broadcast studios planned for this scheme would not be suitable as alternatives. However, it was stated definitely that administrative and programme sections would be situated in contact with the broadcast groups with considerable advantage, and any space not required in the complete scheme could be used for these purposes.

29. *The Complete Scheme.*—The advantage of having all the activities of the Australian Broadcasting Commission located in one area was stressed by several witnesses, and many reasons were advanced in favour of early planning of the complete scheme involving construction of buildings capable of housing all sections together, with resultant efficiency and economy. It was also pointed out by the representative of the

Postmaster-General's Department that such grouping would result in vacation of the various city premises, and would free 400 telephone lines in important city locations.

30. In view of all the information received in this connexion, the Committee feels that, with the early advent of television, additional accommodation will be needed at short notice and steps should be taken to plan details of all three stages of the complete scheme for the whole of this site without delay.

31. The Committee is of opinion that the broadcasting service, being maintained under such difficult conditions and in poor accommodation at present, constitute a most important national undertaking, and every effort should be made to ensure that the best possible service is maintained and future development facilitated. In comparison with other public organizations the Australian Broadcasting Commission has operated for years under adverse circumstances, and the second stage of the proposal for this site should be placed on an early schedule for works construction and be pushed forward with all speed, if the pressing demands of the next few years are to be met satisfactorily. The third stage should then be constructed as soon as possible, so that all the functions of this vital service may be developed along the most effective, modern lines.

EFFECTIVE USE OF SITE.

32. The preliminary sketches of the complete scheme submitted to the Committee showed the present Forbes-street wing on the western side of the site, a second stage building on the south-eastern aspect, and the third stage comprising a limit height building on the northern side, flanking the Forbes-street building and connected to the end of it. The Forbes-street building included in the sketches of the complete scheme remained at the height planned in the present proposal, and the Committee considered the advisability of extending the ultimate height of this portion to limit height also, in order to make maximum use of the very valuable land which this site offers, particularly as a similar site in this vicinity would not be available.

33. The evidence showed that it would take the whole of the buildings in the complete three stages of the scheme to house the activities of the Broadcasting Commission now in existence and projected in the next few years, and television is also expected to make additional demands for accommodation in this area. It would be possible to take the Forbes-street building up a further six stories above the four now proposed, but provision would have to be made to put in stronger foundations and piers than are planned in the present proposal. This would cost £10,000 more than is estimated in this reference. As it is impossible to obtain similar land in this valuable position the Committee is convinced that this sum should be allocated, so that it would be possible, after the third stage of the scheme had been completed, to carry the Forbes-street building to limit height if circumstances demand it a few years hence.

THE SITE.

34. The site is located near King's Cross, to the south of William-street, and embraces an area of nearly $1\frac{3}{4}$ acres. The area extends for 302 feet along the east side of Forbes-street; approximately 297 feet on the north, fronting Premier-lane; 261 feet along Clapton-place on the eastern boundary; and the southern boundary terminates against private property known as "Upton Court". The land is mostly of rock foundation, much of it high above Forbes-street and Premier-lane, and there are considerable variations of level, with a steep slope to the north. It is valuable land and is situated in a relatively quiet area, and in an eminent position. The Committee is satisfied that the size and position of the site make it an excellent one for the purpose.

THE BUILDING.

35. The main portion of the building will be four stories high over the existing structure, making in all six stories over Forbes-street pavement. The various floors have been planned on appropriate levels because of the unusual contours of the site, and it will be possible to continue floors connecting at the same levels in the later stages of the scheme. The four stories now being added are therefore referred to as fifth to eighth levels, being thus related to any of the buildings to be erected on the site.

36. The planning centres round the network of four studios and the master switch control room, with everything designed to facilitate efficient working and control. Space for the duty supervisor is located on a central position in such a way that he has vision through to all the studios.

37. Some doubt was cast upon the wisdom of placing the Transcription Department on the eighth level, as it was thought that despatch of transcriptions from this level would involve a good deal of unnecessary handling in forwarding to destinations outside the building. The Committee was informed, however, that comparatively little despatch is involved, as the recording and transcription is mainly for internal activities, so that the eighth level will be convenient for these purposes.

38. *Acoustic Design.*—Special precautions are taken in this building to construct the accommodation to eliminate extraneous noises to the maximum extent, and to keep the noise level below the recommended tolerable average of 25 decibels. The necessary insulation is achieved by completely "floating" internal walls, floors and ceilings of each studio on anti-vibration mountings. Special windows are used, and the materials for construction are chosen from those which will give proper diffusion and even sound absorption characteristics.

39. *Air Conditioning and Ventilation.*—Special measures have to be taken to install air-conditioning and mechanical ventilation in appropriate parts of the building to provide the required control of dust, moisture and temperature in the atmosphere. For this reason complete air-conditioning is planned for the entire sixth and seventh levels, while plenum ventilation system is proposed for the fifth level, with air filters to preserve dust-free atmosphere in the Record Library.

40. Inquiries made by the Committee suggested that the toilet rooms on the fifth level were some distance from the external walls and would need improved ventilation. This will be practicable without difficulty, and the Committee recommends that mechanical ventilation be installed in this section.

41. *Lift.*—As there will be a relatively small population in the building it was planned to install only one lift. Study of the plans appeared to suggest that a further lift should be included in the building; however, the architect explained that this west wing will later be joined to the north wing which will contain the main entrance foyer and bank of lifts, providing ample transport.

42. It was also pointed out that the lift is placed in the part of the building occupying a high part of the site, so that, even in an emergency, only a minimum of walking would be necessary. It is therefore considered unnecessary to include an additional lift at present.

43. *Temporary Escape Stairs.*—The opinion was expressed that the temporary escape stairs on the eastern side of the building were open to the weather, and, as they passed across open windows, could constitute a danger in case of fire, rendering the stairs useless as a means of escape. Inquiry into this matter, however, showed that these stairs were additional to

the requirements of fire regulations, and this section of the building would be amply served by the stairs in the future main entrance, which would be adjacent when the north wing was constructed. It was also pointed out that, in the meantime, it was planned to have these windows glazed with fire-resisting glass, so that there would be little risk in the event of fire at this point.

CONSTRUCTION AND FINISHES.

44. The steel-framed construction, cased in concrete, previously referred to, will have the external walls faced with first quality brickwork, of light honey-brownish pink colour, to match those already on the lower stories. Use of these bricks will make it possible to match the facing on the future stages of the scheme. Window hoods and trim will be of architectural terracotta.

45. Specially designed aluminium sun visors will be provided on the entire western elevation. They will be horizontal, and individually adjustable manually to control light and solar penetration, thereby minimizing refrigeration load on the air-conditioned floors, and providing comfort conditions for occupants of other floors. Some doubt was expressed concerning the use of these louvres, as they involve considerable initial expense, and past experience in some cases has indicated difficulties in operation and maintenance. The Committee investigated this matter and is satisfied that the louvres planned will be useful in obtaining the conditions necessary in the building, and, if constructed with care and first quality materials, should prove satisfactory.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES.

46. The Committee was informed that the original structure was the subject of discussions with the City Council, and was endorsed by the City Building Surveyor. Evidence was obtained from the appropriate officials of the Council, who agree that the present proposal complies with the regulations for this area.

AMENITIES.

47. With the present necessity for immediate additional accommodation, plans have been prepared with the object of obtaining the maximum space for use as soon as possible, and little room was available for amenities. The plans show only a large locker room on the seventh level plan, but inquiries by the Committee brought the information that further space for amenities will be available in the existing building when some of the activities are transferred to the new floors. It was ascertained that additional female toilet accommodation could be arranged on the fifth level by subdivision of the present space. The Committee recommends that this should be done.

FINANCIAL.

48. *Estimated Costs.*—The amounts shown earlier in this report as the estimated cost of this first stage of the scheme, totalling £158,500, were given as those calculated on present-day costs, with the hope that immediate action could be taken to approve construction at an early date. Owing to the urgent necessity for this section of the building programme the amount of £158,000 had been placed on the current approved programme for 1954-55. The Committee emphasizes the urgency of the project and recommends that this amount, plus an additional £10,000 for special strengthening of foundations in preparation for future additions, be approved without delay.

49. *Equipment.*—The Postmaster-General's Department will be responsible for the installation of technical services and equipment. Details of the amounts involved were submitted to the Committee,

totalling £44,006. This will be partially offset by the recoverable value of the existing equipment. A good deal of the switching equipment has been in use for many years, and its recoverable value is estimated at £4,000. In addition, however, most of the recording equipment has been kept up to modern standards and it is proposed to use it in the new recording control booths. The proposed establishment expenses will be distributed over four successive years, and it is also shown that maintenance and administrative costs borne by the Postmaster-General's Department amount to £55,000 per annum.

SECTION IV.—THE COMMITTEE'S CONCLUSIONS.

50. The following is a summary of the conclusions reached by the Committee as a result of its investigation of the plans and evidence:—

- (1) The broadcasting service is a most important national undertaking which has been operating for too long under difficult conditions and in cramped accommodation. Every effort should be made to encourage the best possible service now, and to facilitate maximum development in the critical years which lie immediately ahead. (Paragraph 31.)
- (2) The accommodation proposed is needed now, and construction of the west wing on Forbes-street, should be regarded as an urgent matter. (Paragraph 21.)
- (3) With the early advent of television further accommodation will be needed at short notice, and steps should be taken to plan details of all three stages of the complete scheme for the whole site without delay. (Paragraph 30.)
- (4) The second stage of the scheme should be placed on an early schedule for works construction and pushed forward with all speed, if the pressing demands of the next few years are to be met satisfactorily. (Paragraph 31.)
- (5) The third stage should be then constructed as soon as possible, so that all the functions of this vital service may be developed along the most effective modern lines. (Paragraph 31.)
- (6) The three stages envisaged are expected to accommodate all present sections of the broadcasting service, but it is desirable to provide for possible future expansion, and also to make effective use of this valuable city site. The cost of strengthening the proposed foundations to take a limit height building at a later date will involve expenditure of an additional £10,000 now, and it is recommended that this amount should be included in the present proposal. (Paragraph 33.)
- (7) The full space desired by the Postmaster-General's Department for switching and control room is necessary and should be included in the proposal. (Paragraph 18.)
- (8) The size and position of the site make it an excellent one for the purpose. (Paragraph 34.)
- (9) Mechanical ventilation should be included for the toilets on the fifth level and the area subdivided to provide for female staff. (Paragraphs 40 and 47.)
- (10) The Committee emphasises the urgency of the project and recommends that the amount of £158,500 proposed, plus an additional £10,000 for strengthening the foundations, should be approved as soon as possible. (Paragraph 48.)

J. O. CRAMER, Chairman.

Office of the Parliamentary Standing Committee
on Public Works,

Parliament House,

Canberra, A.C.T.

2nd March, 1955.