

THE PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
1970—Parliamentary Paper No. 19

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works

REPORT

relating to the proposed construction of

ADMINISTRATION OFFICE
BLOCKS 6, 7 AND 8

and an

INFORMATION AND
DISPLAY BUILDING

Darwin, Northern Territory

(SECOND REPORT OF 1970)

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COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Department of Works,
Canberra, A.C.T.

Departmental No. 43
Executive Council Meeting
No. 3

MINUTE PAPER FOR THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Public Works Committee Act 1969

Recommended for the approval of His Excellency the Governor-General in Council that the proposal—Construction of Administration Office Blocks 6, 7 and 8 and Information and Display Building, Darwin, Northern Territory (particulars of which are set out in the attached statement) be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for investigation and report to the House of Representatives and the Senate.

R. C. WRIGHT

Minister of State for Works

Approved in Council

PAUL HASLUCK

Governor-General

22 January 1970

Filed in the Records of the Council

IAN GRIGG

Secretary to the Executive Council

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Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works

ADMINISTRATION OFFICE BLOCKS 6, 7 AND 8 AND INFORMATION AND DISPLAY BUILDING DARWIN, NORTHERN TERRITORY

REPORT

On 22 January 1970, His Excellency the Governor-General in Council referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for investigation and report to the House of Representatives and the Senate, the proposal for the construction of Administration Office Blocks 6, 7 and 8 and an Information and Display Building in Darwin, Northern Territory.

The Committee have the honour to report as follows:

THE COMMITTEE'S INVESTIGATION

1. The Committee received written submissions and drawings from the Northern Territory Administration and the Department of Works and took evidence from their representatives at a public hearing in Melbourne.

2. In December 1969, when in Darwin on other business, we inspected the proposed sites, blocks 4 and 5 in the Commonwealth Administrative Centre, and examples of substandard and overcrowded accommodation in use by Commonwealth departments.

THE PROPOSAL

3. *Brief Description.* The proposal submitted to the Committee is for the erection of three modern air conditioned buildings to complete the development of the Commonwealth Administrative Centre in Darwin. Blocks 6 and 7, designed as a twin unit, will consist of a common basement with ground and two upper floors. They will provide office space for the Department of Health, the Commonwealth Employment Service and the Northern Territory Administration.

4. Block 8, also comprising a basement, ground and two upper floors, will accommodate an automatic data processing centre, a file registry, a cafeteria, staff recreation areas, a P.A.B.X. system and the Finance and Welfare Branches of the Northern Territory Administration.

5. The building to house the information and display centre will be a small single-storey structure.

6. At the time the work was referred to the Committee it was estimated to cost \$3.1 million.

EXISTING OFFICE ACCOMMODATION

7. *Commonwealth Administrative Centre.* A proposal to erect Commonwealth offices in Darwin was investigated and reported on by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works in 1939, but construction was suspended due to the outbreak of World War II. After the war, departments occupied a variety of pre-war or wartime accommodation and temporary structures built to meet urgent needs.

8. In the early 1950s, the concept of a Commonwealth Administrative Centre flanking the Legislative Council building was envisaged. The proposal aimed at placing official activities close to each other on an appropriate and prominent site which would, at the same time, provide for public convenience. Since then, the concept has been developed to the point where five air conditioned three-storey office blocks, and the Supreme Court and Reserve Bank buildings have been erected. The Committee reported to the Parliament on blocks 1 to 4 and the Supreme Court in 1955 and in May 1964 the Parliament resolved it was expedient to erect block 5 without the work having first been referred to the Committee. Blocks 1 and 2 were completed in 1962, block 3 in 1965 and blocks 4 and 5, constructed as a twin unit with a common basement, in 1968.

9. Due to the growth in office staff since the new buildings were planned, the accommodation provided has, in effect, given only a moderate measure of relief. Overcrowding of some offices is still prevalent forcing the continued use of substandard wartime accommodation and in recent years, the costly leasing of privately owned premises. Departments and branches of the Northern Territory Adminis-

tration are still dispersed throughout Darwin creating inefficiency and inconvenience to the public.

10. *Inadequate Office Accommodation.* As mentioned above, Commonwealth-owned office accommodation in use includes both substandard temporary wartime structures and modern buildings overcrowded in places. Of the 164,000 sq ft of Commonwealth-owned space, over 40,000 sq ft is substandard. The Department of Health, the Commonwealth Employment Service and the Welfare Branch of the Northern Territory Administration are those most seriously affected by these deficiencies.

11. Except for the conveniently located suburban dental clinics and infant health centres which, in any case, are autonomous, the Department of Health offices are spread over eight separate buildings within a radius of 1½ miles. The main administrative building is a converted post-war residence, clinics and medical sections are housed in wartime huts and other sections are located in the Darwin Hospital and private premises. The buildings are not suitable for dealing with the public which visits Department of Health offices at the rate of about 26,000 visitors per annum, staff amenities are limited to basic essentials and working conditions are crowded and clearly substandard.

12. The Commonwealth Employment Service of the Department of Labour and National Service occupies part of the ground floor of block 3 in Mitchell Street. Whilst in terms of office standards the accommodation is good, the amount of space available is not consistent with requirements, resulting in gross overcrowding of both office and enquiry areas. Particularly following the wet season, a significant seasonal influx of visitors occurs and up to 60,000 enquiries per year or 250 per working day are handled by the staff. Normally in other Australian centres of comparable size, applicants for employment are readily contacted, but as job seekers arriving in Darwin initially have no permanent address, it is necessary for them to return frequently to the office, thus accentuating the problem.

13. The Welfare Branch of the Northern Territory Administration is spread over three sites. It is housed in substandard wartime barracks, leased premises and in block 3 in the Administrative Centre. As over the next five years it is estimated that staff will increase from 98 to 158, it is clear that substantial

extra space is necessary to meet these requirements.

14. *Leased Premises.* Government policy is that rented office space is not regarded as a long term alternative to Commonwealth-owned premises. Accordingly leases on premises have been taken on a limited tenure basis only and most will terminate between 1970 and 1974.

15. At present, the Commonwealth leases some 61,000 sq ft or about 25% of Commonwealth occupied office space in Darwin. The rental at the moment is over \$200,000 per year. The Committee noted that the proposal to build blocks 6, 7 and 8 will not mean significant rental savings as they will only provide sufficient accommodation for those departments most drastically affected by gross overcrowding and substandard premises. It will therefore be necessary to take up the options of further leases on most of the premises.

16. *Future Requirements.* A recent survey by the Northern Territory Inter-departmental Advisory Committee on Office Accommodation showed a clear requirement for a building programme which will overcome present accommodation deficiencies and also keep pace with the expansion of Commonwealth activities in Darwin.

17. Substandard offices represent some 19% of the area occupied and, in addition, staff numbers in the Northern Territory have increased at the rate of 10% per annum since 1964. At present, 1,741 persons requiring office space are employed by the Commonwealth in Darwin and this figure is expected to grow to over 2,400 by 1974 and to 3,000 by 1979.

18. The Committee noted the view that the present shortage of accommodation represents the equivalent of more than five standard office blocks. By 1974, after blocks 6, 7 and 8 have been constructed, it is thought that the deficiency will be more than four blocks and by 1979, about eight blocks.

19. We were told that plans for the construction of additional offices are now being considered. Bearing in mind the lack of suitable land in the city area and the present traffic and parking problems there, it is thought that this development will take place on Crown land 2½ miles from the city and subsequently in the Casuarina and Dripstone Districts.

20. Urban development north-east of the city has been proceeding or is planned with the development of these two districts which

together will have a population of about 20,000. The town plan has been drawn up on the basis that the districts will have decentralised working areas around a major shopping centre.

21. *Committee's Conclusion.* It was clear to the Committee that there is an urgent need for office blocks 6, 7 and 8 as proposed in this reference.

22. Even if blocks 6, 7 and 8 were available immediately, there would still be a present deficiency equivalent to about one office block similar to block 6. Acknowledging the inevitable growth that will occur in the future, we believe that plans for future additional Commonwealth-owned office space should be brought to fruition without delay.

INFORMATION AND DISPLAY BUILDING

23. *The Need.* The rapid development of the Northern Territory in recent years has resulted in an increasing number of particular and general enquiries which under existing arrangements cannot be handled efficiently or effectively. Prospective investors and others from interstate and overseas require a quick general picture encompassing such matters as growth rates, population trends, production figures, retail trade, construction programmes, costs and availability of essential services, transport and communication facilities. This material, if available from a central location would enable interests to be given a much quicker and more accurate appreciation of the Territory and its future.

24. In addition, the diversified responsibilities of the Northern Territory Administration and some other departments, the rapid population growth and the seasonal influx of visitors combine to create a heavy demand for an appropriately located centre to handle general enquiries. Despite attempts to overcome the problem by the use of information bulletins etc., the problem still persists and is a frequent source of complaint.

25. The Committee are agreed that the provision of an information and display building as proposed is necessary to satisfy the increasing interest being shown in the Northern Territory and that the Commonwealth Administrative Centre is an appropriate location.

THE SITE

26. The Commonwealth Administrative Centre adjoins Darwin's main business and commercial area and is bounded by the Esplanade and Herbert, Bennett and Smith Streets and divided by Mitchell Street. The site is prominent, appropriate for its purpose, and convenient for the public, and the buildings proposed in this reference will complement and complete its development. Minor demolition of temporary substandard huts will be necessary before construction can commence.

27. The Committee are agreed that the sites selected for the buildings are suitable.

DECENTRALISATION OF OFFICE ACCOMMODATION

28. Whilst it is true that many of those who will work in the new buildings are already located in the area in unsatisfactory accommodation, there will be a further compounding of the present traffic and parking problems in the city area.

29. We were therefore heartened to note that plans for the construction of future Commonwealth office space are based on the decentralisation of offices close to the Department of Works stores and workshops at the 2½ Mile and in the Casuarina and Dripstone districts.

THE BUILDING PROPOSALS

30. *Design.* The design of blocks 6 and 7 will be similar to that of blocks 4 and 5. It provides for a ground and two upper floors with a basement beneath the entire building and because of tropical conditions, allows for sun screening of the north-west and south-east window walls. However, the main entrance design will be modified to permit a walk-through access from blocks 4 and 5, to block 8, and to Bennett Street. The entrance will be accentuated by aluminium sun screens contained in six panels each two storeys high. Secondary entrance doors at the ends of the building will also be varied to allow access from ground level with the sun screen panels continuing above in an unbroken line.

31. Centrally positioned in the basement will be air conditioning plant, an electrical substation, and the main switch room. The remaining area at this level will be used for offices. The ground floor offices at the Mitchell Street end will be occupied by Department

of Health clinics, doctors' consulting rooms and laboratories, whilst the Smith Street end will house the Commonwealth Employment Service. The first and second floors will provide general office accommodation mainly for the Department of Health, but part of the first floor will be allocated to the District Welfare Office of the Social Welfare Branch, Northern Territory Administration.

32. Toilets, tea preparation areas, cleaners' facilities and secondary stairways will be positioned at each end of the building on all levels.

33. The gross floor area of blocks 6 and 7 will be 651 squares.

34. Block 8 will complete the development of the administration area. It will be the focal point of the Commonwealth office complex without detracting from the other buildings in the vicinity—the Law Courts, Police Headquarters, Reserve Bank and the old Town Hall. The design provides for sun screens to be contained in well proportioned panels enclosing the whole building. The Commonwealth Coat of Arms will be located over the main entrance.

35. This building will also have three floors above the ground and a basement. Accommodated there will be air handling plant, a P.A.B.X. equipment room, an electrical switch room, a computer centre and a registry.

36. The ground floor will contain the main entrance and reception foyer, a staff dining room to seat 300, a theatrette, staff recreation facilities, a P.A.B.X. switch room and food preparation facilities including storage, cold room, dish washing and change rooms for male and female kitchen staff. The theatrette will also double as a reading room and staff lounge and will allow extension of the dining room for larger functions. The food preparations area will be capable of serving 250 hot and 250 light meals and refreshments daily.

37. A podium surrounding the building at ground floor level will serve as a terrace to the dining room and the ground floor generally.

38. The first and second floors will provide office space for the Finance and Welfare Branches of the Northern Territory Administration. Vertical access to block 8 will be provided by two staircases servicing all floors. A ramp for use by disabled persons will be provided. The gross floor area will be 502 squares.

39. The single-storey information and display building, which has been designed to

harmonise with neighbouring buildings, will be distinguished by a coloured ceramic wall treatment. It will follow a simple rectangular plan with the main display area enclosed in part by solid walling, and partly by continuous floor to ceiling glazed window units. A covered walkway, accessible both from the mall and from Smith Street will serve the building.

40. *Structural.* The structure of blocks 6 and 7 will be identical to blocks 4 and 5, except for alterations necessary to provide a pedestrian walk-through through the main entrance.

41. For block 8, both pre-cast prestressed concrete and cast in situ reinforced concrete will be used.

42. *Materials and Finishes.* Generally, materials and finishes for blocks 6 and 7 will match those used on blocks 4 and 5. However, preference will be given to low maintenance costs and local availability.

43. In block 8, external walls will be concrete block from floor to sill height between off-form concrete columns. The walls, where not protected by the aluminium sun screens and the podium retaining wall, will be faced with pre-cast concrete panels, whilst the tank room walls will be lined with metal cladding. Door and window frames will be aluminium and the roof will be reinforced concrete covered with galvanised ribbed steel decking. External sun screens will be made from anodised aluminium grill sections, set at an angle, to prevent direct sunlight penetration. The podium will be paved with concrete slabs finished with exposed aggregate.

44. Internally, permanent walls will be off-form concrete, face blockwork or hard plaster finished with paint. On the first and second floors, office areas will be sub-divided by demountable partitions.

45. Offices and similar areas will have demountable acoustic ceilings. Floors generally will be covered with vinyl tiles, except for kitchen and toilet areas which will have ceramic tiles and the ground floor foyer which will be surfaced with local marble slabs. The raised floor in the computer area will comprise modular removable plywood panels finished with sheet vinyl and supported on adjustable metal pedestals. The dining room will have a timber parquet floor.

46. *Information and Display Building.* The external walls of this building will be of masonry construction and faced with coloured

ceramic tiles. Glazed sections of the walling will have non-actinic glass in anodised aluminium frames.

47. The roof will be constructed with steel trusses supported on external walls and columns and covered with ribbed sheet metal decking. Roof areas will be insulated and projecting soffits will be lined with natural finish timber battens. Fascias will be of anodised aluminium. The surrounding walkway will be covered with concrete exposed aggregate slabs.

48. Internally, walls of the exhibition area will be coloured face blockwork. The ceiling will be of timber battens to match the soffit linings and will be designed for recessed exhibition lighting. The floor of the display area will be carpeted.

49. *Mechanical Services.* Blocks 6, 7 and 8 will be air conditioned by a central refrigeration unit in the basement plant room of blocks 6 and 7. Initially, the unit will comprise two chiller sets with a total refrigeration capacity of 350 tons from which chilled water will be reticulated to air handling plants in each block. Provision will be made for a third chiller to serve future expansion of the computer installation. The cooling towers will be in the tank room area on the roof of blocks 6 and 7. A separate air conditioning plant will serve the information and display building.

50. Kitchen and toilet areas will be mechanically exhausted. Miscellaneous mechanical services will include an electric hot water service, refrigerated drinking water units, sanitary incinerators and kitchen equipment.

51. *Electrical Services.* Electricity will be supplied from the basement substation in blocks 6 and 7 from which block 8 and the information and display building will be fed by underground cables.

52. Lighting generally will be fluorescent. Block 8 will be floodlit and area lighting will be provided throughout the landscaped areas and the mall.

53. *Lifts.* Because of the limited height of blocks 6, 7 and 8, passenger or goods lifts are not proposed but small file lifts are to be installed for the vertical transportation of office records.

54. On examination of the matter, we agreed that in view of the nature of the buildings and their likely occupation, larger lifts are not required. We did think, however, that in future office buildings of this nature, consideration

should be given to whether it is economic to provide a simple and direct means of transporting the substantial amounts of office wastes from upper floors to the central collection point. Some use can be made in this instance of the file lift but in future buildings other devices such as shutes should be investigated.

55. *Civil Works.* These works include car parking areas, access ways, concrete footpaths and stormwater drainage.

56. The parking areas which will be bituminous surfaced and provided with concrete kerbs and channels will bring the capacity of the on-site parking facilities in the centre to 600 cars.

57. Landscaping will include, as an extension of the existing development, a tree shaded pedestrian mall, groups of trees and shrubs around buildings and car parks and lawns.

58. *Hydraulic Services.* Water and sewerage services will be connected to the town mains. Provision will be made for treatment, prior to discharge, of laboratory wastes from the Department of Health area.

59. *Fire Protection.* Thermal fire alarm systems will be installed in all buildings in addition to smoke detectors in the computer and the P.A.B.X. equipment areas in block 8. Hose reels, internal and external fire hydrants and portable extinguishers will be located as necessary.

60. *Committee's Conclusion.* The Committee recommend the construction of the work in this reference.

ESTIMATE OF COST

61. The estimated cost of the work when referred to the Committee was \$3.1 million. We learned during our enquiry that this figure was based on out-dated calculations and has been subsequently revised to \$3.3 million as follows:

	\$
Blocks 6 and 7	1,692,000
Block 8	1,458,000
Information and display building	35,000
External works	115,000
	<hr/>
	3,300,000
	<hr/>

PROGRAMME

62. It is expected that after an approval to proceed is given, the preparation of final drawings and tender documents will take 9 months. Construction time for the work is estimated at two years after a contract is let.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

63. The summary of recommendations and conclusions of the Committee is set out below. Alongside each is shown the paragraph in the report to which it refers.

	<i>Paragraph</i>
1. There is an urgent need for office blocks 6, 7 and 8	21
2. Plans for future additional Commonwealth-owned office space should be brought to fruition without delay	22
3. An information and display building is necessary	25
4. The sites selected for the buildings are suitable	27
5. Plans for the construction of future Commonwealth office	

Paragraph

space are based on the decentralisation of offices at the 2½ mile and in the Casuarina and Dripstone districts	29
6. In future office buildings of this nature consideration should be given to whether it is economic to provide a simple and direct means of transporting office wastes to the central collection point ..	54
7. The Committee recommend the construction of the work in this reference	60
8. The estimated cost of the work when referred to the Committee was \$3.1 million. This figure has been subsequently revised to \$3.3 million	61

C. R. KELLY
Chairman

Parliamentary Standing Committee
on Public Works,

Parliament House,
Canberra, A.C.T.

12 March 1970.