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THE PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works

REPORT
relating to the proposed construction of an
ARCHIVES REPOSITORY
at
Villawood, New South Wales
(SEVENTH REPORT OF 1970)

COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE
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PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

ARCHIVES REPOSITORY, VILLAWOOD, NEW SOUTH WALES

R E P O R T

By resolution on 23 April 1970, the Senate referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for investigation and report to the Parliament the proposal to construct an archives repository at Villawood, New South Wales.

The Committee have the honour to report as follows:

THE REFERENCE

1. The proposal referred to the Committee involves the construction, in two stages, of an archives repository on Commonwealth-owned land at Villawood, an outer Sydney suburb.
2. The first stage of the project, which itself is to be completed in two parts, is to comprise
 - some 57,000 sq. ft of space for a repository, offices and lending services to be available by August 1971;
 - an additional 50,000 sq. ft for repository, plant and office purposes to be ready in May 1972.
3. The second stage, comprising 99,000 sq. ft of repository and office space is to be completed in 1975.
4. The various components of the work are to be staged to permit evacuation of the Heffron Park facilities in time for the return of this

land to the State and at the same time to allow progressive expansion of the archival service as the demand occurs.

5. The total estimated cost of the work when referred to the Committee was \$4 million.

THE COMMITTEE'S INVESTIGATION

6. The Committee received written submissions and drawings from the Prime Minister's Department and the Department of Works and took evidence from their representatives at a public hearing in Sydney. Evidence was also given by the Town Planner of the Bankstown Municipal Council. We inspected the existing repository buildings at Heffron Park and the proposed site in Miller Road, Villawood.

COMMONWEALTH ARCHIVES OFFICE

7. The Commonwealth Archives Office is the Commonwealth Government's archival authority. Its headquarters are in Canberra except that some head office functions are still being performed in Melbourne while the central offices of some departments remain there. Regional branch offices have been established in Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane.

8. The office implements a programme for the orderly and consistent disposal of the Commonwealth's records, provides a centralised bulk storage and permanent shelter for records of archival value, offers a comprehensive retrieval and lending service for local Commonwealth authorities, besides ensuring that archives of significance are available to the community.

N.S.W. BRANCH OPERATIONS

9. Existing Facilities The New South Wales regional office of the Commonwealth Archives Office operates from two locations in Sydney. The first is a small office and storage area in the Commonwealth Centre in the city which is used for the collection and distribution of archival material and the study of some items by departmental officers and accredited members of the public.
10. Irrespective of the facilities to be provided by the proposals in this reference, a city based facility will continue to be needed, as a service point for departments located there and for the public carrying out research.
11. The principal operational base and storage have, since 1950, been at Heffron Park, Maroubra. Originally only one storehouse was used, but since 1968 a second has been progressively taken over. Sole occupation of the latter building is expected in September 1970.
12. The floor area of the two sheds is about 100,000 sq. ft providing a storage capacity of 177,000 linear ft. Standard records are stored on static steel shelving, and non-standard items such as maps and plans are placed in conventional cabinets. Internal movement of records is by hand trolley except in the case of bulk moves when portable roller tracking is used.
13. Registration and Disposal Commonwealth records may not be destroyed without the concurrence of the Commonwealth Archives Office. Records are examined jointly by the agency concerned and the Office to assess their value for administrative and research purposes. At this time, the Office determines the number and type of records found in the agency and its administrative structure and history allowing a programme for the orderly disposal of records

to be established. Having identified and registered records, preparation of inventories and other finding aids used in central and regional offices for retrieval and information purposes then follows.

14. Transfers and Processing Annual transfers of records from agencies to the Office include records of permanent value and others being retained for fixed periods. Retention periods of temporary material can vary between one and 80 years.

15. Records being transferred are processed which includes sorting, stamping, boxing and labelling. Processing may occur in the agency or in the repository and the time taken can vary according to whether the material is a continuation of an existing series and whether it needs to be amalgamated or inter-filed with material already in custody.

16. Storage Standard containers are now used to accommodate the usually encountered sizes of record materials. Maps and plans are stored in conventional cabinets, cans of films and tapes in racks and apart from some minor variations, most other records are stored in standard bays of steel shelving 8 ft high, 3 ft wide and 15 ins. deep. These hold eight vertical rows of standard cartons and require little use of ladders or steps.

17. For the optimum use of space, records are stored according to whether they are for permanent or temporary storage and whether they are to be frequently consulted.

18. Lending Records are made available to departments on demand and according to circumstances, are collected by the agency at Heffron Park, from the Archives Office in the city or delivered by the Office directly to the department. During 1968/69, 19,661 requests for loans were received, involving the issue of 88,927 items held in store.

19. Material in its original form or on microfilm is also made available for research projects. Through the branch office, 7,119 such items were consulted on the premises in 1968/69 and information from 4,948 items was conveyed by telephone.

EXPECTED DEVELOPMENTS 1971/1980

20. As the New South Wales branch is already carrying out all basic forms of activity with its holdings, future changes are likely to include only developments within the present sphere of activity and an increase in the volume of operations. The proposed buildings have been planned with this in mind and with the need to allow operations to continue without major building operations to about 1985. The Committee were told furthermore that the additional storage which can be built in the future within the limits of the present site would satisfy requirements into the 1990s.

21. Future developments are likely to involve the greater use of teams for surveying the records of a specified group of agencies and the introduction of a registry of Commonwealth record series. Closer liaison with tertiary institutions and their programmes of research, extension of the period archives are available to the public on open access and the development of approved extension services are factors also likely to influence the extent and direction of future growth.

22. The Committee were informed that, in terms of storage, the net annual increase in the period 1971-1980 is expected to be 25,000 to 30,000 linear ft. The 370,000 linear ft to be provided in the first stage at Villawood is thus planned to meet current and future requirements to about 1975.

THE NEED

23. A complex of storehouses now occupied by the Commonwealth at Heffron Park was built during the war, on State-owned land taken over under National Security Regulations. Initially, some 100 acres of land were involved but 46 acres were returned to the State in 1957. While the formal agreement for the Commonwealth's occupancy of the remainder terminated in December 1969 occupancy is being permitted by the State to October 1971.

24. The Committee reported to the Parliament in 1966, in 1969 and again on 7 April 1970 respectively on proposals designed to facilitate the removal of three Commonwealth activities from Heffron Park, viz. a migrant hostel, Department of Supply stores and an Army medical and dental equipment depot. The present reference is concerned with the removal and relocation of the last remaining Commonwealth activity in the Heffron Park buildings. As the buildings at Heffron Park are vacated they are being demolished and the area is being restored for return to the State.

25. It was demonstrated to our satisfaction that there is a continuing need for a Commonwealth archives repository in the Sydney area and since the New South Wales Government requires the return of the Heffron Park land, it follows that the existing facility should be relocated elsewhere.

THE SITE

26. The Commonwealth owns a portion of land at Villawood, an outer suburb of Sydney. A large part of the site is occupied by a migrant hostel and 6 acres have been set aside for the purposes of the Commonwealth Archives Office.

27. The latter area is bounded on the east by Miller Road, on the north and west by the migrant hostel and on the south by privately owned land which is earmarked for industrial development. The site is rectangular in shape except

for an area measuring 140 ft by 80 ft which intrudes the northern boundary. This section which is at present part of the migrant hostel area will need to be made over for archives use before future extensions outside the scope of the present reference can be made.

28. The site is zoned for special purposes and adjoins residential and light industrial areas. It is 14 miles from the centre of the city, average driving time from the city office being 50 minutes.

29. The Committee closely examined the departmental witness not only about the convenience of the site and its proximity to its main users in the city but also about the other sites studied and the alternative of purchasing an existing building or buildings closer to the city. We were told that no suitable buildings are available and that whilst the Villawood site is less convenient than Heffron Park, it is almost as close to the city as the alternative sites. We concluded that the proposed site is suitable for the purposes of the Commonwealth Archives Office.

THE PROPOSED BUILDINGS

30. The Nature of the Requirement Broadly, the immediate requirement is for a repository which in the short term will facilitate vacation of the Heffron Park storage and with sufficient growth space to cater for needs to about 1975. At that point, the second stage will be required to meet demands for the following decade. A longer term requirement is for the site to permit subsequent development to meet the needs of the Office after that time.

31. We noted the advice of the Prime Minister's Department on the relevant merits of single and multi-storey repositories of various sizes and agree that in the circumstances of the New South Wales Office, the proposals submitted

are a satisfactory solution. To a point, single storey storage is considered to be better mainly because of ease of access for material and staff and better staff supervision. Beyond that point multiple entry and servicing points are required, supervision becomes difficult and the internal bulk movement of material becomes a major operation. Single-storey accommodation is considered to be most suitable for records being processed immediately after receipt, for records to which frequent access is required or which remain unstable in volume and require periodic re-shelving.

32. Multi-storey accommodation is more suitable for holding permanent material. Records most frequently consulted can be located adjacent to user facilities and those used less often can be stored on floors remote from service areas. Because of the nature of the records which are located in this type of building, air conditioning is a requirement. This amenity is more economically provided in a multi-storey structure.

33. The Committee noted that experience locally and overseas supports the proposed use of air conditioning to provide controlled climatic conditions in vaults and long term storages. The requirement is for controlled atmosphere in the film store, the vaults which house records of importance and in storage areas accommodating records of permanent archival value. We noted particularly the evidence that acid pollution in the atmosphere, high temperatures, variations in atmospheric humidity, dust and light all have a deleterious long term influence on paper of recent and current manufacture. Since most of the material stored permanently by the Commonwealth is on this type of paper, we support the air conditioning proposals in this reference.

34. Site Layout The first stage building is to be a large single-storey repository to the rear or west of the site and an adjoining two-storey building east of it which will contain processing and plant rooms, toilets and offices.

35. The main part of the second stage will be a three-storey repository building towards the front of the site and additional office accommodation. The second stage buildings will be connected to the first stage at the office/service block. The remaining development in this reference will include a service road from Miller Road along the southern boundary of the site to both repository and office buildings, parking areas and landscaping.

36. An area north of and adjacent to the second stage repository has been reserved for the ultimate development.

37. Design Features The office section, besides meeting administrative needs will contain controlled research facilities including a reference library for use by the public or by departmental researchers. There will also be an exhibition gallery for displays of archival material of historical or general interest.

38. Repository areas will be designed to facilitate the reception, sorting and storage of archival material in secure and fire protected areas. Dust and other damaging conditions will be guarded against. Valuable records will be housed in special vaults within the protected areas which will also include a film store. The offices and large repository areas in the second stage will be air conditioned.

39. Most material will be stored in cardboard boxes on steel shelves in a compact pneumatic activated system. The rails for the hydraulically

operated compactus storage will be installed as part of the building work. The two main storage areas will have loading bays for the bulk handling of material. Day to day movements will be dealt with at the lower level of the office block.

40. Enquiries will be received at a controlled entrance on the upper floor of the office link where closed and open research rooms are available together with a reference library and exhibition areas. As visual control of archival material and personal effects of visitors is required, a checkpoint is proposed where visitors' bags will be retained. Visual control from the area near the search rooms will also be possible.

41. Construction Foundation footings in stage 1 will be bored piles to the shale which underlies the site at depths up to 20 ft. The floor slab is to be generally a flat slab supported on the piers and the external walls will be carried on the edges of the slab. The footings in stage 2 will be a pier and beam system.

42. The external walls of stage 1 will be cast in situ off-form reinforced concrete which will provide a permanent and durable surface both internally and externally. Internally, the walls of the vaults will be of reinforced concrete and elsewhere internal walls will be of hollow pre-cast concrete blocks. The fire wall separating the two parts of the first stage repository will also be reinforced concrete. The concrete slab floor will be covered with sheet vinyl. The metal deck roof will be carried on steel trusses supported on steel columns. Limited natural light will be admitted through translucent panels in roof monitors which will also provide natural ventilation. The only windows will be in the north and south elevations. The office building will have brick external walls.

43. Stage 2 will be of reinforced concrete flat slab construction with external face brickwork up to the high level windows. Internally, office walls will be face brick while in the repository dividing walls will be concrete block with a sprayed vinyl paint finish. The roof will be framed in steel trusses and covered with an insulated metal deck. Generally, internal walls of concrete and pre-cast blocks will be sprayed with a plastic finish. The offices will have face brickwork and demountable wood partitions, some with glazed infills. Floors will be vinyl sheeted except in the entrance where non-slip quarry tiles will be used. Toilet floors will be tiled.

44. Civil Engineering Services A concrete kerbed and guttered roadway along the southern boundary will connect Miller Road to the loading bays, lending and receiving centre and the public entrance. The reference submitted to the Committee included a sealed parking area for 16 cars. A secondary bitumen surfaced road will skirt the northern boundary for access to the plant room and for fire fighting purposes.

45. The primary water supply to sprinklers, hoses and internal hydrants in the repository areas and for domestic use will be obtained from the main in Miller Road. Water to external hydrants and a secondary supply for fire sprinklers will come from a 100,000 gallon underground storage.

46. The sewer will be connected to the main in the adjacent hostel grounds.

47. Electrical Engineering Services An 11 kV high voltage supply will be taken from Miller Road to a substation in the stage 1 building from which power will be reticulated at medium voltage to the whole complex. Street lighting will be provided along the new roads and security lighting installed at appropriate points. Most internal lighting will be from fluorescent fittings complying with S.A.A. standards.

48. Mechanical Engineering Services The air conditioning in stage 1 will be limited to the film store and office area and humidifiers will be provided in the vaults. The stage 2 repository is to be air conditioned throughout.

49. Other mechanical services will include the motorised roller shutter doors to the stage 1 repository, refrigerated drinking fountains, tea making facilities and hot water reticulated to sinks and basins.

50. For vertical transportation in the stage 2 building, a goods/passenger lift will be installed. Horizontal transport of archival material will be by means of power driven belt conveyors fitted with gravity rollers.

51. Fire Protection The repository buildings will be protected by smoke detectors and an automatic fire sprinkler system, internal hoses/reels and hydrants and an internal push button alarm system. The vaults and film store will have a CO₂ system. The office link block will be protected by internal hoses/reels and an automatic fire detection system. Externally, extinguishers and hydrants will be provided.

52. Committee's Conclusion Subject to the recommendations which follow, the Committee recommend the construction of the work in this reference.

PROGRAMME

53. The Committee noted that after an approval to proceed is given, it is expected that 4½ months will be required for the completion of working drawings and contract documents, the invitation of tenders and the letting of a contract for stage 1. For the second stage, it is thought that 6 months will be required to reach this point.

54. After a contract has been signed, stage 1 is expected to take 19 months to construct and stage 2, 24 months.

ESTIMATE OF COST

55. At the time the work was referred to the Committee, the estimated cost was \$4 million as follows:

		\$	\$
Stage 1	Building work	1,525,000	
	External engineering services	<u>225,000</u>	1,750,000
Stage 2	Building work	2,218,000	
	External engineering services	<u>32,000</u>	<u>2,250,000</u>
			<u>4,000,000</u>

OTHER OBSERVATIONS

56. Car Parking As a result of a point raised during our enquiry, the client department has decided to increase the provision of on-site car parking from 16 to 24 spaces. We concur and note that the extra spaces will cost an additional \$2,000.

57. Air Conditioning Because of the particularly harmful effects which acid pollution in the atmosphere has on modern paper, we were concerned about the cleaning of outside air by the air conditioning system before it is circulated in the repository. We found that although the air is to be passed through an alkaline wash to clean it of sulphur dioxide, no particular assurances were proposed to be obtained from the manufacturers on the performance of this task by the equipment. We do not believe that this is satisfactory and urge that only equipment which will guarantee the reduction of airborne acid pollution to acceptable levels should be used.

58. The matter is especially important in view of the location of the Villawood site in a light industrial area and adjacent to land owned by a paint manufacturer.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

59. 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.

Paragraph

- | | | |
|----|--|----|
| 1. | THERE IS A CONTINUING NEED FOR A COMMONWEALTH ARCHIVES REPOSITORY IN THE SYDNEY AREA. | 25 |
| 2. | THE EXISTING FACILITY SHOULD BE RELOCATED ELSEWHERE THAN AT HEFFRON PARK. | 25 |
| 3. | THE PROPOSED SITE IS SUITABLE FOR THE PURPOSES OF THE COMMONWEALTH ARCHIVES OFFICE. | 29 |
| 4. | THE AIR CONDITIONING PROPOSALS IN THIS REFERENCE ARE SUPPORTED. | 33 |
| 5. | SUBJECT TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS WHICH FOLLOW THE COMMITTEE RECOMMEND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE WORKS IN THIS REFERENCE. | 52 |
| 6. | AT THE TIME THE WORK WAS REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE THE ESTIMATED COST WAS \$4 MILLION. | 55 |
| 7. | IT HAS BEEN DECIDED TO INCREASE THE PROVISION OF ON-SITE CAR PARKING FROM 16 TO 24 SPACES. THE EXTRA SPACES WILL COST AN ADDITIONAL \$2,000. | 56 |
| 8. | ONLY AIR CONDITIONING EQUIPMENT WHICH WILL GUARANTEE THE REDUCTION OF AIRBORNE ACID POLLUTION TO ACCEPTABLE LEVELS SHOULD BE USED. | 57 |



(C.R. Kelly)
Chairman.

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works,
Parliament House,
CANBERRA.

2 June 1970.