



1976

THE PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works

**THIRTY-NINTH
GENERAL REPORT**

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PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

THIRTY-NINTH GENERAL REPORT

Pursuant to Section 16 of the Public Works Committee Act 1969-1974, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works have the honour to report the proceedings of the Committee during the period 1 January to 11 November 1975.

This report is an account of the proceedings and the views of the Twenty-third Committee which ceased to exist when the Parliament was dissolved on 11 November 1975. The subsequent Committee was not appointed until 4 March, 1976.

TWENTY-THIRD COMMITTEE

1. Members of the Twenty-third Committee were appointed in the Senate and in the House of Representatives on 18 July 1974. They were Senator D.S. Jessop, Senator J.I. Melzer, Senator A.G. Poyser, Messrs. R.N. Bonnett, H.J. Garrick, L.K. Johnson, the Honourable C.R. Kelly, Messrs. L.J. Keogh and D.T. McVeigh. At the first meeting of the Committee on 23 July 1974 Mr L.K. Johnson was elected Chairman and the Honourable C.R. Kelly Vice-Chairman.

PROPOSALS REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE

2. Eleven references were made to the Committee during 1975. Twelve reports were presented up to 11 November 1975 and included four relating to references from the previous year. Three references from the previous year were rescinded and four lapsed with the dissolution of the 29th Parliament on 11 November 1975.

3. A tabulated summary of references and reports is at the end of this report.

MEETINGS

4. The Committee met on 30 occasions between 3 February and 11 November 1975 when the Committee ceased to function with the dissolution of the 29th Parliament. The meetings were held to take evidence at public hearings, carry out inspections and to undertake private deliberations and took place in Canberra (17), Brisbane (3), Parramatta (3), Darwin (2), Katherine (1), Tennant Creek (1), Alice Springs (1), Sydney (1) and Wodonga (1).

INTERDEPARTMENTAL COMMITTEE REPORT ON THE PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE ACT (PARLIAMENTARY PAPER NO. 105/74)

5. In May 1975, in response to an inquiry on the progress of the Government's consideration of widening the ambit of the Committee's activities to include proposed works of certain public bodies, the Committee were informed that the matter had been deferred pending further consideration by interested Ministers. In November 1975, when the review of the Act was nearing completion, consideration was again deferred due to the tabling of an Interim Report by the Joint Committee on the Parliamentary Committee System. The recommendations of that Committee included substantial changes to the structure of the Public Works Committee as outlined in the following paragraphs.

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE SYSTEM

6. The following extract from the Interim Report of the above Committee which was tabled in the Parliament on 15 October 1975, relates to the Public Works Committee:-

"Recommendation 8

Para 122. It is recommended that the Senate establish a standing committee specifically empowered to carry out the roles, so far as may be deemed necessary, that are currently assigned to the Joint Committee on Public Works, the Joint Committee on the Australian Capital Territory and the Joint Committee on the Northern Territory. Such a Committee could well be one of the Senate's seven functional Committees".

7. As one of the reasons for tabling this report was to "get advice from interested persons" the Chairman of the Public Works Committee appeared before the Committee on the Parliamentary Committee System on 20 October 1975 and requested that consideration be given to the following matters before finally deciding the future status of the Public Works Committee.

- Because of the role of the Public Works Committee as a "bulwark" or forum between the bureaucracy on the one hand and the public on the other, a Joint Committee - representing the Parliament and not just one House is most desirable.
- There has been no evidence put forward to indicate that the present Joint Public Works Committee has been unmanageable (as suggested with other joint committees).
- There is no guarantee that the present statutory powers and those proposed in the current review of the Public Works Committee Act will be retained if it is to be a Senate Committee.

- It is a matter of conjecture that the future work load of members of the House of Representatives will be such that they are unable to carry out duties and activities related to the Public Works Committee.
- The members of the House of Representatives should be given an opportunity to express their views on the proposal to transfer the Committee to the Senate and the implication of such a transfer on the present arrangements for the motion for the 'approval of work' to be resolved by the House of Representatives.

8. The action of the Chairman was endorsed by the Committee at a meeting on 23 October 1975.

CONSULTATIONS

9. During the year the Committee found it necessary on two occasions to draw the Government's attention to a lack of adequate consultation with local government bodies and other interested organizations and persons (See Reports on Australian Government Centre, Parramatta (4/75) and the Road Safety and Standards Authority facilities at Albury/Wodonga (5/75)). In the Report on the Road Safety and Standards Authority facilities the Committee also criticised what it regarded as the "indecent" haste with which land acquisition proceedings were commenced.

10. The Committee believe that greater emphasis must be placed on the need for meaningful discussions with those organizations and persons likely to be affected by Australian Government projects.

PUBLIC NOTICE SIGNS ON SITES OF PROPOSED MAJOR WORKS

11. In an attempt to make the public aware of proposed major public works at a much earlier stage, the Committee recommends that a sign, giving details of the proposal, be erected on the proposed site as soon as the Government approves in principle the reference of a major public work to the Public Works Committee. The Committee believe that this action will help to overcome the problem of inadequate consultation which presently exists.

STANDARD AND TIMING OF SUBMISSIONS

12. The overall standard of departmental submissions continues to be satisfactory. However, in the case of the proposed Australian Government Centre at Parramatta, N.S.W., the Committee were critical of the lack of information regarding the Australian Government's decentralisation and community facilities policies which the Committee believed were vital to a proper consideration of the merits of the scheme. While the necessary information was provided at a subsequent hearing by the then Department of Urban and Regional Development, the Committee believe that it highlights the need for departments to pay closer attention to the justification of proposals particularly when new policies are involved (as in the case of the Parramatta project).

13. The Committee believe that proposals should not be referred in the Parliament for investigation and report until departmental submissions are available for distribution. The Committee are charged by the Public Works Committee Act to report to Parliament as expeditiously as possible. If departmental submissions are not available at the time of referral in the Parliament, the Committee may be seriously handicapped in the expeditious conduct of an inquiry.

CAR PARKING POLICY

14. The question of car parking is one which invariably receives a great deal of attention at public hearings and the Committee are concerned at an apparent inconsistency in policy on this issue. The Committee have been informed that Australian Government policy is to foster the use of public transport and therefore provision for car parking associated with major public works is generally provided for official vehicles only. However, in its Report on the Deakin Telephone Exchange in the A.C.T. (7/75), the Committee drew attention to what it believes to be an over-generous provision of car parking, while recognising that the provision was made in accordance with the requirements of the National Capital Development Commission. The Committee recommended in the report to the Parliament on the Deakin Telephone Exchange "that the present car parking policy be re-examined with a view to establishing some consistency throughout Australia".

FLOOR COVERINGS

15. The Committee once again draw attention to the fact that a policy decision is still awaited on the use of carpet for living-in accommodation for junior ranks in Defence establishments, although its use has been approved for officers and senior non-commissioned officers. The Committee have been informed on a number of occasions by the Department of Housing and Construction that carpet is the more economic covering when cleaning and other costs are taken into consideration. The Committee first raised the question of the use of carpets for living-in accommodation in Defence establishments in 1970 and are concerned that an inordinate period of time is being taken to fully resolve this matter.

OVERSEAS BUILDINGS

16. The 1974 annual report of the Department of Foreign Affairs indicates that the current overseas design and construction program totals over \$86 million. The Committee note that expenditure of this magnitude does not come within the ambit of the Public Works Committee Act and have requested the Government to consider this matter during the current review of the Act.

EXEMPTION OF WORK - ERLDUNDA/SOUTH AUSTRALIAN BORDER ROAD

17. This work was exempted in the Parliament from Public Works Committee inquiry on 20 February 1975 in accordance with section 1B (8) (6) of the Public Works Committee Act on the grounds that it was an urgent work. The Committee were informed by the Minister for the Northern Territory on 4 December 1974 that this work was regarded as urgent and would be exempted from Public Works Committee scrutiny. Whilst regretting not being able to investigate the new highway standards being proposed, the Committee raised no objection to the proposed exemption. However, the Committee are of the opinion that as the work was not exempted until 20 February 1975, ample time existed for a Public Works Committee hearing and a report to the Parliament. It appears that due to inadequate planning on the part of the departments concerned, the Committee were denied the opportunity of examining this proposal.

WORKS EXCEEDING PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE REFERENCE LIMIT
OF \$2 MILLION DURING DOCUMENTATION/TENDERING STAGE

18. As at 31 December 1975 there were no works proposals on which the first limit of cost estimate was below \$2 million, and which, during documentation/tendering, exceeded \$2 million due solely to inflationary pressures.

REVISED COST OF PROPOSALS AT TIME OF PUBLIC HEARING

19. Of the twelve references reported on by the Committee from 1 January 1975 to 11 November 1975, the estimated cost of four had risen from the time of reference to the time of the public hearing, reflecting the general inflationary trend in the economy. The estimated cost of six proposals remained the same. One estimated cost fell, due to re-assessment of the design (Sadadeen High School, Alice Springs (Report 10/75)). In the case of the Orchestral Studio and Music Centre for the ABC in Brisbane (Report 2/75), the Committee were informed that the estimated cost would increase by the time tenders were called.

APPRECIATION

20. The Committee wish to record their appreciation to all those who gave assistance at hearings and site inspections, particularly the Department of Housing and Construction (now the Department of Construction).

21. We also wish to thank the Principal Parliamentary Reporter, the Government Printer and respective staffs for their co-operation and service throughout the year.

STAFF

22. The Committee were served by Mr R.B. Fenton as Secretary, Mr P.J. Roberts as Assistant Secretary, Mr G.L. Laffen and Mrs J.R. Thompson.


(C.R. Kelly)
Chairman

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works
Parliament House,
CANBERRA, A.C.T.

Date Proposal Referred	Proposed Work	Date of Report	Report Presented	Expenditure Proposed when Referred to Committee	Expenditure Recommended by Committee	Motion for Expediency Passed	Remarks
30. 7.74	Australian Post Office Administrative Centre, Perth			\$ 7,000,000	\$		The debate on a motion to rescind this reference on 6 November 1975 was adjourned. Subsequently on 11 November 1975 the reference lapsed with the Dissolution of the 29th Parliament.
13.11.74	Malak Primary and Pre-School, Darwin, N.T.	27. 2.75	4. 3.75	2,800,000	2,800,000		Recommended, subject to land development and planned population needs.
13.11.74	Central Hospital Services Complex, A.C.T. (Stage 2)	13. 2.75	25. 2.75	2,350,000	2,350,000	6. 3.75	Recommended as proposed.
21.11.74	Sanderson High School, Darwin, N.T.	-	-	6,650,000	-	-	Rescinded 4.3.75. Now the responsibility of the Darwin Reconstruction Commission.
21.11.74	Orchestral Studio and Music Centre, Brisbane, Queensland	27. 2.75	4. 3.75	2,350,000	2,800,000	6. 3.75	Recommended as proposed.
28.11.74	Water Resources Centre, Darwin, N.T.	-	-	6,200,000	-	-	Rescinded 9.10.75. Now the responsibility of the Darwin Reconstruction Commission.
5.12.74	Central Laboratory Facilities, Casuarina, N.T.	-	-	7,400,000	-	-	
5.12.74	Australian Government Centre, Parramatta, N.S.W. - Alternative 2*	22. 5.75	29. 5.75	38,000,000	46,000,000**	5. 6.75	* Alternatives 1 and 3 not fully investigated (see paragraph 4 of 4th Report of 1975). **\$46 million if constructed in two stages. Committee noted estimated cost could reduce to \$45 million if constructed as a total continuing project.
6. 3.75	Construction of Road Safety and Standards Authority Facilities at Albury/Wodonga.	22. 5.75	29. 5.75	9,000,000	9,000,000	5. 6.75	Recommended as proposed.

Date Proposal Referred	Proposed Work	Date of Report	Report Presented	Expenditure Proposed when Referred to Committee	Expenditure Recommended by Committee	Motion for Expediency Passed	Remarks
5. 4.75	Telephone Exchange Building, Edgecliff, N.S.W.	22. 5.75	29. 5.75	\$ 3,400,000	\$ 3,400,000	4. 6.75	Recommended as proposed.
29. 5.75	Stuart and Barkly Highways N.T. Second Three-Year Program for Improvement and Maintenance.	28. 8.75	4. 9.75	34,600,000	34,600,000	8.10.75	Recommended as proposed.
5. 6.75	Telephone Exchange Building, Deakin, A.C.T.	21. 8.75	27. 8.75	12,750,000	13,500,000	1.10.75	Recommended as proposed.
8. 7.75	Sadadeen High School, Alice Springs, N.T.	28. 8.75	4. 9.75	5,430,000	5,200,000	9.10.75	Recommended as proposed.
8. 7.75	Naval Transmitter Building and Power Centre, Humpty Doo, N.T.	28. 8.75	4. 9.75	4,500,000	4,500,000	2.10.75	Recommended as proposed.
14. 7.75	Canberra Hospital - Extensions to Podium Stage 1.	11. 9.75	1.10.75	7,600,000	8,170,000	23.10.75	Recommended as proposed.
11. 9.75	Construction of a Multi-Storey Ward Block, Repatriation General Hospital, Greenslopes, Qld.	16.10.75	22.10.75	11,500,000	12,300,000	29.10.75	Recommended as proposed.
2.10.75	Development Roads in the Northern Territory			19,350,000			References lapsed due to Dissolution of 29th Parliament on 11.11.75.
8.10.75	New Complex for Antarctic Division Headquarters and for the Hobart Regional Laboratory of the Australian Analytical Laboratories, Kingston, Tasmania.			7,000,000			
9.10.75	Navy Supply Centre and Army Workshop Facility at Defence Establishment, Zetland, N.S.W.			13,500,000			