

THE PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS



REPORT

relating to the

COMMONWEALTH OFFICES PROJECT, ALICE SPRINGS

(Twentieth Report of 1989)



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DEPARTMENT OF THE SENATE
PAPER No. 4299
DATE
PRESENTED
21 NOV 1989
<i>Mary Evans</i>

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MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE
ON PUBLIC WORKS

(Twenty-ninth Committee)

Mr Colin Hollis MP (Chairman)

Mr Percival Clarence Millar MP (Vice-Chairman)

Senate

House of Representatives

Senator Bryant Robert Burns

Mr George Gear MP

Senator John Robert Devereux

Mr Robert George Halverson OBE MP

Senator Dr Glenister Sheil

Mr John Graham Mountford MP

Mr William Leonard Taylor MP *

* Appointed on 29.9.88 following resignation of
Mr Maxwell Arthur Burr MP

Secretary:

Mr Peter Roberts

SECTIONAL COMMITTEE ON COMMONWEALTH OFFICES PROJECT, ALICE SPRINGS

Mr Colin Hollis MP (Chairman)

Mr Robert George Halverson OBE MP (Vice-Chairman)

Mr William Leonard Taylor MP

Inquiry Staff: **Mr Peter Roberts - Secretary**
 Mrs Denise Denahy - Assistant Secretary
 Mrs Helen Hutchins - Secretarial Support

EXTRACT FROM VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS OF
THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NO. 135 DATED THURSDAY 31 AUGUST 1989

16 PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE - REFERENCE OF WORK - COMMONWEALTH OFFICES PROJECT, ALICE SPRINGS: Mr West (Minister for Administrative Services), pursuant to notice, moved - That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, the following proposed work be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for consideration and report: Commonwealth offices project, Alice Springs.

Mr West presented plans in connection with the proposed work.

Debate ensued.

Question - put and passed.

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

COMMONWEALTH OFFICES PROJECT, ALICE SPRINGS

By resolution on 31 August 1989 the House of Representatives referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for consideration and report the Commonwealth offices project, Alice Springs.

THE REFERENCE

1. This proposal is for the construction of an office building in Alice Springs which will provide 2 800m² of usable space with underground parking. The building structure will have the capacity to provide an additional floor of some 1 400m² to cater for future expansion. The building will be constructed on a Commonwealth-owned site fronting Hartley Street and adjacent to an Alice Springs Town Council park.
2. The estimated cost of the proposal is \$5.68M at August 1989 prices.

THE COMMITTEE'S INVESTIGATION

3. The Committee received a written submission from the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) and took evidence from its representatives at a public hearing in Alice Springs on 27 September 1989.
4. The Committee also received written submissions and took evidence from the following organisations:

- Alice Springs Town Council
- Master Builders Association
- Northern Territory Government
- Public Sector Union (PSU).

5. A written submission was also received from Keeler and Associates Pty Limited, Architects, and is incorporated in the transcript of evidence. A list of witnesses who appeared at the public hearing is at Appendix A. The Committee's proceedings will be printed as Minutes of Evidence.

6. Prior to the public hearing the Committee inspected the proposed site at Alice Springs and existing accommodation occupied by Commonwealth departments.

THE NEED

7. Commonwealth departments in Alice Springs service an area of over one million square kilometres with a stable population exceeding 30 000. The region also has a large transient population and is a focal point for tourism in Central Australia.

8. At present the Commonwealth occupies approximately 4 750m² of leased office accommodation in Alice Springs. Much of this accommodation is inadequate in terms of size, standard and location. DAS advised that there have been structural problems with leased accommodation and also continual staff complaints relating to air-conditioning. This was confirmed by the PSU which also pointed to problems with the sewerage system, poor lighting and inadequate maintenance. Staff complaints led to an industrial dispute in 1986 and although conditions had improved were still far from satisfactory.

9. DAS informed the Committee that the provision of a Commonwealth Centre in Alice Springs is essential for the provision of efficient Commonwealth services in the region. The

building will also serve as a regional headquarters for areas such as Yulara, Tennant Creek and as far north as Elliot. This proposal will also allow ready access by the public to a building clearly identifiable as the focus of Commonwealth services and activities in Alice Springs.

10. DAS believes this proposal represents the most appropriate and economical method of satisfying the Commonwealth's office accommodation requirements in Alice Springs following an examination of other delivery methods such as instalment purchase and leasing. This proposal will provide the following advantages:

- the proposed occupants of the offices are all Commonwealth service agencies and collocation in the main activity centre will provide ready access for the public to a building clearly identifiable as a focus of Commonwealth activity in the Alice Springs region
- collocation of Commonwealth departments will produce economies of scale and provision of common use facilities and services
- collocation will also provide opportunities to rationalise space requirements with future tenancy changes
- leased office accommodation often requires costly modifications to air-conditioning systems, lighting, electrical capacity etc in order to meet modern and changing office needs. This is particularly so with the increased use of screen-based computer equipment in Commonwealth offices. This building will have the capacity and flexibility to adapt to these changing needs.

Committee's Conclusion

11. There is a need to replace existing substandard office accommodation in Alice Springs with a Commonwealth owned office building which will also provide a focus for Commonwealth services in Alice Springs.

THE PROPOSAL

Summary

12. The proposal is to construct an office building which will provide some 2 800m² of usable office space to accommodate the Commonwealth office requirements in the region. The major occupants will be the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Commonwealth Employment Service. The building will be fitted out to current commercial standards concurrently with its construction.

Government Objectives

13. The proposal is in line with Government objectives of:

- providing suitable accommodation for departments to enhance their efficiency of operations and delivery of services to the public
- increasing the proportion of owned office accommodation
- reducing overall rental costs (rental costs will reduce from \$1.1M per annum to \$0.56M per annum)

- developing its own office buildings which allow for ready and economic adaption to longer term changes and user requirements.

Planning

14. The design will incorporate the specific requirements of proposed occupants whilst retaining sufficient flexibility for a wide range of potential users. The building will provide two floors of office accommodation with a basement car-park.

15. Access to the building is from Hartley Street through a shaded plaza into an atrium. Separate entrances to each tenancy is achieved from the atrium. This satisfies the brief requirement for separate entrances for the two major tenants requiring high public access whilst maintaining maximum 'shopfront' exposure. A centrally located service core containing a lift, toilets, stairs, and common use facilities is directly accessible from the main entry atrium. The design is based on client requirements and the Australian Property Group brief, relevant construction standards, Codes of Practice and Australian Standards.

Civic Design

16. The proposed offices are located in the government services precinct of the central business district. The building has been designed to provide a focus for Commonwealth services in Alice Springs and to enhance and complement the streetscape and the adjoining park whilst maintaining a scale in keeping with the surrounding environment. Setbacks from all alignments will be provided.

17. External shading will be provided to all elevations. The shopfront access is recessed to form a shaded plaza. Both measures will enhance energy conservation and the plaza will form

an extension to the adjoining park as a sheltered waiting area for people accompanying those seeking services in the building.

Accommodation

18. The building will contain the following:

- secure underground parking for 46 vehicles while bicycle parking and service areas will be provided in the basement
- shopfront office accommodation on the ground floor
- general office accommodation and associated staff amenities on the first floor
- access for disabled persons will be provided in accordance with the relevant codes.

19. Staff amenities will conform to the Code of Practice for the provision of amenities in Commonwealth Government employment. Male and female showers will be provided. Male and female toilets will be provided for client use.

20. Toilets for disabled persons and other facilities in line with the relevant standards will be incorporated in the design.

Concerns Regarding Accommodation

Parking

21. Both the Alice Springs Town Council and the PSU raised concerns regarding the amount of car-parking to be provided. The Council indicated that a commercial building of this size would

require the provision of 84 spaces while the future expansion of 1 400m² would raise the requirement to 126 spaces.

22. DAS indicated that current Commonwealth Government policy prescribes that parking in Commonwealth buildings is provided for official vehicles only - staff parking is not provided. However as indicated in recent Committee reports the current Commonwealth policy on the provision of car-parking is being reviewed.

Staff Amenities

23. The PSU requested the provision of the following staff amenities:

- a union room
- gymnasium
- a balcony for smokers.

24. In response DAS indicated that while not providing a dedicated union facility, a common area with conference room and visitors office will be available for use by unions. Provision of a dedicated facility by individual departments is a matter for consultation between client departments and the unions. DAS would not support the provision of a gymnasium and indicated that a commercial aerobics and fitness centre is located close to the proposed site. The provision of a balcony for smokers is not supported as Government policy prohibits smoking in Commonwealth buildings.

Childcare

25. This project, in common with similar office projects referred to the Committee, does not make provision for a childcare facility. As indicated in recent reports, the Committee repeats its call to the Government to review its

current policy of not providing childcare facilities in Commonwealth offices.

The Site

26. The site is Commonwealth-owned fronting Hartley Street and adjacent to a park owned by the Alice Springs Town Council. The site is in close proximity to the Council offices, Northern Territory Government offices and to commercial, retail and banking premises, the law courts and a police station.

27. It is a regular shaped property with an area of approximately 3 500m². Part of the site is currently occupied by old timber-framed buildings being utilised by an Army unit - the North West Mobile Force (NORFORCE). Those buildings will be demolished to make way for the new building.

28. The site has an April 1989 valuation of \$525 000. Ownership of the property was retained by the Commonwealth at the time of self-government for the Northern Territory in 1978. DAS did examine another site offered to it by the Northern Territory Government. However, as it was removed from the central business district, it was considered unsuitable.

Committee's Conclusion

29. The Commonwealth site in Hartley Street is suitable for the construction of the Commonwealth offices project.

CONSTRUCTION

Materials and Finishes

External

30. External walls including service cores, stair shafts and

columns will be precast concrete with a fine exposed aggregate finish or a pressed metal cladding system. Services will include an "anti-graffiti" treatment.

31. External service cores will be lined with masonry. Windows will be tinted glass. Window-frames and infills will be dark bronze anodized aluminium. It will be possible to open 30% of the windows.

Internal

32. Circulation areas will incorporate materials and finishes chosen for serviceability, ease of cleaning and maintenance, and a high degree of hygiene. Internal facades to the atrium will have glazed windows in natural aluminium frames. Spandrels and columns will have aluminium cladding.

Floors

33. Floors will be carpeted in the office areas. Non-slip ceramic tiles will be used in wet areas, and dimpled rubber material will be provided to foyers.

Ceilings

34. Ceilings will comprise suspended acoustic tiles to office areas and painted plasterboard elsewhere.

Engineering Services

General

35. Services will cater for tenant fitout requirements and provide for flexibility and growth.

Energy

36. The proposed building will have features designed to minimise total building energy consumption including:

- sunscreening
- glazing
- high efficiency
- low pressure air handling plant with outside air cycle
- the use of natural lighting supplemented by controlled artificial lighting.

37. Energy saving features and management techniques will be included as part of the detailed design. In particular, the atrium will be developed as part of the low energy consumption of the building.

38. Overall energy requirements for heating and cooling will be reduced by the atrium being tempered and cooled by natural means and supplemented by relief air from occupied areas. The use of solar energy was investigated for both hot water and air-conditioning but was not found to be economically feasible for this project.

Structure

39. The building will consist of reinforced concrete columns and floors with reinforced concrete retaining walls at basement level. Floors will be designed for normal office loading of 5kPa with selected areas capable of supporting compactus loads.

40. The structure of the building has been designed to allow for the addition of one extra floor of approximately 1 400m² should this be required in the future. The extra cost to the structural element is \$30 000 and has been included in the cost estimate.

41. The Committee requested DAS to provide it with information regarding the cost of extending the building in the future. This information is set out below and it should be noted that these estimates have not been included in the cost of the existing proposal and all costs are shown in current values.

- Option 1 - Provide concrete slab and third level (including fitout) as part of the existing proposal - \$ 1 850 000.

(DAS believes that this option cannot be justified at this time as there is no Commonwealth need for the space within the next five years and at this stage the Northern Territory Administration has no wish to collocate with Commonwealth activities and the Alice Springs Town Council has no need for the space. There is also no demand from the private sector for accommodation of this standard).

- Option 2 - Provide the additional floor at a later stage on a concrete slab provided as part of the existing proposal.
 - slab now: \$200 000
 - floor later (including fitout): \$2 300 000.

It is expected that staff occupying space in the building in this option would not be required to vacate during construction.

• Option 3 - Providing both the concrete slab and the additional floor at a later stage has two components:

- building component (including fitout) -	
	\$2 850 000
- leasing cost for displaced staff -	
	\$ 700 000
Total:	\$3 550 000.

42. Having examined the information provided by DAS, the Committee believes that the concrete slab for the future third level should be provided as part of the current proposal.

Committee's Recommendation

43. To enable the future expansion of the building a concrete slab should be provided as part of the current proposal at an additional estimated cost of \$200 000.

Mechanical

44. Air-conditioning will be provided to all office areas. Exhaust systems will ventilate the toilets and lift room floors. Hot water will be supplied to all toilets, tea rooms and cleaners rooms. Refrigerated drinking water units will be provided to office floors.

Lifts

45. A lift with the carrying capacity of sixteen persons will be provided.

Electrical

46. Mains power will be taken from the Northern Territory Power and Water Authority at high voltage and reticulated from an on-site transformer substation.

47. Lighting throughout will be in accordance with general requirements of Australian Standard 1680 Interior Lighting and Visual Environments. Where reduction of glare is required, light fittings will have low brightness diffusers.

Fire Services

48. The building will incorporate a hydrant hosereel system designed in accordance with requirements of the Fire Safety Act and the Building Act. An automatic water pipe sprinkler system will be provided in accordance with AS 2118. Portable fire extinguishers will also be provided.

Hydraulics

49. The hydraulics services will comprise the following:

- water supply for domestic and fire service requirements
- sanitary plumbing and drainage system
- storm water drainage system.

50. The above services will comply with the relevant authority's codes and regulations.

Security

51. Static and electronic perimeter and internal security will be provided. Details will be determined by client department

requirements. Floor designs and lift control options will allow for discrete security of individual tenancies or floors. Key operation of the basement car-park entrance will be provided.

ENVIRONMENT

52. DAS advised the Committee that under the provisions of the Environment Protection (Impact of Proposals) Act 1974, an environmental impact statement is not required.

CONSULTATION

53. DAS consulted with the following organisations:

Commonwealth

- Attorney-General's Department
- Australian Valuation Office
- Australian Survey and Land Information Group
- Department of Aboriginal Affairs
- Department of Community Services and Health
- Department of Employment, Education and Training
- Department of Social Security
- Department of the Arts, Sport, Environment, Tourism and Territories

Northern Territory

- Department of Lands and Housing
- Northern Territory Planning Authority
- Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services
- Northern Territory Power and Water Authority
- Alice Springs Town Council

Staff Associations

- Staff and staff associations in Alice Springs through direct consultation and the Australian Broadcasting and Public Sector Union.

Other Organisations

- Combined Aboriginal Organisations.
- Disabled Persons Bureau

CONSTRUCTION PROGRAM

54. Completion of the building including fitout is scheduled to be achieved by early 1991.

LIMIT OF COST

55. The estimated cost of the proposed work is \$5.68M at August 1989 prices and the total estimated cost on completion is approximately \$7M inclusive of fitout, escalation and fees. As indicated in paragraph 43 the Committee has recommended that a concrete slab to allow future expansion should be provided as part of this proposal at an additional estimated cost of \$200 000.

56. DAS informed the Committee at the public hearing that the original plan was for an office building of 3 600m² at an estimated final cost of \$9M. However, further analysis of the office accommodation market in Alice Springs indicated that the proposal needed to be reduced to 2 800m² as some Commonwealth agencies were suitably accommodated in leased space at a justified rental rate. Therefore, the proposal to provide 3 600m² could not be economically sustained at this time. As outlined in the report the proposed building has capacity for future extension should it be required.

57. Although the reduced proposal was below the \$6M reference limit, the Committee believed that in the circumstances, it should still examine the proposal and requested DAS to proceed with reference action. DAS agreed to the request and the proposal was referred on 31 August 1989.

Committee's Recommendation

58. The Committee recommends construction of the Commonwealth offices project, Alice Springs at an estimated cost of \$5.68M at August 1989 prices.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

59. The conclusions and recommendations of the Committee are set out below with the paragraph in the report to which each refers:

	Paragraph
1. There is a need to replace existing substandard office accommodation in Alice Springs with a Commonwealth owned office building which will also provide a focus for Commonwealth services in Alice Springs.	11
2. The Commonwealth site in Hartley Street is suitable for the construction of the Commonwealth offices project.	29
3. To enable the future expansion of the building a concrete slab should be provided as part of the current proposal at an additional estimated cost of \$200 000.	43
4. The Committee recommends construction of the Commonwealth offices project, Alice Springs at an estimated cost of \$5.68M at August 1989 prices.	58


Colin Hollis

Chairman

21 November 1989.

APPENDIX A

LIST OF WITNESSES

BARRY, Mr Eugene Herbert, Acting Town Engineer and Town Planner, Alice Springs Town Council, Civic Centre, Todd Street, Alice Springs, NT

BATES, Mr Brian, Client Services Manager Northern Division, Department of Administrative Services, Australian Construction Services, MLC Building, 3rd Floor, 81 Smith Street, Darwin, NT

EDWARDS, Mr Colin William, State Manager, Australian Property Group, Northern Territory, Department of Administrative Services, TCG Centre, 7th Floor, 80 Mitchell Street, Darwin, Nt

GORDON, Mr Ian Donald, Secretary, Department of Transport and Works, Box 2520, Darwin, NT

JACKA, Mr Andrew Robert, Deputy State Manager, Northern Division, Department of Administrative Services, Australian Construction Services, MLC Building, 3rd Floor, 81 Smith Street, Darwin, NT

MAU, Ms Linda Pauline, Northern Territory Executive Member, Public Sector Union, Corner Gregory Terrace and Both Street, Alice Springs, NT

O'KEEFE, Mr Allan John, Chairman, Master Builders Association, Centralian Division, PO Box 1040, Alice Springs, NT

SAMPSON, Mr Brian, Director Project, Australian Property Group, Department of Administrative Services, PO Box 1920, Canberra, ACT

APPENDIX B

PROJECT DRAWINGS

Figure 1 - Location Plan
Figure 2 - Section and Elevation Plan

- B2
- B3

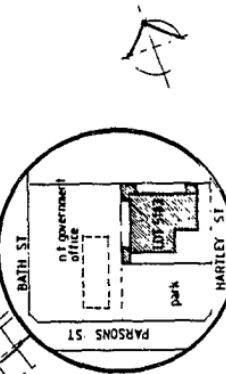
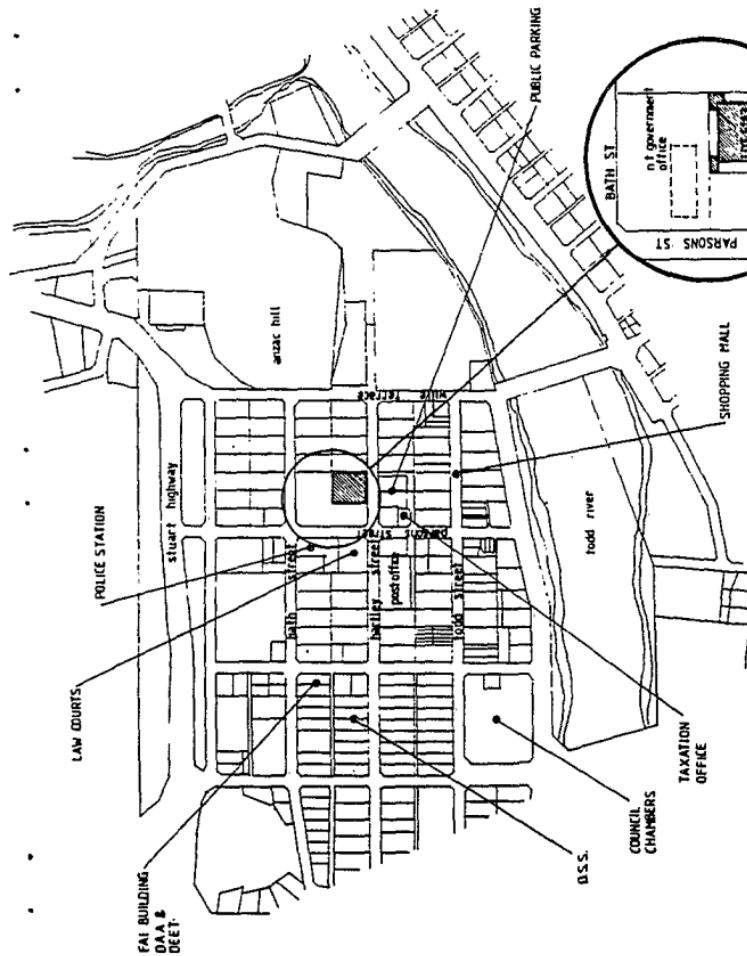
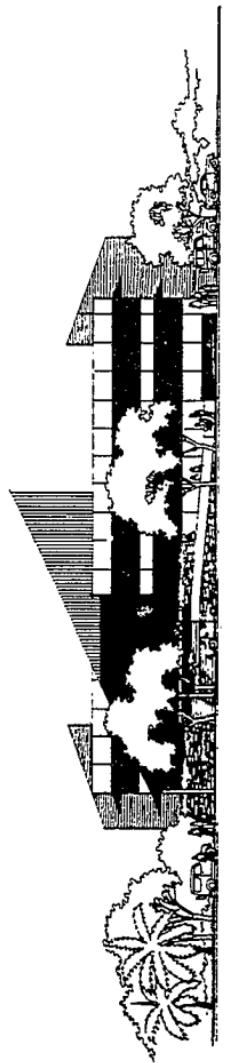
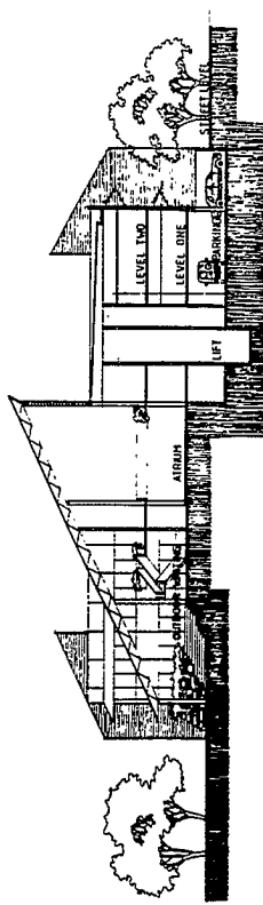


Figure 1 – location plan



elevation to harley street

B3



section

Figure 2 - section and elevation

— t₁ — t₂ — t₃ — t₄ — t₅ — t₆ — t₇ — t₈ — t₉ — t₁₀ —