



*The Parliament of the
Commonwealth of Australia*

*Joint Standing Committee
on the Parliamentary Zone*

**THE FUTURE OF THE
OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE**

NOVEMBER 1992

1.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE
PARLIAMENTARY ZONE

(Thirty-sixth Parliament)

Joint Chairmen

Senator the Hon K W Sibraa
President of the Senate

Hon L B McLeay MP
Speaker of the House of Representatives

Members

Senator B R Archer

Senator J Coates

Senator M A Colston

Senator M E Reid

Senator K W Sowada

Hon J D M Dobie MP

Mr R G Halverson OBE MP

Hon A C Holding MP

Mr C Hollis MP

Mr M J Lee MP

Secretary to the Committee

Mr P F Bergin

Introduction

1. The Parliamentary Zone Development Plan published by the National Capital Development Commission in January of 1986 commented on the impact of the New Parliament House. It suggested that the New Parliament House will constitute a shift in the focus of activity to Capital Hill.

2. It also suggested:

"The provisional Parliament House will become derelict unless a new use is found for it which is of sufficient status to justify refurbishment of the building together with a continuing high standard of maintenance," Page 6.

Both suggestions have become realities.

Old/Provisional Parliament House

3. It is not proposed in this report to examine the historical background of the old Parliament House. It is sufficient to note that it was opened in 1927 and for over fifty years served the Parliament of Australia. Those years were important years in the history of Australia encompassing the Great Depression of the 1930s, the second World War and the Vietnam War.

4. The building was extended on a number of occasions yet it still remains as a focal point for many historical events and as a symbol of the Australian commitment to democracy.

1984 Report

5. The Joint Standing Committee on the New Parliament House in May 1984 reported on the Future Use of the Provisional Parliament House. The report recommended that the building not be demolished and:

"The most appropriate future use would be as a museum related to the Australian Constitution, Federation and the Commonwealth Parliament". Recommendation No 3.

6. A further recommendation was that the provisional Parliament House should remain under the control of the Presiding Officers who would be advised by a Joint Parliamentary Committee appointed specifically for the purpose. The complete recommendations of the report are set out at Attachment A.

The Parliamentary Zone Development

7. The provisional Parliament House was, in 1986, one of nine major buildings in the Parliamentary Zone and a feasibility study was, according to the Development Plan, underway into the post 1988 use of the building.

8. It was anticipated that the study would lead to recommendations for a major refurbishment of the building particularly re-modelling of the roof and south facade. Further on it was stated that:

"Provisional Parliament House: It will be necessary to refurbish the existing building when its future use has been determined. The south facade and the roof will have to be reconstructed because of their visibility from the New Parliament House. Because of the centrality of this particular site is it important that a tourist information centre be located in the building after its evacuation by Parliament, or alternatively, a new building for such a purpose be erected in the vicinity. The east and west gardens may require re-planning depending upon the future use of the provisional Parliament House". Page 35. Parliamentary Zone Development Plan. National Capital Development Commission, January 1986.

9. The reference to the evacuation of the building conjures up images of a building about to collapse.

10. With the move to the New Parliament House, the old Parliament House became the responsibility of the Department of Administrative Services. It became another Commonwealth property.

Committee Considerations

11. This Committee has, since its appointment, been concerned at the inaction regarding the old Parliament House. To the passerby it appears to be left to decay, a once great symbol of Australian democracy.

12. At its second meeting on 28 February 1992, the Committee was briefed by officers of the Department of Administrative Services on the proposals for the old Parliament House. A working group was appointed at the next meeting of the Committee on 27 March 1992 to seek the views of Members, Senators and other relevant groups on the use of the old Parliament House as a constitutional museum. Senator Reid and Mr Holding were co-convenors while the other members were Senator Coates, Senator Archer and Mr Halverson.

13. While some chose to make written comments, others made verbal comments to the members of the working group and the proposal for a constitutional museum met with general support from both Members and Senators.

14. Two of the Committee's meetings, 1 May and 26 July 1992, were held in the old Parliament House during which time members took the opportunity to tour the building. Those meetings and tours served to strengthen the resolve of the members to preserve and enhance the old Parliament House.
15. At present the old Parliament House is used for occasional functions and for irregular tours. It cannot be claimed to be in regular use, rather it is in limbo awaiting a decision on its future. The fear is that before a decision is made the building will fall into such a state of disrepair that to return it to its former state will no longer be an option.
16. The Committee is aware of the Heritage Strategy for the old Parliament House Redevelopment and of the proposals for the interim use of the building. The Committee views with apprehension some of the proposals for the use of the building. It had been suggested it would cost over \$60 million to restore it to its 1927 state. The Committee does not consider restoration to its 1927 state as essential since to do so would neglect or rather destroy many of the additions and the events that occurred in them. Another concern is that the proposed uses do not relate to the building but rather the history of those organisations that acquire space in the building. However, it is not aware of any action on these proposals. Nor is it enthusiastic about proposals which may see the building become yet another office block within the Parliamentary Triangle.
17. The old Parliament House was designed for the Parliament and its use should continue to enhance the parliamentary ethos of Australian Society. The Chambers which in earlier days were the venues for debates on Australia's future could once again be made to come alive through the use of modern technology. It would no doubt make for a spectacular sound and light presentation. The proposal for a portrait gallery is not incompatible with the Committee's intention for the building since Kings' Hall was a defacto portrait gallery in the days when the building was alive and the portraits of our past leaders evoked much interest from the visitors to the building.
18. The development of the old Parliament House as a constitutional museum would not be an alternative to the Museum of Australia but would complement it. The Museum of Australia would be one of the most important of the many organisations that could assist in this development.
19. The last four years have seen little action in relation to the old Parliament House. This inaction in no way reflects on the officers of the Department of Administrative Services who have shown a real empathy for, and commitment to, the building. It is a tribute to these officers that the building has not fallen into greater disrepair.

Conclusion

20. As Australia moves towards 100 years of Federation there could be no more fitting way to commemorate the significance of the Federation than by restoring the old Parliament House to remind Australia of the developments that have taken place during those first 100 years.

21. It would stand restored reflecting not only past memories but also future aspirations of the Australian nation.

22. The Committee views with concern the current inaction on the old Parliament House. Old Parliament House should be made available and accessible to the Australian people as a matter of urgency. The cobwebs that have been spun should be removed and the building should once again be accessible. The building offers many opportunities to recreate Australian history in a way that will not only remind Australians but also educate them on the history of the nation. The recommendations of the 1984 report should be reconsidered and adopted. That reconsideration and adoption would be the first step towards the commemoration of 100 years of Australian achievement.

23. The museum should be the subject of a staged development within the building as over time all the building should be opened up to the public. The first stage in such a process would be to return the building to the custody of the Presiding Officers who are in turn responsible to the Parliament.

24. The Government recently announced the approval of a plan to refurbish the old Parliament House. The plan provided for \$1.25 million to be spent to fit-out the interior of the building to make it more accessible to the public.

25. The Committee welcomes the announcement but considers the building should be the responsibility of the Parliament.

26. The Committee recommends that:

1. The old Parliament House, including the gardens, by regulation made under, or by amendment of, the Parliamentary Precincts Act 1988 be included in the Parliamentary precincts so that the old Parliament House and the gardens are the responsibility of the Parliament and under the control and management of the Presiding Officers;

6.

2. The old Parliament House be developed as a museum related to the Australian Constitution, Federation and the Australian Parliament; and
3. The Resolution of Appointment of the Joint Standing Committee on the Parliamentary Zone be amended to provide for it to advise on proposals for the development of the old Parliament House.

Jerry Delaney
(KERRY W. DELANEY)
President
of the Senate

Leo McLeay
(LEO McLEAY)
Speaker of the House
of Representatives

COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

1. THE PROVISIONAL PARLIAMENT HOUSE SHOULD NOT BE DEMOLISHED (Paragraph 4.13)
2. BECAUSE OF THE HISTORICAL AND HERITAGE MERITS OF THE PROVISIONAL PARLIAMENT HOUSE IT SHOULD REMAIN BASICALLY AS IT IS SUBJECT TO THE MODIFICATIONS REQUIRED TO THE SOUTHERN FAÇADE AND THE ROOFLINE TO ENHANCE THE VIEWS OF IT FROM CAPITAL HILL (Paragraph 4.18)
3. THE MOST APPROPRIATE FUTURE USE WOULD BE AS A MUSEUM RELATED TO THE AUSTRALIAN CONSTITUTION, FEDERATION AND COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENT (Paragraph 4.30)
4. THE PARLIAMENTARY MUSEUM SHOULD BECOME THE CUSTODIAN OF THOSE PAINTINGS AND OTHER ITEMS OF ARTISTIC MERIT WHICH ARE PART OF THE NATIONAL COLLECTION AND WHICH HAVE PARLIAMENTARY OR POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE (Paragraph 4.33)
5. THE PROVISIONAL HOUSE SHOULD REMAIN UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE PRESIDING OFFICERS ADVISED BY A JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE APPOINTED SPECIFICALLY FOR THE PURPOSE (Paragraph 4.34)
6. FUNDS SHOULD BE PROVIDED IN THE 1984/85 FINANCIAL YEAR FOR A CONSERVATION ANALYSIS AND PLAN TO BE CARRIED OUT ON THE PROVISIONAL PARLIAMENT HOUSE (Paragraph 4.37)
7. THE CONTINUED LONG-TERM USE OF THE PROVISIONAL HOUSE BY THE PARLIAMENTARY DEPARTMENTS IS NOT APPROPRIATE (Paragraph 4.38)