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THE PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE  
NEW PARLIAMENT HOUSE

REPORT RELATING TO THE PLANNING FOR  
THE SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CHAMBERS  
IN THE NEW PARLIAMENT HOUSE

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(Thirty-fourth Parliament)

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REPORT RELATING TO THE PLANNING FOR  
THE SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CHAMBERS  
IN THE NEW PARLIAMENT HOUSE

1. The Joint Standing Committee on the New Parliament House has considered proposals for the interior design of the new Parliament House. This consideration commenced in 1983 with the interior design theme and has progressed through a number of the major spaces in the building. Consideration of the interior design matters followed the resolution of most of the building design and layout issues which the Committee had previously approved.
2. The Senate and House of Representatives Chambers are two of the major spaces for which interior design proposals were submitted to the Committee. These particular submissions were endorsed in April 1984 after the Committee had adopted the interior design concept in November 1983.
3. During 1985 the Committee has given further consideration to certain aspects of the design of the Chambers with particular emphasis on the details of colours, lighting and seating.
4. In order that Senators and Members are informed of the interior details of the Chambers in the new House this short report has been prepared. The report briefly records those features common to both Chambers and then describes in more detail the interior design and arrangements for each Chamber separately.

**CHAMBERS: GENERAL**

5. The layout of the Chambers in the new Parliament House is based on those in the provisional building, as required by the brief. The design of the Chambers endeavours to create a sense of 'intimacy' within spaces which are large in total volume terms. This will enable debate to take place without the impression of addressing a large group in an auditorium. The horseshoe configuration will allow for future increases in the numbers of Senators and Members to be accommodated within their respective chambers without structural change to the building.

6. Each Chamber will be a column free space of three levels, surrounded by lobbies for Senators and Members at ground level with public and the media galleries at first floor level and soundproof galleries and translation galleries at second floor level.

7. One of the main features in each Chamber will be the large central three-dimensional skylight chandelier which will allow controlled natural light into the Chamber. Through these skylights the artificial light in the Chambers will be visible at night from the exterior of the building. The roof skylights will be major external elements in the building's visual identity and will clearly identify the location of each Chamber. The character of each Chamber will largely be created by high quality materials and craftsmanship, rather than by the use of artworks.

8. Considerable emphasis has been placed on acoustic and light level testing of the Chambers. The designed acoustic properties of the Chambers will be supplemented by a suspended speech reinforcement system. The speech reinforcement systems to be provided in the Chambers will ensure proper audibility and clarity within those spaces. The light levels within the chambers will be kept relatively constant to ensure pleasant and efficient working conditions and allow for possible televising of the proceedings.

9. The basic interior design intent is to maintain and reinforce the character and unity of the "global plan" within the separate identity of each space and room. With this in mind the two Chambers have been developed along similar lines, yet maintaining their own clear identity. The two Chambers with their traditional colour references were the generators of the colour theme and organisation for the building as a whole. The palette of colours presented in November of 1983 showed visibly the interdependence of the two Chambers as the originators of the structure by which interior materials were selected and gauged.

10. The actual floor of each Chamber is the focus of attention, and the floor is the source and most intense use of the symbolic red or green. In each Chamber the symbolic colour is maintained to present a unified interior, yet it is gradually lightened as it rises toward the light entering from the clerestories and skylight at the ceiling thereby unifying the whole space. Additionally light enters each Chamber at four vertical corner slit windows. Coats of arms are carefully integrated with the major architectural elements giving significance yet maintaining an overall simplicity of design.

11. Acoustical tests of 1:10 scale models completed in 1982 established the requirements for acoustical absorption at wall surfaces to overcome the generation of echo within large spaces. Consistent with this requirement and in response to the significant surface area required to provide adequate absorption the Architects recommended the use of special fabric wall panels. The primary use of fabric in combination with the carpet of the floor and the fabric/leather seating elements again provide significance through design and craft yet maintain an overall dignified simplicity.

12. The design of each Chamber will ensure that the future installation of electronic facilities, such as voting systems, can be undertaken without major disruption to the Chamber. In relation to electronic voting systems, no provision is being made during construction for the provision of voting result display panels, however allowance is being made in the design of the Chamber desks for the future incorporation of voting consoles.

13. Each Chamber will be equipped with seven television cameras placed in recessed and discreet locations to avoid intrusion. Each camera will be controlled remotely and linked for production purposes to the central operations area in the basement. Pictures generated by the cameras will be of broadcast quality to facilitate any future decision of the Parliament agreeing to televise proceedings. The camera output will also be used as part of the house monitoring system which will provide a video and audio service.

14. Translation galleries are included in the design of each Chamber to provide facilities required on occasions when the Chambers may be used for multi-lingual conferences. The translation system will be cabled to all floor level positions in each Chamber.

15. Seating for Senators and Members will be designed to incorporate maximum ergonomic efficiency and functional comfort. Desks will be designed to integrate microphone and call bell facilities, future electronic voting panels, headphone jacks, a writing surface and storage.

16. In both Chambers the Hansard activity will be accommodated at a table separate from the main Chamber Table.

17. Some historic furniture and items of memorabilia connected with the Chambers such as the Speaker's Chair will be transferred from the provisional Parliament House. In general, however, furniture and other appointments in the Chambers will be new and designed to harmonise with the architecture of the Chambers and the interior design concept.

18. Each Chamber will be equipped with the necessary ancillary facilities required for its operation. These include such items as clocks, speech timers, division bells and lights, other digital clock displays for the Clerk, Deputy Clerk and Hansard Reporter and attendants call system. Each Chamber will be provided with a dedicated document movement system linking the Sub-Table office with the attendant's station.

19. The general lobbies adjacent to each Chamber will include service alcoves where light refreshments may be available to Senators and Members when the Houses are sitting. The lobby areas open onto the inner courtyards.

#### SENATE CHAMBER

20. The architectural character of the Senate Chamber will be defined by the corner piers which support the galleries at different levels, by the oval configuration of the roof and the multi-faceted glass skylight and the symbolic use of the red colours.

21. The Senate Chamber, initially will provide seating for 88 Senators and 18 advisers in a 3-stepped seating arrangement including a single seat for the Usher of the Black Rod. The third and fourth party advisers will be accommodated in guests galleries to be located on the floor of the Chamber. The President's gallery will also be located at Chamber level. The steps between seating levels will be kept relatively low to maintain a balance between adequate sight lines and ease of movement within the Chamber. On the occasion of the Opening of Parliament seating can be provided for the total number of 260 Senators and Members by positioning temporary seating along the third step on the floor of the Chamber. As required by the brief, permanent seating for 118 Senators and the Usher of the Black Rod can be provided and, by adding temporary seating, the projected total of 360 Senators and Members can be accommodated on the Chamber floor level.

22. A limited number of positions in the Chamber will be provided with telephone inter-com links (silent ringing) to offices and suites.

23. At first floor level, three stepped galleries will provide for 398 visitors/tourists and space for six wheelchairs. Provision will also be made within these galleries for separate areas for an officers' gallery and a guests' gallery. Structural provision will be made for the future installation of security glazing if required. A fourth gallery at first floor level, behind the President's Chair will accommodate media representatives.

24. Soundproof galleries with capacity for 72 persons standing and 68 sitting will overlook the Chamber from two sides on the second floor level. These galleries will enable the operations of the Chamber to be described to visitors without disturbing proceedings on the Chamber floor. Also located on this floor and overlooking the Chamber will be translation galleries to provide language facilities for international Parliamentary conferences.

25. It is proposed to feature the following materials in the Senate Chamber:

Floor:	Red carpet - specially made
Walls:	Stucco - white
	Acoustical fabric panels with timber trim
Ceiling:	Acoustic cast plaster
Seats, Desks &	
Centre Table:	Jarrah
Screen behind	
	President's Chair
	and Coat of Arms: Tasmanian myrtle

#### HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CHAMBER

26. The House of Representatives Chamber will have four pairs of corner columns, which rise through the full height of the space and support the roof and its rectangular skylight.



27. The interior of the House of Representatives Chamber will be similar in layout to that of the Senate but its larger seating capacity provides an opportunity to create a different architectural space. The Chamber will have the capacity to seat 172 Members, which may be increased ultimately to 240. Provision is included for 11 Advisers and the Serjeant-at-Arms. A joint sitting of the projected total of 240 Members and 120 Senators can be accommodated by the addition of temporary seats along the perimeter of the Chamber.

28. Three galleries will allow seating for a total of 528 visitors and space for six wheelchairs. Provision will be made within these galleries for an allocation of up to 70 seats in the Senators' and Diplomats' Gallery and a similar number of seats in the Speaker's Gallery located on either side of the Chamber at first floor level. Structural provision will be made for the future installation of security glazing if required. A fourth gallery located behind the Speaker's Chair will accommodate representatives of the press and media.

29. Soundproof galleries will be located on two sides of the Chamber at the second floor level with a capacity for 64 persons seated and 64 standing. Cabling will be provided at this level for the possible provision of simultaneous interpretation services should the Chamber be used for multi-lingual Parliamentary conferences.

30. It is proposed to feature the following materials in the House of Representatives:

Floor:	Green carpet - specially made
Walls:	Stucco - white
	Acoustical fabric panels with leather trim
Ceiling:	Acoustic cast plaster and profiled timber
Seats & Desks:	Grey Box

## CONCLUSION

31. Whilst this report deals only with the Chambers, the Committee will provide a comprehensive report on the overall Developed Design for the new Parliament House.



(D. McCLELLAND)  
President



(H.A. JENKINS)  
Speaker

Joint Chairmen

13 November 1985