



Dissenting Report of the Australian Labor Party Committee Members

The Labor Party Committee members of the Public Works Committee (PWC) wish to remind the other members of schedule 17 of the *Public Works Committee Act 1969*. Schedule 17 clearly states that it is the responsibility of committee members to have regard to:

- the stated purpose of the work and its suitability for that purpose; and
- the most effective use that can be made, in the carrying out of the work.

We are not satisfied that these two factors have been given the appropriate consideration in this report.

The Labor Party committee members have serious concerns about the cost of the proposed fit out of the embassy and does not support the report in its current form.

Specifically Labor is concerned about the building's suitability for the purposes outlined by the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT).

Labor is concerned that the cost of fitting out and furnishing an 812 square metre space is in excess of what is reasonable given the proposal seeks to only accommodate 15 staff members. Given that four of these employees will be security staff, the office sizes and sizes of communal areas, we believe it is clearly excessive.

Labor acknowledges the concerns raised by submitter, Mr Julian Carter, that the building is already an office space and therefore does not need to be completely demolished before being fitted out.

Recommendation

Labor members recommend that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade seriously reconsider the need to demolish the existing office space fit out in the Tornado Tower, Doha, Qatar and seek out more cost effective solution for the taxpayer.

Recommendation

Labor members recommend that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade pursue a more cost effective fit out option for the Australian Embassy in Doha, Qatar.

We believe the \$7,000 per square metre fitout is excessive. 140 square metres has been set aside for public functions and events and there is an 81 square metre space that has not been justified either in the report or in hearings.

In justifying the fit-out, DFAT representatives cited trade figures, Qatari student numbers, as well as data on the expected 9% increase of Australian visitors to Qatar. However, DFAT did not provide nor give any baseline figures for Australian visitors to Qatar, and cited a desire to double the 93 Qatari students that study in Australia. Firstly, without a clear indication of the number of Australian visitors it is difficult to assess whether or not a 9% increase is significant. Secondly, we believe the possibility of 93 more students is not compelling enough to justify the cost of the fit-out. Finally, the trade figures between both nations are likely to contract as the \$58 million dollar trade of motor vehicles is likely to soon disappear.

At no point either in the hearings nor in the report did DFAT provide comparative data or outline any threshold that necessitates the opening of a consulate.

According to the Statement of Evidence regarding the Fitout of the Australian Embassy in Doha, paragraph 2.1.8 confirmed that DFAT required 817 metres squared in space. No justification was given for this spatial requirement given that the same document only makes reference to 15 staff members.

Graham Perrett MP
Deputy Chair

Sharon Claydon MP
Committee Member

Senator Alex Gallacher
Committee Member

Joanne Ryan MP
Committee Member

