



PARLIAMENT of AUSTRALIA HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES

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8 April 2015

Ms Lyn Beverley
Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration

Dear Ms Beverley

INQUIRY INTO THE PROPOSED PARLIAMENT HOUSE SECURITY UPGRADE WORKS

Thank you for your letter of 27 March 2015 inviting me to make a submission to the Committee's inquiry into the proposed Parliament House security upgrade works.

I propose to make some general comments to the Committee to provide context rather than comment on the detail of the proposed works.

The Context

It is worth seeing the latest proposals for the upgrade of security at Parliament House in context.

Since the building was occupied in 1988 there have been a wide range of security measures and works undertaken to strengthen the security of Parliament House and its surrounds. These measures have been in response to changing security threats and assessment of threats. For example, after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 in New York and October 2002 in Bali, a range of measures were implemented such as the bollards on the Ministerial, House of Representatives and Senate slip roads, the concrete wall around Parliament Drive and the restriction of access to the grassed roof of Parliament House. Following external reviews of security in 2009 and 2010-11, there were a number of upgrades to the physical security of the building, including a new security operations control room, a purpose built mail screening facility, enhancements to the car parks, blast proofing of external windows, and modifications to internal security points. There has also been significant work in relation to ICT security. Although some measures attracted adverse comment at the time, they are now accepted as part of the framework of security protection for the building.

Implementing new security measures at Parliament House has its challenges. Such measures, quite rightly, attract considerable scrutiny from members of Parliament, the media and the general community. In a robust democracy such as we have in Australia, there is a need to balance security requirements with the openness and accessibility expected of the parliamentary

institution, and so, inevitably, judgements will be made about whether security measures have achieved the appropriate balance.

The Presiding Officers, with their responsibility under section 6 of the *Parliamentary Precincts Act 1988* to 'take any actions they consider necessary for the control and management of the precincts', bear a significant burden for ensuring the safety and security of Parliament House, its occupants and visitors to the building. In relation to the Ministerial wing, the Presiding Officers' general powers and functions are subject to any limitations and conditions agreed with the relevant Minister (section 6, Precincts Act). In fulfilling their responsibilities, the Presiding Officers seek to ensure not only the safety and security of the building and its occupants in a direct sense, but also seek to protect the institution of the Parliament in a broader and symbolic sense.

Generally, the decision to proceed with security measures within the precincts is the responsibility of the Presiding Officers under the Precincts Act. However, under section 5 of the *Parliament Act 1974* parliamentary approval is required for any measures within the precincts that involve external works such as the erection of a building or work (other than maintenance or repair). In the case of such proposals for works, the House Standing Committee on Appropriations and Administration must consider such proposals and report to the House as appropriate (SO 222A).

Assessing security measures

As the security threat is heightened, as it has been most recently, it is necessary to consider more rigorous security measures to minimize the risks to the building and its occupants. A new threat will need to be assessed to ascertain whether it opens up new vulnerabilities and a requirement for action to deal with these vulnerabilities.

The Committee has available to it the papers which were presented to the Houses in relation to the most recent perimeter security enhancements. Those papers noted that the proposed security upgrade works resulted from a review of Parliament House security undertaken by a multi-agency taskforce in response to the heightened security threat environment. The review recommended a number of internal and external security enhancements, and these are being progressively implemented under the direction of the Presiding Officers.

A number of these security measures have been implemented already. These include giving the Australian Federal Police (AFP) the command and control responsibility for security at Parliament House, increasing the AFP presence, both internally and externally, increasing static guarding and patrols both internally and externally and tightening access requirements for visitors and guests.

Any new security measures, such as the ones the Committee is examining, must be assessed against a number of factors. There are the factors that you would expect to examine in assessing security measures for any building including:

- are they effective in mitigating the risks that have been identified;
- are they cost effective; and
- are they proportionate to the nature of the security risks identified.

In addition, there are particular factors which must be considered because of the iconic nature of Parliament House and the particular functions the Parliament has to perform. These include:

- do the measures interfere with the rights and privileges of the Houses and their members;
- what is the impact of any measures on the perception of Parliament House as an iconic symbol of our democratic system;
- what is the impact of any measures on the ability of building occupants and visitors to freely access the building and any proceedings of the Houses or their committees; and
- are the measures in accordance with the design values and heritage quality of Parliament House.

In examining any proposed measures, the Presiding Officers are making judgements about all these factors, relying on the advice of the security agencies about security implications and of the parliamentary departments in relation to cost, design and heritage issues, and implications for members and senators, building occupants and visitors and for the parliamentary institution.

In reporting to the House about the House Standing Committee on Appropriations and Administration's consideration of the perimeter security measures that were subject to parliamentary approval, the Speaker referred to the importance the Appropriations and Administration Committee placed on balancing security with access to Parliament House (rightly known as the people's house). The Appropriations and Administration Committee also observed the importance of preserving the valuable and unique heritage of Parliament House and noted, in this regard, that the Presiding Officers had instructed DPS to ensure the final design solution for the works supports the key reference documents for the design and heritage of the building.

I trust this provides some context to the Committee of the consideration of security measures at Parliament House.

Yours sincerely

DAVID ELDER
Clerk of the House