

Introduction

Referral of Work

- 1.1 On 25 March 2003 the proposal to construct a new chancery building in Colombo, Sri Lanka was referred to the Public Works Committee for consideration and report to the Parliament in accordance with the provisions of the *Public Works Committee Act 1969* (the Act)¹. The proponent agency for this work is the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).
- 1.2 The Hon Peter Slipper MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration, advised the House that the estimated cost of the proposed works was \$11.19 million. Mr Slipper noted further that, subject to Parliamentary approval, construction would commence in May 2004 with practical completion and occupation expected by July 2005.

1 Extract from the Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives, No. 85, Tuesday, 25 March 2003.

Background

Australian Diplomatic Presence in Sri Lanka

- 1.3 Australia has been represented in Sri Lanka since the first Commissioner assumed his post in 1947. The first Australian High Commissioner was appointed the following year, when the country achieved independence.
- 1.4 The Chancery currently occupied by the Australian High Commission in Colombo consists of two converted houses, which were constructed over 50 years ago. One of the two houses was already in use as the Official Residence when the second was purchased to serve as a Chancery in 1961. As space requirements increased, a new Official Residence was purchased. The Chancery expanded into the two buildings and a linking annex was constructed.
- 1.5 Since the 1960s, the requirements of the Australian mission to Sri Lanka have changed considerably and the existing Chancery is no longer adequate to meet these needs².

The Site

- 1.6 It is proposed that the new Chancery building be constructed on a vacant block at 21 Gregory's Road, Ward No. 36, Cinnamon Gardens, Colombo 07, Sri Lanka.
- 1.7 Cinnamon Gardens is a residential area of Colombo, which is already home to a number of foreign missions. The Canadian High Commission and Japanese Embassy are both located in Gregory's Road. The new site is in the same general area as the current Chancery.
- 1.8 The proposed site is freehold land, which was purchased by the Commonwealth of Australia in December 1997. The site is flat and rectangular in shape, and measures some 3,221m².

Inquiry Process

- 1.9 The Committee is required by the Act to consider public works over \$6 million³ and report to Parliament on:
- the purpose of the work and its suitability for that purpose;
 - the need for, or the advisability of, carrying out the work;
 - whether the money to be expended on the work is being spent in the most cost effective manner;
 - the amount of revenue the work will generate for the Commonwealth, if that is its purpose; and
 - the present and prospective public value of the work⁴.
- 1.10 The Committee called for submissions by advertising the inquiry in *The Australian* on Wednesday 2 April 2003 and the *Canberra Times* on Monday 14 April 2003. The Committee also sought submissions from relevant government agencies, local government, private organisations and individuals, who may be materially affected by or have an interest in the proposed work. The Committee subsequently placed submissions and other information relating to the inquiry on its web site in order to encourage further public participation.

Public Hearing

- 1.11 On Thursday 19 June 2003, the Committee received a thorough briefing from DFAT officers on the scope and environs of the proposed works. A public hearing was held at Parliament House, Canberra later that same day⁵.

³ *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, Part III, Section 18 (8).

⁴ *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, Part III, Section 17.

⁵ See Appendix D for the official Hansard transcript of the evidence taken by the Committee at the public hearing on Thursday, 19 June 2003 in Canberra.

