

Introduction– Report of the Public Works Committee of the 41st Parliament

Referral of Work

- 2.1 On 21 June 2007 the refurbishment of staff apartments, Australian embassy complex, Tokyo, Japan, 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).
- 2.2 The Hon Peter Lindsay MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence, advised the house that the estimated out-turn cost of the proposal is \$22 million. Subject to Parliamentary approval, DFAT plan to commence work in early 2008 with completion planned for 2010.²

Background

- 2.3 The embassy complex comprises the Chancery, the Head of Mission residence and 43 staff apartments occupying eight apartment blocks. The site also houses a recreational block which contains a tennis court, squash

1 Extract from the *Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives*, No. 182, 21 June 2007.

2 See House Hansard for 21 June 2007.

court, bar and lounge, indoor swimming pool, basketball court and barbeque area.³

- 2.4 The apartments comprise two, three and four bedroom configurations, ranging in size from 83 square metres to 253 square metres. The building was designed in 1980 and completed in 1990 and no longer complies with current standards. Subject to the completion of mid-life upgrade works, the remaining useful life of the building is 35 years.⁴
- 2.5 In June 2006 a scoping study was undertaken by Denton Corker Marshall Architecture and Urban Design. This included a current condition assessment for each apartment, budget cost estimates and delivery strategies. Apartment 421 has been refurbished as a prototype apartment to evaluate the finishes, test feasibility assumptions, assess unknown factors, ascertain the time and cost of the works, identify likely problems and solutions, and establish a quality benchmark for all apartments.⁵

Location

- 2.6 All works will be carried out at the existing embassy complex in Tokyo, Japan.⁶

Inquiry Process

- 2.7 The Committee is required by the Act to consider public works over \$15 million⁷ 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 work.⁸

3 Submission No. 1, paragraph 2.1.

4 *ibid.*, paragraphs 2.2 and 2.3.

5 *ibid.*, paragraphs 2.4 and 2.5.

6 *ibid.*, paragraphs 11.1 and 13.1.

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

- 2.8 The Committee called for submissions by advertising the inquiry in the *Australian* on Wednesday, 4 July 2007. 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.

Inspection and Hearing

- 2.9 Under the terms of the Act, the Committee may not convene at any place outside Australia and its external Territories. Where a public work is to be carried out outside Australian and its external Territories, the Committee:
- ...shall consider the work on the basis of plans, models and statements placed before it and of evidence (if any) taken by it.⁹
- 2.10 On Thursday, 13 September 2007, the Committee received a briefing from DFAT officers on the scope and environs of the proposed works to be undertaken. A confidential briefing from officers of the Department of Defence and a public hearing were held at Parliament House, Canberra, later that day.¹⁰

8 *ibid.*, Section 17.

9 *ibid.*, Section 18B.

10 See <www.aph.gov.au/pwc> for the official Hansard transcript of the evidence taken by the Committee at the public hearing on Thursday, 13 September 2007 at Parliament House, Canberra, ACT.