

Introduction

Referral of Work

- 1.1 On 22 June 2006, the proposed fit-out of new leased premises for the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations at Brindabella Park, ACT was referred to the Public Works Committee for consideration and report 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 Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR).
- 1.2 The Hon Peter McGauran MP, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry; and Deputy Leader of the House, advised the House that the estimated cost of the proposed works was \$15.5 million. Subject to parliamentary approval, the fit-out procurement process could begin in September 2006, allowing construction to begin by November 2006. A staged construction has been adopted allowing stage 1 completion and occupation by December this year. Stage 2 would be completed by the end of January next year for occupation in early February.

¹ Extract from the *Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives*, No. 111, Thursday 22 June 2006

Background

Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

- 1.3 DEWR submits in its statement of evidence that its purpose is to provide the Government and the Australian public with high quality advice, programmes and services to achieve three key outcomes:
- efficient and effective labour market assistance;
 - higher productivity, higher pay workplaces; and
 - increased workforce participation.²
- 1.4 DEWR's headquarters is situated in Canberra and is commonly known as the DEWR National Office.³

Inquiry Process

- 1.5 The Committee is required by the Act to consider public works over \$6 million⁴ 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.⁵
- 1.6 The Committee called for submissions by advertising the inquiry in *The Canberra Times* on Saturday, 15 July 2006. The Committee also sought submissions from relevant government agencies, private organisations and individuals, who may be materially affected by, or have an interest in, the proposed work. The Committee subsequently

2 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 1.1.1

3 *ibid*, paragraph 1.1.3

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

5 *ibid*, Section 17

placed submissions and other information relating to the inquiry on its web site in order to encourage further public participation.

Inspection and Public Hearing

- 1.7 On 8 September 2006 the Committee visited the Brindabella Business Park and inspected the site and environs of the proposed works. A confidential briefing from the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and a public hearing were held at Parliament House later that day.⁶

⁶ See Appendix D for the official Hansard transcript of the evidence taken by the Committee at the public hearing on Friday, 8 September 2006 at Parliament House