



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

**JOINT PARLIAMENTARY
COMMITTEE**

(Subcommittee)
on

PUBLIC WORKS

**Reference: CSIRO Research Interaction Centre and Biomolecular Research Facilities,
Black Mountain, ACT**

CANBERRA

Friday, 11 October 1996

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

CANBERRA

WITNESSES

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FRATER, Dr Robert Henry, Deputy Chief Executive, CSIRO, Limestone Avenue, Campbell, Australian Capital Territory 3

HUPPATZ, Dr John Lawrence, Assistant Chief, Division of Plant Industry, CSIRO, Corner Clunies Ross Street and Barry Drive, Acton, Australian Capital Territory 3

JAMES, Mr Lindsay Eric, Project Manager, Corporate Property, CSIRO, Limestone Avenue, Campbell, Australian Capital Territory 3

MELERO-NICHELE, Ms Lina, Science Communication Manager, Division of Plant Industry, CSIRO, Corner Clunies Ross Street and Barry Drive, Acton, Australian Capital Territory 3

MOODY, Mr Trevor Laurence, Assistant General Manager, Corporate Property, CSIRO, Limestone Avenue, Campbell, Australian Capital Territory 3

SZYDLIK, Mr Zbigniew Tadeusz, Director, Daryl Jackson Alastair Swain Pty Ltd, Architects, 49 Jardine Street, Kingston, Australian Capital Territory 3

JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

(Subcommittee)

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Mountain, ACT*

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Present

Mr Neil Andrew (Chair)

Mr Richard Evans Mr Hollis

The subcommittee met at 11.01 a.m.

Mr Andrew took the chair.

CHAIR—Ladies and gentlemen, I declare open this public hearing into the proposed construction of the CSIRO Research Interaction Centre and the Biomolecular Research Facilities, Black Mountain, Canberra.

I should in my opening statement apologise for the relatively small number of Public Works Committee members we have here. While what we have is a quorum and therefore perfectly legitimate, we would normally be accompanied by senators. Unfortunately, the Senate has chosen to sit on a Friday and for that reason we do not have any Senate representation here on behalf of the PWC. Can I welcome you all here to this important hearing into what is a very significant project not only from Canberra's point of view but also, and particularly, from the point of view of the CSIRO.

This project was referred to the Public Works Committee for consideration and report to parliament by the House of Representatives on 21 August 1996 at an estimated cost of \$17.1 million. In accordance with subsection 17(3) of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, in considering and reporting on a public work, the committee shall have regard to:

- (3) In considering and reporting on a public work, the Committee shall have regard to -
 - (a) the stated purpose of the work and its suitability for that purpose;
 - (b) the necessity for, or the advisability of, carrying out the work;
 - (c) the most effective use that can be made, in the carrying out of the work, of the moneys to be expended on the work;
 - (d) where the work purports to be of a revenue-producing character, the amount of revenue that it may reasonably be expected to produce; and
 - (e) the present and prospective public value of the work.

This morning the committee inspected facilities of the CSIRO Division of Plant Industry at Black Mountain, the site proposed for the new facilities, and the wider Black Mountain site. Today the committee will hear evidence from the CSIRO. I now call representatives from the CSIRO, who will be sworn in by the Assistant Secretary. I welcome you all.

[11.03 a.m.]

AGOSTINO, Mr Anthony, Scientist and Manager, Divisional Research Facilities, Division of Plant Industry, CSIRO, Corner Clunies Ross Street and Barry Drive, Acton, Australian Capital Territory

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CHAIR—The committee has received a submission from the CSIRO dated August 1996. Do you wish to propose any amendments?

Mr Huppertz—There is one amendment, Mr Chairman. On page 24 of the submission, under section 10.3.6, ‘Communications Systems’, paragraph 132, line 2, we would replace the number 37 with the number 73.

CHAIR—If there are no further amendments, it is proposed that the submission be received, taken as read and incorporated in the transcript of evidence. Is it the wish of the committee that the document be incorporated in the transcript of evidence? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

The document read as follows—

CHAIR—Would a representative of CSIRO now care to read the summary statement.

Dr Huppertz—The proposed CSIRO Research Interaction Centre and Biomolecular Research Facilities at Black Mountain, ACT is brought before the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works. This proposal is for the construction of a CSIRO research interaction centre integrated with a new biomolecular research laboratory for the Division of Plant Industry on the CSIRO site at Black Mountain, ACT.

CSIRO requires appropriately designed and equipped research facilities which will provide safe, healthy and efficient working conditions for its skilled staff who direct and undertake a wide range of research to meet national priorities in accordance with CSIRO objectives and to approved programs.

As the committee is aware, CSIRO is progressively replacing or upgrading many old, substandard and inefficient laboratory buildings as funds become available, and constructing new facilities as required by changing research directions and priorities. The committee has in recent years examined redevelopment proposals by CSIRO at North Ryde in New South Wales, at Clayton in Victoria and Gungahlin in the ACT, and reported favourably on them. These redevelopments are proceeding following parliamentary approval.

The Division of Plant Industry is CSIRO's largest division and has a pivotal role in providing research for the benefit of Australian agriculture and agribusiness systems. The division applies strategic research in the plant sciences to promote profitable and sustainable agrifood and fibre industries, develop novel plant products and improve natural resource management. The headquarters of the division's laboratories form a major part of CSIRO's presence on its Black Mountain ACT site—a 37.4 hectare parcel of land located adjacent to the Canberra central business area and the Australian National University. CSIRO tenure is a 99-year Commonwealth lease.

The proposed works will include the replacement of existing substandard, vermin-infested, outdated laboratories, which are quite unsuitable and inappropriately serviced for modern biomolecular research, with a high quality research laboratory to meet the division's requirements for biological research into the 21st century. The laboratory will have large, open-plan serviced laboratories for investigation into the biochemistry of plant processes, molecular engineering and molecular plant breeding technologies. The new laboratory will ensure that the division maintains a world-class capability in plant science and technology, and support Australian industry to increase its growth in national and international markets.

It is also planned to incorporate the plant industry laboratory into a CSIRO research interaction centre in order to provide a complex that can bring the concepts and achievements of CSIRO's research to the community and to provide programs that will

enable special groups and CSIRO stakeholders to share in the excitement of new scientific discoveries. The centre will offer interactive exhibits, illustrating CSIRO research from all of its divisions and their application to the community.

The complex will also incorporate cafeteria, conference and banking facilities, providing amenities which will serve all CSIRO staff on the Black Mountain site. The estimated cost of the project is \$17.1 million. Construction will be staged over an 18-month period with completion by late 1998.

The proposed development consists of the following works: biomolecular research laboratories, support offices, instrument areas and support services areas of approximately 2,700 square metres; a research interaction and display centre of approximately 1,000 square metres and a 200-square metre science education centre; site amenities totalling 1,100 square metres, including a 150-person conference facility, public and staff cafeteria, shop and banking facilities; atrium, plant areas, internal circulation and amenities, bridges and linkways totalling approximately 1,400 square metres; and associated roadworks and car parking, services reticulation and landscaping.

The design of the building reflects the division's corporate aspirations in providing a public interface for clients and visitors, and quality working facilities with medium and long term flexibility and adaptability. The design will maximise the use of natural light. Passive energy conservation measures will be incorporated into the building and landscape design, and active measures in the mechanical, electrical and hydraulic services design. Siting of the building complex is consistent with the site master plan.

In developing this proposal, CSIRO and its consultants have contacted all interested groups, including CSIRO staff and unions and those local authorities having statutory responsibility over the locality and services. General support for the proposal has been received from staff, government and industry organisations.

The proposed design fully meets the CSIRO functional brief and conforms with technical requirements of local authorities. It will be designed and constructed in accordance with the relevant Australian standards and appropriate laboratory codes. The proposed works will provide a laboratory to meet changing research and market needs and enable CSIRO to continue to integrate with Australian industry.

CSIRO believes that the complex will provide an appropriate workplace that will stimulate and promote research and development activities and further enhance opportunities for conducting national and international research consistent with its long-term objectives. The integrated research interaction centre will provide a powerful statement about CSIRO's commitment to inform the public of its research and, in turn, inspire long-term interest in and support for the CSIRO and for research generally.

CSIRO is satisfied that the proposed complex is the most appropriate, timely and

cost-effective way to provide safe and efficient accommodation for its staff. It therefore confidently submits the redevelopment proposal to the committee for examination and seeks its endorsement. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR—Thank you. Dr Huppertz, there are a number of questions that PWC members may now wish to put to the CSIRO and it is, of course, your right to direct them to any witness from the CSIRO currently appearing before the committee.

It is perfectly fair to say that this proposal has received widespread support and in fact it is extraordinary for this committee to sit here with only one group of people to appear as witnesses, that being the CSIRO, indicating that there has been very little disquiet in the community about the proposal. There have, however, been some requests from groups of a heritage nature that some of the heritage buildings currently existing on the Black Mountain site be retained. Can you give us an assurance that buildings such as the Phytotron building will not be affected by the proposed development?

Dr Huppertz—We can give that assurance, but I will ask Mr Moody to elaborate further.

Mr Moody—The works proposed in this complex will not affect any buildings that have heritage significance. The Phytotron building will form part of what we see as an interactive complex being developed. We see that building as an attribute of this project rather than anything that should be dismissed as insignificant. So, in answer to your question, there will be no impact on the heritage significance of the Phytotron building.

CHAIR—There was also concern expressed about the location of, I think, an American elm tree which would need to be removed. Would you like to comment on that?

Mr Moody—The tree in question we understand was planted as part of the landscaping associated with an adjacent building approximately 40 years ago. Our approach on any development on CSIRO sites is to ensure that trees are retained as far as possible, and certainly our intention was to do our best to retain that tree but it currently stands in the footprint of the building and is earmarked for removal.

Mr HOLLIS—This is going to be a significant complex. Is Canberra the best location to carry out this work or would it have been better to have put the complex somewhere else?

Dr Huppertz—We believe that Canberra is an excellent site for a building of this particular focus. CSIRO corporate headquarters is in Canberra, the national parliament is here, a number of our most significant stakeholders are here—the rural research corporations have their headquarters in Canberra—and it is on a major tourist route. The proposed complex is in the vicinity of the Australian National University, the Black Mountain Tower and the Australian National Botanic Gardens. Therefore, we believe that

it will attract a considerable number of visitors who visit Canberra for the other attractions that are here, and we believe that it is the most appropriate place to put such a complex. As I mentioned this morning, the number of staff on the CSIRO Black Mountain site is about 900, representing currently five CSIRO divisions. There are three further CSIRO divisions in Canberra, so there is a very significant representation of CSIRO in its activities here.

Mr HOLLIS—With the visitors that you are planning to have come there, that will be to visit the interactive centre, I take it. You would not want visitors wandering through where your scientists were doing significant work, would you?

Dr Huppertz—That is correct; although there will be an opportunity for visitors to observe science at work, if you like, and there will be opportunity to interact with scientists on the site and in that complex.

Mr HOLLIS—Yes, but they would not be wandering through their labs or anything like that, would they?

Dr Huppertz—No. There will be no access to the laboratories themselves.

Mr HOLLIS—If you are going to have so many visitors there, have you got parking facilities? How do you expect these visitors to come? By car or by bus or what?

Dr Huppertz—We have made an assessment of the number of visitors that will come to the site and the way that they will get there, and I will ask Mr Moody to elaborate further.

Mr Moody—We had a consultant perform a traffic study to see what the impact of this development would be on traffic and parking throughout the site. From that assessment, we have been able to provide adequate car parking bays and bus bays to service what we believe to be the ongoing needs of visitors to the site.

Mr HOLLIS—It has been put to me that maybe there was no need for a new building, and that a little judicious refurbishment could have fulfilled the needs.

Dr Huppertz—The current building that the proposal seeks to replace was to be a temporary structure and was erected in 1957, some 40 years ago, for a purpose entirely different from that which we require the new building to provide for. It is a building that is now seriously substandard: it contains a number of small rooms that are quite unsuitable for modern molecular biology research; and it is subject to flooding. We have had problems with vermin, and the cost of upkeep for that building has now become very significant. Mr Moody, would you like to add anything further?

Mr Moody—Yes. The existing building is also just a single-storey building

construction on the site, taking up what we consider to be a significant area, from a master planning viewpoint. The building floor area is too small to meet current requirements on the site and, in fact, current laboratory needs are such that the floor area would need to be doubled. We did go through an exercise to cost out the refurbishment of that building. Effectively, it meant we were virtually demolishing the building. It contains asbestos, it is structurally unsound and the cost of refurbishment is no different from the cost of a new building to replace that particular footprint—that footprint being approximately 1,400 square metres. The laboratory space we now need is approximately 2,700 square metres, which means that we would be taking up a fair area of the site in single storey construction just to provide the laboratory space for our current research needs.

Mr HOLLIS—Did I hear you say that the current building contains asbestos?

Mr Moody—It is asbestos cement fascia cladding, which still has to be treated in the same way as loose asbestos within the building.

CHAIR—Dr Huppatz, one might mischievously observe that my farmers expect the CSIRO to be world leaders in the control of vermin. Are you telling me that possums and rats are more elusive than rabbits and nematodes?

Dr Huppatz—The nature of the building, as it is, leaves us open to invasion by pests and indeed this has happened and it has become quite difficult to control. We have removed them but we think that there is no real possibility of keeping them out on a permanent basis.

CHAIR—On a more serious note, I, along with Mr Hollis, looked seriously this morning at the feasibility of refurbishing that block. What struck me was that it would make it very difficult for there to be any public interaction with scientific work if that refurbishment occurred. That sort of interaction can only be developed in a building designed for that purpose. Would you comment on the changes that have occurred in CSIRO—that is, the greater participation of school groups, the public, and presumably tourists, in viewing CSIRO research and the work we saw this morning on what was called the ‘Green Machine’. I presume that is going to be expanded on as a result of this construction.

Dr Huppatz—Let me take that question in two parts. Firstly, the current restructuring that is going on within CSIRO has come about as a result of a board decision that we needed to refocus our research activities in such a way that we could better serve our clients and our customers and better interact with the public. I would ask Dr Frater to briefly outline the transition from the institute structure to the new alliance structure, which we think will enable us to carry out our functions much better.

Dr Frater—I believe you have some diagrams there, one of which looks extremely complex with lots of dots on it. One of the things that has been a feature of CSIRO over

long periods is the series of divisions that were part of each part of an institute. Broadly speaking, the institutes were addressing the needs of part of the economy. The reality, as we have looked, if you took a snapshot at any time over the years, is that each division was actually working in a significant number of sectors.

When we reorganised CSIRO in 1988 we tried to reorganise the divisions so that they were individually and sectorally aligned. The nature of that change and the nature of the change in the organisation itself was that in a very short period those divisions were again working across a number of sectors. What we have done this time is to recognise the fact that divisions work in number of sectors and organise our planning on the basis of those sectors and not the divisions.

If you look at the diagram, you will see that across the top is a list of divisions and down the side is a list of sectors. Let us take the Division of Plant Industry, fourth from the right. You will see that it appears as doing work in all the sectors within the agribusiness alliance, two of the sectors within the environment and natural resources group and two of the sectors within the manufacturing area. What we are doing now is to organise our planning along sector lines, but reserving and preserving the division as the business unit of the organisation. So we have set out to capture what is going on within a changing organisation in a structure that does not require us to keep changing the divisions. We recognise that the participation of an individual division within different sectors will change with time.

In the situation here, Plant Industry has underlying science that serves a range of these sectors, and the interaction centre will be able to show a lot of that very directly. Perhaps that tells you something of the way we have changed. In addressing the sectors from a planning point of view we are bringing ourselves closer to the industries associated with the sectors. We now have advisory committees which are sector based and those committees are able to give us advice which applies to all the work involved in a sector across the organisation, irrespective of what division it takes place in.

CHAIR—With respect, Dr Frater, I am not surprised. Once again, any one of my farmers would have suggested that the Animal Health Division was bound to have a good deal with Plant Industry and Soils because they were all interrelated. It was perhaps only surprising that it took two steps to get to this fairly obvious conclusion.

Dr Frater—Things are often very obvious in the end. I think what is different about this, and different to the way organisations are commonly managed, is that we are taking these two cuts but still leaving the management of the process along divisional lines.

CHAIR—While I am grateful for your explanation, when I first asked Dr Huppertz about the changes that we had seen and my reference to the Green Machine, I was also thinking about the changes in terms of public interaction which I felt were particularly

significant because you were endeavouring to make science, as it were, user-friendly and I thought you may care to elaborate on those changes. That was what the question was designed to facilitate.

Dr Frater—Let me comment in part on that. Over the last decade our efforts in the public interaction area have increased quite considerably. In fact, we have just celebrated the 10th birthday of the Double Helix Club, which is a children's science club. That represents a vast increase in interaction with the community, looking at encouraging future scientists. But perhaps I can pass back to Dr Huppertz to talk about some of the other areas of interaction.

Dr Huppertz—In the time that I have been with CSIRO there has been an enormous change in the way that we have tried to interact with our customers, if you like, in the delivery of scientific outcomes. This has partly come about by necessity to get the results of scientific research out into the field where they are actually used and partly because of the changing nature of the research and the involvement of CSIRO in so many cooperative research centres which have an education component as part of their terms of reference.

The Green Machine that you saw this morning is part CSIRO Division of Plant Industry, part the Cooperative Research Centre for Plant Science and part CSIRO Corporate Education. This was set up as a cooperative venture to take biological science to school children particularly and to the community at large. Other parts of CSIRO are doing similar things with their science. There is a much greater emphasis now on interaction with the community and bringing an awareness of science, and what CSIRO is doing, out into the community.

CHAIR—Thank you, Dr Huppertz. Mr Evans, did you have any questions?

Mr RICHARD EVANS—I have a couple of questions regarding the commercial aspect of the new enterprise and also the current buildings. Through you, Dr Huppertz: what is the anticipated increase in numbers visiting the centre? Have you got an estimate of increase in numbers?

Dr Huppertz—Yes, we have had that done by consultants. I will ask Ms Melero-Nichele to answer that question more fully.

Ms Melero-Nichele—Market research was performed by two different market analysis experts: one specialising in the local market and the other in public science interaction centres. Projections indicate about 230,000 visitors in the first two years of operations. This is based on admission costs of \$5 for adults and \$2 for children.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—So that is 115,000 people coming in per year?

Ms Melero-Nichele—Correct.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—So you derive the income from that. I suppose the Green Machine is not open on the weekends at the moment. Is the new building going to be open on the weekends?

Ms Melero-Nichele—It certainly will and the Green Machine will be also.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—How does this impact upon added expenditure costs? Have you budgeted for that in the future?

Ms Melero-Nichele—Yes, we certainly have. The operations at the centre will be cost neutral. The revenue gained from the admissions and also from the cafe and the CSIRO shop, which is also proposed, will cover the operational costs of the interaction centre.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—Moving on to the commercial operations then, you have currently got a lease operator in the current administration building. Is that lease operator automatically being transferred over into the new building or are you in fact tendering a process for the lease?

Dr Huppertz—No. The current lease operator would not automatically be transferred to the new operation. The normal tender process would be gone through.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—What is the current lease situation now? Is it about to expire or is it on a month to month basis? In fact, if the operator you have got at the moment is not successful in the tender process, how do you propose handling the termination of the lease?

Dr Huppertz—We would need to take that on notice and get back to you on that.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—You mentioned that there is going to be a banking facility there. Would that be incorporated into the CSIRO gift shop arrangement or will it be an agency? Will you be tendering that process to the banks and other agencies?

Dr Huppertz—No, CSIRO has its own credit union, Sirocredit. They already have a temporary facility on site. You may have noticed that, when we walked the site this morning, there was an automatic teller close to the building that we propose to demolish. So Sirocredit will be part of the staff facilities on site, along with the canteen arrangement and the shop and the conference centre.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—Just to reinforce the matter, you believe, with the arrangements of 115,000-odd people coming in per year paying \$5 or \$2, that this will be revenue neutral in relation to expenditure of security, cleaning and these sorts of facilities:

is that right?

Dr Huppertz—We believe so, yes.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—The last series of questions I wanted to ask you is in relation to the administration building where you currently have the laboratories and the cafeteria. What are the plans for those particular rooms now? Are you in fact going to redevelop them?

Dr Huppertz—Those plans have not been finalised. We realise that the space that is currently occupied by the cafeteria is very useful space but we have no firm plans for it at this stage.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—Once you anticipate getting some plans, how would the expenditure of redevelopment normally be handled—through your normal budgetary constraints or would you be applying elsewhere for funds?

Dr Huppertz—No. It would be handled through our normal budget.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—Although you have no plans at the moment, when might you start thinking about what will happen to that facility?

Dr Huppertz—We are currently thinking about it and there have been various suggestions that we may, for example, move the visual resources unit, which is to the left of the current cafeteria, and redevelop the area to house them, and convert the visual resources area to more laboratory space, but that is only one suggestion.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—If you are going to have all these hundreds of thousands of people coming into the site, does that cause a security problem for the remainder of the buildings?

Dr Huppertz—No, we believe not. Our buildings on site are now secured during the daytime as well as after hours, and we believe that the security system that we have now is quite adequate to keep people from wandering into spaces where they are not supposed to be.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—Will the promotional budget come out of the revenue that you derive from the people visiting?

Dr Huppertz—The revenue that we derive from people visiting, and revenue that we derive from the other activities, like the cafeteria and the shop, will be used to redesign and refocus the exhibits from time to time. So that will be recycled in that way to—

Mr RICHARD EVANS—Will that also cover promotional activities as well, such as brochures and pamphlets and tourist stuff?

Dr Huppertz—I believe it will.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—If it is budgeted for 230,000 people over two years, what happens if you get 450,000 people over two years? Are you able to cope with it? Are the health aspects of it—public conveniences and things like that—able to cope with a sudden interest in science?

Dr Huppertz—I believe we would cope with it. That is, perhaps, an excessive estimate, but we would hope for more than the 115,000 a year and we would have facilities to cope with, probably, 30 per cent above that estimate.

CHAIR—I seem to have a fixation this morning, and I hope you will forgive me, but if you are taking a group of people, for example, farmers, who are saying, ‘But we’re contributing to this through our R&D levy, why should we pay \$5 a head to see what we have already paid to have happen?’ do you anticipate a negative reaction to the \$5 charge? Some people specifically would see themselves as having made the work at least possible.

Dr Huppertz—I do not think so because the exhibits that they will see, and what they will be exposed to, will be the whole of CSIRO—not just a particular sectional interest that a group might have. While the exhibits will vary from time to time and focus on the activities of different CSIRO divisions, obviously not all at once, there will be a considerable breadth of CSIRO’s activities that will be on show at any one time. I very much doubt whether a particular sectional group would feel that their interests were either degraded or enhanced at any one particular time. I doubt there would be any animosity on those grounds.

CHAIR—The other group that expressed incidental concern about the proposal was Aerial Cabs, who asked in a submission to the PWC that there be provision made for the covered setting down and picking up of passengers. I note that CSIRO has not accommodated that; would you like to comment on your resistance to what seemed like a reasonable request from Aerial Cabs?

Mr Moody—During the early stages of design we looked seriously at extending the covered access out to North Science Road, which you walked along this morning, being the main entry to the building, but on cost grounds, through a value management review of the project, we decided to pull back on that. There is a significant cost involved in extending the covered area. We will accede to Aerial Cabs’ requirements for a dedicated taxi bay but a covered drop down point is something that would not normally be provided on any such facility, to our knowledge.

CHAIR—And the dedicated cab area will be close enough for people to have

access to the building without too much discomfort in inclement weather?

Mr Moody—Certainly; it would be located at the main entry of the building which means it is a matter of just spending a few seconds walking across the bridge into the building.

CHAIR—And we will await Mr Evans's increased tourist load to assist the funding.

Mr HOLLIS—With Mr Evans's increased tourist load I would imagine there would be some people coming there who have a disability. I guess there may even be some people on your staff with a physical disability. What is the access in the building for people with physical disabilities and does the building itself meet ACROD standards?

Dr Huppertz—We believe that it does, but I will ask Mr Moody to explain that in detail.

Mr Moody—We have had discussions with ACROD in relation to disabled access throughout the building. As a matter of course in CSIRO facilities, whatever they might be, we provide disabled access to all areas of the building so that access is not impeded in any way for the disabled, whoever they may be—they could be scientists or visitors.

Within this building we will be providing an entry ramp to the main control point. Access for the disabled will be provided by means of a lift between levels of the building and we will be providing disabled toilet facilities within the building. Disabled bays will be provided for car parking. We believe we have generally met and in some cases possibly exceeded what would be normal disabled requirements for buildings.

Mr HOLLIS—As the chairman indicated, there has not been a lot of people putting in critical proposals or objecting to this. What sort of consultation has there been with the staff? Are the staff happy with what has been proposed? Has there been consultation with the staff association and have they had an input?

Dr Huppertz—We have a staff association that covers the whole of CSIRO and they have been supportive of this proposal. The proposal was discussed at considerable lengths by the Site Chiefs Committee. The Black Mountain site is run by a committee of chiefs that comprise the five divisions that are currently on site and this proposal has the endorsement of the site chiefs. At the staff level, the division has a consultative committee which has been fully briefed and consulted on the progress and the development of this proposal, and they are quite supportive of it. I would ask Mr Agostino to elaborate further.

Mr Agostino—I believe that the Divisional Consultative Committee is actually putting a submission to your committee. The Consultative Committee is the focus for industrial participation within the division and is made up of management, staff and union

representatives. Basically they are extremely supportive of the idea, in particular the idea of a science interaction centre which will give scientists the opportunity to communicate their ideas with the general public and other stakeholders.

Mr HOLLIS—Is there a master plan for the whole Black Mountain site? It seems to me that the whole thing has evolved and there is a whole variety of styles—almost a historical walk through, I suppose, with the development of science. But is there a master plan for the site or is it just going to continue to evolve?

Dr Huppertz—I expect you could be forgiven for suggesting that it might have evolved historically and with somewhat less than adequate planning. But there is in fact a master plan for the site and I will ask Mr Moody to elaborate on this.

Mr Moody—A master plan was developed for the site in the mid-1970s. It was in 1977 that the then National Capital Development Commission endorsed a master plan for the site which has been pursued since that time for any development work within the site. In fact, aspects of the design for this complex, such as the road works and location of the building, are sited such that they comply with that original 1977 endorsed master plan. Prior to those days there probably had been some ad hoc development on the site, but over the last 20 years we have been following a master plan.

Mr HOLLIS—Now, I am not a scientist. I do not know very much about science, and I am not a landowner like the Chairman so I cannot put technical questions like that, but I read articles in the paper every so often about these laboratories, and things escaping and the rabbits suddenly dying and things like that. I was fascinated this morning to read—what did we do—we extracted genes or something?

CHAIR—DNA.

Mr HOLLIS—DNA. But are there any worries from your neighbours there—the Australian National University is probably doing the same sort of thing—or is there any possibility of anything escaping from there? That is very much in lay person's terms.

Dr Huppertz—Yes. You were quite right that there are activities that go on at the site and at the Australian National University that have some potential dangers. The sorts of things that you might think of are the use of radioactive isotopes in research, the use of transgenic materials, particularly in viruses and so on, that have some potential for escape from the laboratory into the environment.

Now all these things are governed by very stringent regulations for the use of radioactive materials in research. The division has a Radiation Safety Committee, of which Mr Agostino is the chairman, and they provide regular inspections of areas where radioactive isotopes are used in the division's research, and there is a very strict control over the amount of radioactivity that is used in experiments and the disposal of such

materials after its use. This is very strictly monitored throughout the site.

The escape of transgenic material is also taken very seriously. This morning we walked past a secure glasshouse called the Biosafety Glasshouse, part of which is in fact a quarantine facility where research into viruses and the production of virus resistant plants is conducted. And again this facility is controlled under guidelines promulgated by GMAC, the Genetic Manipulation Advisory Council, and again we take this very seriously in terms of eliminating the possibility of any mishap in that regard and providing for the safety of our staff.

CHAIR—This building neither enhances nor detracts from that level of safety, you believe.

Dr Huppertz—That is correct.

CHAIR—Any other questions?

Mr RICHARD EVANS—I just noticed in your model that you have little buses coming in and out, and I noticed when we were up there near the Green Machine at the back of that wing—the Meninga wing, I guess—that you have got a very small roadway. Are there facilities for buses to come in and out of the place and are there parking facilities for buses?

Mr Moody—North Science Road along which you walked this morning will actually be reconstructed and widened as part of this proposal—the widening coming down towards the new complex. We have allowed, on the basis of traffic studies, for three bus bays which we anticipate will meet our needs and those bus bays will be located along North Science Road. Any overflow bus parking beyond that which was projected by our traffic studies can park on Julius Avenue, which is the main entry to the site, where there is capacity for buses.

CHAIR—Any other questions? Mr Hollis.

Mr HOLLIS—We appear to live in an increasingly competitive society. I am about the most uncompetitive person I know, but I live in a competitive society. Where are we in this field, on a world rating? Are we up at the cutting edge, or are we beginners in it? Are we leaders in research in this area, or what? Linked to that, of course, is the question of what this building will do for our national or international standing. Will it enable the people who work there, if they are not at the cutting edge, to reach the cutting edge? Or, if they are at the cutting edge, will it enable them to continue there?

Dr Huppertz—I would make a number of points in answer to your question. I am not by training a molecular biologist, so there is a certain impartiality about this answer. I believe that the work in modern molecular biology that is conducted in the division is of a

standard comparable to anywhere in the world. Some major achievements have come out of the work on gene technology in the division. You may have heard or seen some publicity about a technique called gene shears. That originated in the building just down the corridor from where we first entered the laboratory wing this morning. So, in that regard, there is certainly no false modesty on our part about the level of science that is carried out in that building.

It is also worth the committee's noting that the division is a major training ground for scientists of the future. We have in our laboratories some 40 PhD students who are affiliated with a number of universities—in particular, the ANU, because of its proximity, but also Melbourne University, Sydney University, Charles Sturt University and the University of New England. Those PhD students actually work in our laboratories with our scientists, and this provides us with the opportunity of passing on knowledge that we have acquired in this area to the future scientists of Australia.

With regard to the research that will be carried out in the proposed building, the work will be focused on the transfer of gene technology into Australian agriculture. Within the division, we have now developed transformation systems for all the major crop plants and a number of the major pasture plants. Most of these, particularly in the area of pasture plants, were first done in the division. So we have the capability of adding genes that will provide for disease resistance, quality improvement, yield improvement and tolerance of cold or heat, to provide us with greatly improved crop and pasture plants for the future. That is the type of work that we propose will go on in the new laboratory building.

CHAIR—Are there any other questions?

Dr Huppertz—Mr Chairman, could I just make a comment on the question that Mr Evans asked about the canteen lease?

CHAIR—By all means.

Dr Huppertz—The canteen lease is renewed annually and the expiry date is 30 June 1997.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—So the leeway to the new cafeteria opening will be a month to month arrangement, I guess.

Dr Huppertz—Yes, probably. We do not project that the building will be finished until the end of 1998, so we would have—

Mr RICHARD EVANS—Probably you would extend it for 12 months and then, if there were a gap of a few months, probably have just a month to month arrangement.

Dr Huppertz—That is right.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—They have been fully informed as to what is going on, I guess.

Dr Huppatz—I believe so, yes.

CHAIR—If there are no other questions, it is normal—although I hesitate to use that word—or customary in public works committee hearings for there to be other witnesses who have registered their interest prior to the hearing, and I would therefore have invited CSIRO to respond to the evidence of other witnesses. In the absence of any other witnesses, do you wish to make any concluding statements, Dr Huppatz?

Dr Huppatz—I would thank the committee for its attention. It was a particular pleasure for us to be able to take you on site this morning and to show you first-hand what we propose to do with the new building and the science that we propose to put in it. The Chief of the Division of Plant Industry, Dr Jim Peacock, is one of Australia's leading biological scientists, and has an enormous vision for science in this country and what it can do for Australian agriculture. His enthusiasm for this concept of the interaction centre has largely carried the project and, with your approval, will see it through to completion. He has the approval of the chiefs of other divisions on site and the executive committee of the organisation and, with your approval, I am sure it will make a really significant contribution to science education in Australia.

CHAIR—There are no further questions. It is proposed that the documents listed on the sheet that has been circulated to members of the committee be incorporated into the transcript of evidence. There being no objection, it is so ordered.

The documents read as follows—

CHAIR—Before closing, I would like to respond to the kind remarks made by Dr Huppatz. I would like to thank Dr Huppatz and the other witnesses who appeared before us here this morning. I should add for the *Hansard* record that the committee has had the opportunity to meet with Dr Peacock, since he was unable to be here today. I would also like to indicate to the witnesses from CSIRO our appreciation for the hospitality and extensive briefing given to the committee during our inspections this morning. I would also thank the committee members who have made time available for the hearing, *Hansard* for their comprehensive record, and the secretariat.

Resolved (on motion by Mr Hollis):

That, pursuant to the power conferred by section 2(2) of the Parliamentary Papers Act 1908, this committee authorises publication of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 11.58 a.m.