



**The Parliament of the
Commonwealth of Australia**

**JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE
BROADCASTING OF
PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS**

Report

**Provision of sound and vision services in
the new Parliament House**

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Introduction

1. In June 1986 the Committee reported to Parliament on the following terms of reference :

- (a) the televising of the proceedings of the Houses of the Parliament and their committees in the present and the new Parliament House, and
- (b) the radio broadcasting of the proceedings of the Houses of the Parliament and their committees including the continuous and simultaneous broadcasting of both Houses.

2. One of the major areas of inquiry was the method of administering the audio visual system to be installed in the new Parliament House.

3. In that report the Committee recommended the establishment of a Parliamentary Audio Visual Unit (PAVU) under Parliamentary control. It was also recommended that the officer in charge of the Unit be appointed as a matter of urgency to make the transition to the new Parliament House as smooth as possible.

Current Situation

4. A sound and vision system for the new Parliament House was designed by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) under contract to the Parliament House Construction Authority in accordance with a user requirement statement prepared by the Parliamentary Departments and approved by the Joint Standing Committee on the New Parliament House

5. In August 1986 the Joint Standing Committee on the New Parliament House was advised that Cabinet had decided that the vision component should be deleted from the sound and vision facilities, saving an estimated \$10.5m. This cut was part of a total reduction of \$43.3m over the total building project.

6. As a substantial amount had already been spent on the vision system in the new Parliament House, or could not be recovered because of cost penalties resulting from the cancellation of contracts already let, it was decided that core vision equipment already on order be installed and that the vision cables and distribution system be completed. This will enable the deleted vision facilities to be added at a later date at a reduced cost, compared with the cost of a completely new system had the vision component been totally abandoned.

7. As a result of the budget cuts, only two broadcast quality colour cameras, supplemented by some non-broadcast quality colour cameras, will be installed in each Chamber to provide monitoring facilities for the Presiding Officers, Whips and others nominated by the Parliament. As the original brief proposed seven cameras in each Chamber, the coverage will be at best minimal. Cameras will not be provided in committee rooms but most other briefed vision equipment is being installed. Local closed circuit monitoring facilities will be provided in committee rooms to meet the requirements of Hansard. No television monitors will be provided in Senators' and Members' suites, which will mean that at least initially, only audio house monitoring will be available.

8. Certain components of the vision system have been deleted from the central equipment area and central operations area but sufficient equipment has been retained to enable the proving of the system during operational trialling and to provide the limited services mentioned above.

9. The completion of contracts already let will preserve the integrity of the original concept of the systems and should enable within certain time constraints the completion of the vision facilities proposed for the building on a progressive basis over several years. However until that occurs major telecasts originating from the new building, such as opening ceremonies and functions in the Great Hall, will require the use of outside broadcasting facilities.

Viability of a Parliamentary Audio Visual Unit

10. In its 1986 Report the Committee recommended the establishment of a Parliamentary controlled unit to take on what was thought would be a significantly increased sound and vision role compared to that undertaken in the current building:

"In considering functions to be performed by a unit of this kind, the committee believes that, due to the advance of technology, the advantages extend further. The unit, as well as being responsible for production of audio and vision signals of broadcast quality for transmission throughout the building by means of the House monitoring system and externally by making them available to the electronic media, could develop audio-visual packages and educational programs, perform Hansard, Library and archival services and could possibly integrate information retrieval duties. Consequently, the committee **recommends** that the unit be termed the "Parliamentary Audio Visual Unit" (PAVU)."

(Report p.80)

11. Without all elements of the vision system, the Committee now believes the Parliamentary Audio Visual Unit as originally envisaged will not be viable on initial occupation of the new building. On occupation, the requirements will now be little more than the current sound broadcasting functions carried out for the Parliament by the ABC together with audio house monitoring, limited vision house monitoring and Hansard recording functions. Most of these activities are concentrated in sitting weeks only, usually about 20 weeks a year.

Recommendations

12. The Committee believes that until all vision facilities are provided it would not be responsible to recommend the establishment of a Parliamentary Unit with a permanent staffing level whose major function is linked solely to the function of the Chambers. The Committee therefore recommends that :

- . the Parliamentary broadcasting function continue to be undertaken in the new Parliament House by the ABC for an initial period of 2 years; and
- . the ABC also undertake the functions of audio monitoring and limited closed circuit television as these facilities will be provided through the central equipment area.

13. The Committee confirms that the Parliament should ultimately have full responsibility, both administrative and functional, for operation of the audio visual unit, and that this should be achieved through a staged handover to be planned in conjunction with the ABC.

14. The Committee recommends that :

it is essential that the Parliament employ as soon as possible one full time appropriately qualified officer to:

- (a) control and co-ordinate operation of the facilities on behalf of the Parliament;
- (b) plan and implement the progressive installation of further equipment and employment of staff, as additional funds become available; and
- (c) liaise with the ABC on the provision of services.

15. The officer should be employed by the Joint House Department for administrative purposes with policy control remaining with the Joint Committee on the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings. The Usher of the Black Rod and the Serjeant-at-Arms should continue to provide policy advice to the Committee.

16. The Committee recommends that :

discussions take place as a matter of urgency between the Parliament and the ABC to reach agreement on :

- (a) the audio visual functions to be undertaken in the new Parliament House on initial occupation;
- (b) the staffing level necessary to undertake these functions; and
- (c) the arrangements that need to be made for the ABC to provide these services for an initial period of 2 years.

CHAIRMAN

**Joint Committee on the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings—Report—Provision
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