

Introduction

Referral of Work

- 1.1 On 24 June 2003 the proposal to construct a new chancery building in New Delhi, India 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 would be \$24.61 million. Mr Slipper noted further that, subject to Parliamentary approval, construction would commence in mid 2004, with practical completion and occupation expected by late 2007.

1 Extract from the Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives, No. 104, Tuesday, 24 June 2003.

Background

Australian Diplomatic Presence in India

- 1.3 Australia has been represented in India since the country gained independence in 1948. The High Commission in India is classified by DFAT as a Category 1 post and performs a full range of diplomatic functions on a daily basis.²
- 1.4 The chancery currently occupied by the Australian High Commission in India was constructed in 1966, and has undergone a number of minor alterations, including a sizeable extension in 1991. Modifications to the building have been prompted by the need to accommodate additional agencies and to enhance security provisions.³
- 1.5 The existing Australian High Commission compound comprises:
- the chancery;
 - the official residence of the High Commissioner;
 - six free-standing houses, one of which is used as office accommodation;
 - a residential block of 11 apartments;
 - domestic staff quarters;
 - a recreation centre;
 - tennis court and swimming pool; and
 - a number of ancillary buildings.⁴
- 1.6 The High Commission buildings are now fully tenanted by representatives of the following Commonwealth agencies:
- DFAT;
 - DIMIA;
 - DEST;
 - Defence;

2 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 1.1

3 ib id, paragraph 2.2

4 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 2.3

- Austrade;
- Ausaid; and
- ACIAR.⁵

The Site

- 1.7 It is proposed that the new chancery will be constructed at the Australian High Commission compound, which occupies a site of some 4.8 ha at 1/50 Shantipath, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi.
- 1.8 The compound is located in New Delhi's diplomatic district, within close proximity to the embassies of the United States of America, the People's Republic of China and the British and Pakistani High Commissions. The new chancery will be constructed on the site of the existing chancery building, on the intersection of Shantipath and Pansheel Marg.⁶
- 1.9 The Australian High Commission compound was acquired by the Commonwealth under perpetual lease in 1953 and cannot be sold or subdivided without the permission of the President of India.⁷

Inquiry Process

- 1.10 The Committee is required by the Act to consider public works over \$6 million⁸ 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.⁹

5 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraphs 2.3 and 6.3

6 *ib id*, paragraphs 11.2 and 13.1

7 *ib id*, paragraphs 14.1 and 15.1

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

9 *ib id*, Part III, Section 17

- 1.11 The Committee called for submissions by advertising the inquiry in *The Australian* on Wednesday 23 July 2003 and in the *Canberra Times* on Saturday 26 July 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

- 1.12 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 Australia and its external Territories, the Committee:

“...shall consider the work on the basis of plans, models and statements placed before it and of the evidence (if any) taken by it”.¹⁰

- 1.13 On Friday, 22 August 2003, the Committee received a briefing from DFAT officers on the scope and environs of the proposed works. This was followed by a public hearing held at Parliament House, Canberra.¹¹

10 *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, Part III, Section 18B

11 See Appendix D for the official Hansard transcript of the evidence taken by the Committee at the public hearing on Friday, 22 August 2003 in Canberra.