

Introduction

Referral of Work

- 1.1 On 24 June 2003 the proposal to refurbish staff apartments at the Australian Embassy Complex, Paris, France 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 was \$9.5 million. Mr Slipper noted further that, subject to Parliamentary approval, construction would commence in January 2004 with practical completion expected by the second half of 2005.

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

Background

The Embassy Complex

- 1.3 The Australian Embassy Complex in Paris is located at 4 Rue Jean Rey, Champs de Mars. It is in close proximity to the Eiffel Tower and other notable buildings.
- 1.4 The purpose-built embassy complex was designed by eminent Australian architect Harry Seidler, in collaboration with French architect Marcel Breuer and is considered to be a building of architectural significance. Construction of the complex commenced in 1973 and was completed in 1977.
- 1.5 The complex consists of two buildings joined at ground level and sharing a common basement. The two buildings respectively comprise:
 - seven storeys housing the chancery and the residence of the Australian Ambassador to France; and
 - nine storeys containing 29 staff apartments and the residence of the Australian Ambassador to the OECD.
- 1.6 The 29 apartments include two, three and four-bedroom configurations and range in size from 120m² to 250m². Amenities provided for residents within the building include:
 - a dedicated lift;
 - small heated swimming pool;
 - squash court; and
 - recreation lounge.²

Inquiry Process

- 1.7 The Committee is required by the Act to consider public works over \$6 million³ and report to Parliament on:
 - the purpose of the work and its suitability for that purpose;
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² Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraphs 2.1 – 2.3

³ *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, Part III, Section 18 (8)

- 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.⁴

1.8 The Committee called for submissions by advertising the inquiry in *The Australian* on Wednesday, 23 July 2003 and 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

1.9 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 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”.⁵

1.10 On Friday, 22 August 2003, the Committee received a thorough briefing from DFAT officers on the scope and environs of the proposed refurbishment works to be undertaken at the Australian Embassy Complex in Paris. A public hearing was held at Parliament House, Canberra later that day.⁶

4 *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, Part III, Section 17

5 *ib id*, Part III, Section 18B

6 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.

