

## **Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee**

Additional Information

### **Parliament Portfolio**

### **Department of Parliamentary Services**

Budget Estimates 2004-05

### **Topic: Black Leather Lounges**

#### **Hansard pages 15 to 16**

Senator JOHNSTON—On what basis did you choose the CSIRO Leather Research Centre to test and evaluate leather? They are a research centre and not an accredited evaluator, I would have thought.

Mr Smith – The Leather selection process we went through was quite involved. The manufacturer Gosh recommended that we use an independent testing facility. We chose the government's CSIRO believing that they were an independent testing facility that would provide us the right answers.

Senator JOHNSTON – Do you know now that that was probably not the case?

Mr Smith – No. They were given a specification that we wanted the leather to meet and they tested against that specification.

Senator JOHNSTON – Why did you choose them?

Mr Smith – I am not certain exactly why. I would have to –

Senator JOHNSTON - They [CSIRO] are not an accredited leather evaluator or tester; they are a research centre. The British Leather Centre is the world renowned test centre for evaluating leather. So we have gone out and, on the basis of an unaccredited leather tester, as I understand it, have eliminated the Australian tenderer.

#### **Comments:**

The CSIRO Leather Research Centre (LRC) has specialist facilities for conducting leather testing. The LRC is located at Clayton, Victoria and is part of the CSIRO Textile and Fibre Technology facility providing research, technical assistance and consulting services to industry.

The testing services offered by the LRC include:

- Physical testing for strength, rub fastness, abrasion, flexibility, water vapour permeability, waterproof tests, light fastness, oil repellency, colour fastness, solvent repellency and heat/cold resistance of finish;

The techniques used by the LRC include Microscopy, Spectroscopy, Electrochemistry, and Chromatography.

In the evaluation of the black leather for the project, DPS sought external independent expertise to establish the sample hide's properties against the agreed original specifications. DPS sought advice from industry representatives, and the CSIRO LRC and the Australian Wool Testing Authority were identified as the two institutions within Australia that had the necessary qualifications and testing equipment to undertake this work. The CSIRO LRC was selected due to their national and international reputation.

The CSIRO LRC submitted a quotation and details of the relevant tests and testing methodology required to test the leather against the criteria in the specification. The tests proceeded on this basis. The CSIRO LRC was also asked to comment on the quality of the hides supplied and their suitability for use as high quality furniture upholstery leather. Their comments were included in the final test results.

The CSIRO LRC has been conducting research and testing services for the Australian leather industry for nearly 40 years. The testing methods used to assess the Gosh leather comply with international standards (for further information, see Attachment A and the web site <http://www.tft.csiro.au/leather/index.htm>).

### **Hansard page 17**

During questioning by Senator Johnston, Mr Andrew Smith, Assistant Secretary Operations, stated:

"While Gosh may be a world renowned supplier of leather for those sorts of car seats, they are not a world renowned supplier of leather for soft furnishings."

At the time of making that statement, Mr Smith believed that it was correct. However, based on statements from Gosh Leather and further research, Mr Smith now understands that Gosh Leather may in fact be world renowned for the supply of some types of leathers used in the furniture industry.

### **Hansard page 19**

Senator JOHNSTON— ... I might also say that every piece of leather, until about three or four years ago, in this parliament was produced by Gosh's sister company, Howe Leather in Victoria. It seemed adequate and proper for purpose then. Now we seem to be getting away from what was once quite suitable and acceptable. Why is that? Why have we changed the guidelines? These are questions that trouble me.

### **Answer:**

In summary:

- it appears that not all of the leather used in the original building project was in fact Australian leather;

- no changes were made to the original specifications before the recent procurement processes began; and
- the outcomes of the selection processes in 1986 and 2003 were the same, namely that imported leather was chosen for the black leather lounge furniture group.

### **Use of imported leather**

The Parliament House Construction Authority, responsible for the project delivery of the new Parliament House, documents the original process and leather selection for the leather upholstered furniture program in their official publication "Project Parliament: The Management Experience". Chapter 25 covers the supply of leather to the Furniture program and states:

Approximately 15,000 square metres of leather was required for the Furniture Program. The majority of this was supplied by the country's one large-scale tanner, who undertook supervised trials to develop appropriate colours, many of them unique, for the project. About 6,000 square metres of leather had to be imported.

The specification for leathers had already been documented for non-furniture components and the main concern with the domestic product was one of achieving and maintaining quality. Furniture Program personnel were required to liaise between the suppliers and furniture manufacturers to ensure that the product was acceptable.

To guarantee timely availability, the Authority agreed to purchase any leather prepared by the tanners for the project but not subsequently used. As it turned out, there were no surplus stocks of leather available to purchase from the tanner. However, small quantities of leather were obtained from manufacturers and supplied to the User for spares.

A letter from Howe & Company Pty Ltd (the domestic tanner) in August 1989 clarifies that the original leather used on the Black Leather Upholstered Lounge Group was not Howe leather, and states:

The navy leather which was used on furniture built by Bassett Furniture NSW (the Black Leather Upholstered Lounge group) is not as I had indicated a Howe Leather. It is most likely an imported European hide.

Internal documentation produced by Australian Industrial Publications in 1990 supports this claim. Their Leather Finishes (Care and Cleaning) service instruction SI-IFF-001 identifies that the furniture upholstery suppliers were European and include Elmo and Schmidt 2 (now known as Wollsdorf).

### **Use of the original specifications in replacement projects**

In 2002 a project was initiated by the then Joint House Department (JHD) Strategic Planning Business Unit to replace 65 black leather lounges that were in poor condition.

Between June and November 2002, the leather industry was canvassed and manufacturers, agents and upholsterers were invited to provide samples of leather for evaluation against the original Parliament House leather specifications.

The original specifications were retained for four reasons:

- The original specifications were developed after extensive research and industry consultation and were successful in achieving the high standards set by the Parliament House Construction Authority. DPS could not afford to undertake this kind of research for a project of this size.
- As the project for replacing the lounges was to be staged over a number of years, DPS considered it important that the new furniture matched the quality and visual appearance of the original furniture group.
- DPS considered that design integrity issues required matching the replacement leather lounges to the general architectural qualities of the public areas.
- Furniture satisfying the original specifications had a proven track record over 15 years of intense use in the public areas, with over 1 million visitors a year to the building.

DPS has undertaken an internal review of the procurement processes followed for the black leather lounge replacement project. The review found that staff canvassed suppliers of Australian and European leather to identify a product which best met the specified requirements. Throughout that selection exercise, the Australian supplier was afforded substantial opportunity to present a product which met the specification. On the basis of internal and external evaluation and testing methods, the Australian supplier was eventually not selected.

The internal review has found no improprieties in the department's processes. Consideration is currently being given to an independent external review of these processes.

Attachment A



## Leather Research Centre

CSIRO Textile and Fibre Technology Bayview Avenue Clayton VIC 3168

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Ph: 03 9545 2364 Fax: 03 9545 2363

28<sup>th</sup> May 2004

Mr. Philip Goldacre  
Furniture Management Officer  
Strategic Planning  
Department of Parliamentary Services  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Phillip,

Further to your recent communication with Mark Hickey about the LRC and leather testing, the CSIRO Leather Research Centre was supplied with one black finished hide and conducted the following tests for "Selection of Furniture Project 0004-0810A" over the period February to March 2003. The testing was in accordance to IULTCS (International Union of Leather Technologists and Chemists Societies) official methods. The evaluation of the leather was against specifications supplied by the Joint House Department.

The test for lightfastness was in accordance to AS2001.4.21 and was performed by AWTA (Australian Wool Testing Authority) as testing facilities were not available at CSIRO.

Test	Test Method	Equivalent ISO Method
Thickness and leather assessment	IUP4	ISO 2598:2002
Light fastness	AS 2001.4.21	
Fastness to rubbing - dry	IUF450	ISO 11640:1993
Fastness to rubbing - wet	IUF450	ISO 11640:1993
Fastness to rubbing - artificial perspiration	IUF450	ISO 11640:1993
Tensile strength	IUP6	ISO 3376:2002
Tear Strength	IUP8	ISO 3377 (2):2002
Flexing Resistance	IUP20	ISO 5402:2002
pH of extract	IUC11	ISO 4045:1998

CSIRO Leather Research Centre has been conducting research and industry services for the Australian leather industry for nearly 40 years. I refer you to our website for further background information <http://www.tft.csiro.au/leather/index.htm> and to the section relating to industry services <http://www.tft.csiro.au/leather/services.html>

Our test methods are international methods such as SLTC (Society of Leather Technologists and Chemists), International Union of Leather Technologists and Chemists Official Methods and ISO methods, SATRA (Shoe and Allied Trades Research Association) and AATCC (American Association of Textile Chemists and Colorists).

We publish in international journals and present research findings at international leather conferences such as the IULTCS (International Union of Leather Technologists and Chemists Societies) World Congress.

CSIRO Leather Research Centre has specialist facilities for conducting leather testing and chemical analysis and also has sophisticated pilot plant equipment for developing new process technologies.

Yours Sincerely

Catherine A. Money  
Officer in Charge CSIRO Leather Research Centre.



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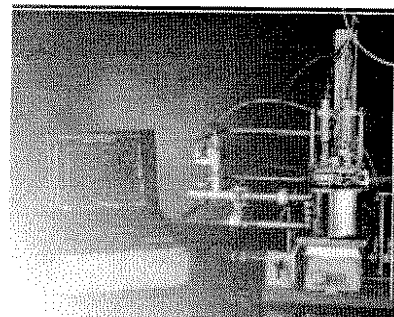
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## Industry Services and Consulting

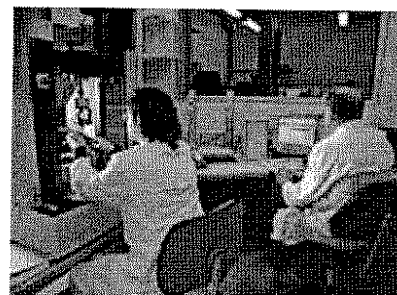
Physical Testing / Histology / Chemical Analysis / Specialised Services / Techniques Available / Consulting

A list of the services offered by the Leather Research Centre is shown below.



### Physical Testing

- Strength tests - tensile, tear, lastometer, stitch tear, puncture
- Rub fastness - Veslic
- Abrasion - Taber
- Flex tests - bally
- Water vapour permeability - SATRA
- Waterproof tests - Bally, Maeser
- Light fastness - Xenon arc
- Oil repellency
- Medical sheepskin compliance testing
- Color fastness to water spotting
- Solvent repellency
- Heat/cold resistance of leather finish



### Histology

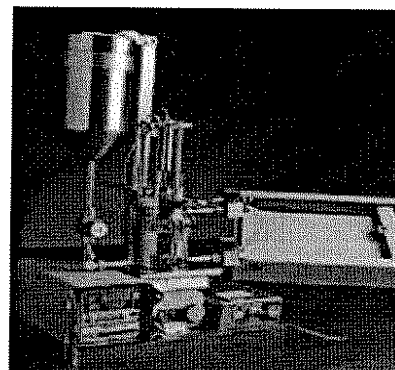
- *Diagnosis of faults or damage*
- *Bacterial or fungal problems*
- *Identification of parasite damage*
- *Species identification*
- *Examination of finishing problems*
- *Determination of thickness*
- *Examples.....*

1. *Damage to armrest of couch*
2. *Vertical Fibre 1, 2*
3. *Example 3*
4. *Scar Tissue*
5. *Stains 1, 2*
6. *Example 4*

### Chemical Analysis

- *Raw materials reagents*

- *Quality of preservation*
- *Process liquors*
- *Effluent*
- *Leather - part processed and finished*
- *Pickled pelts*
- *Fungicides*
- *Formaldehyde*
- *Solvent extractions*
- *Fat analysis*



### Specialised Services

- Hydrothermal shrinkage temperature
- Medical sheepskin testing to AS4480.1 - 1998
- Assessment of resistance of leather and wet-blue to fungal growth using various standards - incl. Australian and ISO

### Techniques Available

#### Microscopy

- Incident light
- Transmitted light (including UV)
- Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM)
- Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM)
- X-ray element analysis
- X-ray density mapping
- X-ray element mapping



#### Spectroscopy

- *Infra-red spectroscopy*
- *Atomic spectroscopy - atomic absorption, atomic emission and inductively coupled plasma*

#### Electrochemistry

- *Range of ion selective electrodes*

#### Chromatography

- *Gas chromatography with flame ionisation and electron capture detection*
- *High performance liquid chromatography with ultra-violet and conductivity detection*



### LRC Processing Facilities

- Trialling of production processes and chemicals and after-care products



- Large range of matched drums in a variety of sizes, wooskin paddle and finishing equipment for industry use



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