

DEPARTMENT OF THE SENATE
PAPER NO. 718
DATE 11 JUN 1970
PRESENTED
<i>J.R. Odger</i>
Clerk of the -

1970

THE PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

*Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works*

REPORT  
relating to the proposed construction of a  
POST OFFICE  
ADMINISTRATIVE CENTRE  
STAGE 1  
at  
Brisbane, Queensland  
(EIGHTH REPORT OF 1970)

## C O N T E N T S

	<u>Paragraph</u>
The Reference	1
The Committee's Investigation	4
The Proposal	
The Need	6
The Concept	11
Committee's Conclusions	14
The Site	16
Occupancy of the Proposed Building	21
Special Features	22
The Proposed Building	
Design	24
Structural Design	28
External Finishes	30
Internal Finishes	32
Mechanical Services	35
Electrical Services	39
Lifts	41
Fire Protection	43
Car Parking	45
Landscaping and Special Features	47
Committee's Conclusion	49
Estimate of Cost	50
Programme	51
Other Observations	
Fire Protection	52
Programming of Work	54
Protection Against Atomic Fallout	56
Recommendations and Conclusions	58

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

POST OFFICE ADMINISTRATIVE CENTRE, STAGE 1  
BRISBANE, QUEENSLAND

R E P O R T

By resolution on 23 April 1970, the Senate referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for investigation and report to the Parliament, the proposal for the construction of Stage 1 of a Post Office Administrative Centre at Brisbane.

The Committee have the honour to report as follows:

THE REFERENCE

1. The proposal referred to the Committee is for the construction of an office building comprising a basement, lower ground, ground, and fourteen upper floors to accommodate Queensland head office staff of the Post Office. Some 150,000 sq. ft of office space is proposed for 1,500 staff besides 42,000 sq. ft for ancillary facilities including a theatre, cafeteria and registries.
2. The building is to be the first part of a two stage development to provide 500,000 sq. ft of office space. The stage 2 building, which will probably be required by about 1980, is presently planned to have 25 floors above a plaza common to both buildings. The total facility has been designed to meet the Post Office's expansion needs over the next 50 years.
3. The work in this reference is estimated to cost \$4.6 million.

THE COMMITTEE'S INVESTIGATION

4. The Committee received written submissions and drawings from the Postmaster-General's Department and the Department of Works and took evidence from their representatives at public hearings in Brisbane and Melbourne. We also took evidence in Brisbane from representatives of the Council of Commonwealth Public Service Organizations, the Professional Officers' Association, the Australian Fire Protection Association and the Brisbane City Council.

5. The site of the proposed development was inspected and we also saw staff working areas in Telecommunications House and the General Post Office.

THE PROPOSAL

6. The Need Since 1928, when the G.P.O. building first became too small for the growing Queensland head office administration, staff have been dispersed by degrees into other departmental and rented accommodation in Brisbane. The point has been reached where the head office functions are now spread over 16 locations, and in consequence, the maintenance of efficiency between, and in, the various divisions and branches has become a major problem. We saw evidence at first hand of the overcrowding that has occurred and of the substandard office accommodation now in use. The criticism of some of this space by the unions, particularly under trying summer conditions, can be well understood.

7. Head office activities now involve a staff of 1,800 who occupy 122,500 sq. ft of rented space, in addition to 73,000 sq. ft of departmentally owned space. Rental charges amount to \$398,000 per annum. By 1972, immediately before the proposed building is due for completion, 151,000 sq. ft of rented space will be necessary costing \$514,000 per annum. Projected staff growth rates assessed at 2.2% per annum indicate a total need for 223,000 sq. ft in 1980 and 278,000 sq. ft in 1990.

8. Concurrently with the need for improved accommodation for administrative functions, there is a requirement to remodel the G.P.O. building to provide facilities for a Post Office operations centre to handle the growing city mail and telegraph traffic. This is in keeping with developments in other States but a prerequisite in Brisbane is the relocation of the administrative staff now in the G.P.O.

9. Completion of the building in this reference will not only enable the G.P.O. to be vacated for its complete conversion as an operations centre and the re-use of Telecommunications House for training purposes, but also the relinquishment of 44,000 sq. ft of rented space which will save \$167,000 per annum in rentals.

10. It is intended that the Engineering Division will continue to occupy good quality leased space, the leases for which have not expired and to consolidate them in the second stage building in another 10 years or so.

11. The Concept The Post Office, having regard to the uneconomic and inefficient arrangements made for accommodating administrative staff in most capital cities, has concluded that it was clearly preferable to construct its own buildings rather than lease privately owned space. The inefficiency inherent in spreading staff with common functions and interests through a large city is obvious. The economic advantages of the Post Office providing its own accommodation are evident from a comparison of that cost with the current annual rentals ranging between \$3.25 and \$3.75 per sq. ft for whole floor tenancies of leased space in Brisbane. We were told, furthermore, that present negotiations suggest that the latter figure may shortly reach \$4.25 per sq. ft per annum.

12. The aim of the Post Office with the present reference is to build accommodation of a standard and at a cost comparable to the better type of private enterprise investment type building, providing general purpose office accommodation. The approach and economic principles adopted and the building type produced are, it was suggested to the Committee, capable of repetition, thereby eliminating the need for the complete and special design of similar buildings elsewhere.

13. The economic analysis of the proposed building demonstrated that taking account of the cost of the land, building costs, interest charges, administration and annual charges to the Post Office including amortization, the cost of the space in the proposed building is equivalent to \$2.67 per sq. ft per annum. The clear conclusion is that on economic grounds the proposal is well justified.

14. Committee's Conclusions We are satisfied that many Post Office administrative staff in Brisbane are housed in unsatisfactory substandard accommodation and should be relocated in space of an acceptable standard at the first opportunity.

15. The Committee believe that the concept of a Post Office administrative centre in Brisbane is appropriate and that the proposal to construct a private enterprise investment type office building as the first stage of this complex is practical and economically sound.

#### THE SITE

16. The site has an area of some 62,000 sq. ft, is situated some five-eighths of a mile north of the G.P.O. towards Fortitude Valley and is bounded by Barry Parade and Wickham, Gotha and Warren Streets. The building in this

reference is planned to front Gotha Street on the northern boundary and its western corner will abut the Barry Parade frontage.

17. The site is currently occupied, mainly by postal workshops, which will be relocated at a new complex being built at Bulimba. The buildings to be demolished for the stage 1 development have already been evacuated. The remainder will be cleared progressively as activities are re-established elsewhere.

18. A railway tunnel under the Barry Parade/Gotha Street corner is surrounded by an easement restricting basement development in a minor way. Although the adjacent use of piling is limited, it is not inhibiting the proposed development and, at this stage, building over the tunnel is not proposed.

19. The Committee noted that the location and extent of the site is thought to be adequate for the foreseeable accommodation needs of Post Office head office activities in Brisbane. Although removed from the city centre, it is extremely well served by public transport and is convenient for the public, staff and for official purposes.

20. The Committee are agreed that the site selected is suitable.

#### OCCUPANCY OF THE PROPOSED BUILDING

21. All sections of head office staff will be accommodated in the building except the Engineering Division which will be consolidated in stage 2. It is expected that the office space available will be sufficient for growth requirements to about 1980.

22. Special Features Space has been allocated on the lower ground floor for a central registry which assisted by a document conveyor system will serve all floors, and a central printing unit capable of meeting the needs of both stages 1 and 2. A theatrette with seating for 150 persons will be located

on the ground floor for promotional, public relations, training and staff recreational activities. A telecommunications sales and information centre, also on the ground floor, will handle sales promotion and customer enquiries. A specially designed area will be provided in the basement for the receipt and storage of cash and securities.

23. Staff amenities will be provided in accordance with approved standards. A cafeteria, located on the lower ground floor, will seat about 300 persons and by staggering the lunch break, it is planned to serve up to 420 hot meals between noon and 1.30 p.m.

#### THE PROPOSED BUILDING

24. Design In normal circumstances, the design and documentation of this project would have been undertaken for the Post Office solely by the Department of Works. The Committee noted, however, that because of the extremely short design and construction period allowed by the Post Office and the temporary inability of the Department to devote appropriate resources to the project, design and documentation is being undertaken for the Department of Works on a fee basis by the architectural firm of Peddle, Thorp and Walker. We noted that this firm is considered to be well equipped for the task, having been engaged in recent years on a number of similar commercial developments.

25. The brief called for a building providing standard office accommodation similar to quality commercial development with a cost limit of \$1,750 per gross square of office space. These requirements have been met and a satisfactory efficiency ratio of 84.7% for usable office space on typical office floors has been achieved.



26. With the future stage 2 development in mind, the stage 1 building has been designed as a simple mass, with horizontal emphasis provided by precast concrete spandels which project beyond double glazed windows. At roof level, a similar horizontal mass is proposed. By recessing the perimeter glazing at plaza level, the structural columns will be exposed providing an arcade on three sides of the building.

27. The building will have a basement and lower ground floor occupying half the site, and a tower section containing a ground floor, 13 office floors and topped by a plant room floor. It will rise 196 ft above the Barry Parade/Gotha Street corner. Main access to the building will be from Barry Parade at ground floor plaza level, but access will also be provided from Gotha Street by a stair. The service core on the Gotha Street side of the tower will contain stairs, toilets, service ducts and lifts.

28. Structural Design Following investigations into the most economical form of construction, the use of reinforced concrete is proposed. The structure of reinforced concrete slab construction will have columns on a grid of 27 ft by 25 ft. The 9 in. thick slab floor which will eliminate the need for beams and minimise the floor to floor height will be generally designed to carry standard office floor loadings except for two areas adjacent to the service core and in the registry and stationery store, where the design loadings will be 200 lb/sq.ft.

29. Site investigations indicate that the building can be founded on sound rock. Simple concrete pier and spread footings will therefore be used.

30. External Finishes The precast concrete structural spandrel panels will be finished with an exposed river gravel aggregate, columns with a crushed quartz aggregate render, and exposed walls, up to the ground floor plaza level,

with a bush hammered ribbed concrete finish. Public areas on the ground floor will have local stone facings and the plaza will be paved with brick.

31. Aluminium framed, double glazed windows fitted with adjustable venetian blinds between the panes, will be used.

32. Internal Finishes The main entrance lobby will be paved with polished marble slabs and walls will be faced with marble veneer. Office areas will have vinyl tile floors, acoustic tile ceilings and will be sub-divided with demountable partitions.

33. In the basement and the lower ground floor, partitions will be generally of masonry construction rendered and painted as appropriate. Ceilings will be off-form concrete. The cafeteria will have vinyl tile floors whilst the theatrette will be carpeted and finished in a manner to aid audience acoustics and viewing.

34. The walls and floors of the toilets and cafeteria kitchen will be ceramic tiled.

35. Mechanical Services The architectural and structural treatment of the building will contribute considerably to the economic design of the mechanical services including air conditioning of the major portion of the building.

36. The eight upper office floors will be air conditioned from two air handling plants located in the roof plant room, whilst the six lower floors will be served by two plants in the basement plant room. The offices on the perimeter of the building will have air circulated by a dual duct high velocity system and those situated internally, by a single duct high velocity induction system. Chilled water will be circulated through the cooling coils from two

chiller sets each being 55% full load capacity and equipped with centrifugal refrigeration compressors. Oil-fired boilers in the roof plant room will feed the heating coils.

37. Due to differing load and occupancy characteristics, separate air handling plants operated from a basement refrigeration plant will serve the cafeteria, theatrette, P.A.B.X., registry, printing and similar areas.

38. Stores, plant rooms, electrical substation, switchroom, maintenance workshop, car parking area, kitchens, toilets, tearooms and the cleaners' rooms will be mechanically ventilated. Other mechanical services will include a domestic hot water supply, kitchen equipment, refrigerated water bubblers and automatic pneumatically operated main entrance doors.

39. Electrical Services Electricity will be supplied from underground high voltage mains of the Brisbane City Council to a substation in the basement. The adjacent main switchboard will reticulate electricity to suitably located distribution boards. The substation will be large enough to take the switch-gear for the stage 2 building.

40. Lighting will generally be fluorescent. Battery operated emergency stair case lighting will be also provided. Power outlets will be located as required and a master and slave clock system will be installed.

41. Lifts An interconnected group of six automatic passenger lifts and a document conveyor system are proposed. The lifts, which will serve floors from the ground to the thirteenth, will each be designed for a loading of 3,500 lbs (23 persons) at a speed of 500 ft per minute. Two of the lifts will also provide a limited service to the lower ground and basement levels. At times other than peak periods, it will be possible to withdraw one lift for use as a goods lift. The document conveyor will serve all floors and will incorporate automatic loading and unloading devices.

42. Starting and finishing times for staff occupying the building will be staggered to minimise lift congestion at peak periods.

43. Fire Protection An automatic sprinkler system will cover the basement car park, the lower ground floor printing area and the ground floor theatre and entrance lobby. The remainder of the building will be protected by a thermal detection system supported by smoke detectors in the air conditioning ducts. The fire isolated escape stairs will be automatically pressurised in the event of fire to prevent smoke ingress.

44. Small bore hoses fitted to hydrants and portable extinguishers will also be provided on each floor. Booster pumps and head tanks will maintain water pressure to fire outlets.

45. Car Parking Parking spaces for 19 departmental vehicles will be provided in the basement which will have a 9 ft clearance height for deliveries to the accounting securities area.

46. In addition, as the site is progressively cleared of other activities, more parking space will be provided. Some 60 spaces are expected by mid-1972, a further 30 by mid-1974, and after the plaza is extended over the rest of the site, parking will be available for about 200 vehicles. Most of these will be available for the private vehicles of staff employed in the building.

47. Landscaping and Special Features The ground floor plaza and a sunken courtyard adjacent to the cafeteria will be landscaped and beautified with planting, flower boxes and seating.

48. Two aluminium flag poles will be positioned at plaza level and the Royal Cipher and building identification signs will be suitably located.

49. Committee's Conclusion The Committee recommend the construction of the work in this reference.

11.

ESTIMATE OF COST

50. The estimated cost of the work when referred to the Committee was \$4.6 million made up as follows:

	}
Building work	2,930,000
Engineering services	<u>1,670,000</u>
	<u>4,600,000</u>

PROGRAMME

51. It is expected that after an approval to proceed is given, the preparation of final drawings and tender documents and the calling and analysis of tenders should be completed in time to permit a contract to be let during November 1970. Construction time for the work is estimated at 19 months.

OTHER OBSERVATIONS

52. Fire Protection The Committee received a well documented submission from the Australian Fire Protection Association advocating the use of wet sprinklers not only in the relatively high fire risk basement areas, but elsewhere in the building. We looked closely at the Association's arguments and considered also the views of expert Department of Works officers.

53. Quite clearly, there is considerable room for debate on what measures are reasonable or are required to adequately protect a building and its occupants against the risk of fire. However, we are unanimously of the opinion that, with respect to the views of the Association, the measures proposed in this case will satisfactorily meet the safety requirements of life and property. We noted, furthermore, that the standards of the Commonwealth's own fire authority and the local authorities have been complied with.

54. Programming of Work The Committee took evidence that due to a combination of factors related to the design capacity of the Department of Works at the time, the relatively late definition of the design requirement by the Post Office and the subsequent advancement of the completion target date, the Department of Works was required to use private architectural consultants for design and documentation.

55. While this situation suggests that the design capacity of the Department of Works may have been over committed for a period, there is also an implication that the Post Office may have been unduly demanding of the Department in setting a target date for completion. We do not oppose the periodic use of private consultants to supplement the design and documentation capacity of the Department of Works, but we believe that at the same time client departments should be realistic when determining target completion dates.

56. Protection against Atomic Fallout In evidence, the Department of Works' witness informed the Committee that although there is no specific departmental instruction on the incorporation of special design features in Commonwealth buildings to provide protection against atomic fallout, a draft instruction has been prepared and is being considered for issue to departmental design sections. Consequently, at this stage, no special design features are proposed to be included in this building.

57. We believe that if the Department is directed to use design techniques intended to afford a measure of protection from atomic fallout in time for inclusion in this building, these steps should be taken.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

58. The summary of recommendations and conclusions of the Committee is set out below. Alongside each is shown the paragraph in the report to which it refers.

	<u>Paragraph</u>
1. MANY POST OFFICE ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF IN BRISBANE ARE HOUSED IN UNSATISFACTORY SUBSTANDARD ACCOMMODATION.	14
2. THEY SHOULD BE RELOCATED IN SPACE OF AN ACCEPTABLE STANDARD AT THE FIRST OPPORTUNITY.	14
3. THE CONCEPT OF A POST OFFICE ADMINISTRATIVE CENTRE IN BRISBANE IS APPROPRIATE.	15
4. THE PROPOSAL TO CONSTRUCT A PRIVATE ENTERPRISE INVESTMENT TYPE OFFICE BUILDING AS THE FIRST STAGE OF THIS COMPLEX IS PRACTICAL AND ECONOMICALLY SOUND.	15
5. THE SITE SELECTED IS SUITABLE.	20
6. THE COMMITTEE RECOMMEND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE WORK IN THIS REFERENCE.	49
7. THE ESTIMATED COST OF THE WORK WHEN REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE WAS \$4.6 MILLION.	50
8. THE FIRE PROTECTION MEASURES PROPOSED FOR THIS BUILDING WILL SATISFACTORILY MEET SAFETY REQUIREMENTS.	53
9. CLIENT DEPARTMENTS SHOULD BE REALISTIC WHEN DETERMINING TARGET COMPLETION DATES.	55

10. IF THE DEPARTMENT OF WORKS IS DIRECTED TO USE  
DESIGN TECHNIQUES INTENDED TO AFFORD A MEASURE OF  
PROTECTION FROM ATOMIC FALLOUT IN TIME FOR INCLUSION  
IN THIS BUILDING THESE STEPS SHOULD BE TAKEN.

57



(C.R. KELLY)  
Chairman

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works,  
Parliament House,  
CANBERRA, A.C.T.

9 June 1970.