



Community and Public Sector Union

17 March 2017

Secretary
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
By email pwc@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary

Main building refresh project, Geoscience Australia building, Symonston Australian Capital Territory

The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry into The main building refresh project, Geoscience Australia building, Symonston Australian Capital territory.

As the primary union representing Australian Public Service (APS) employees, the CPSU is committed to providing a strong voice for our members in matters that affect their daily work life. The CPSU has been involved in supporting our members in Geoscience Australia affected by this project and much of our submission represents their views in relation to this matter.

Recommendation 1: That the Committee consider the total cost of the project to ensure the activity represents true value for money.

Purpose of the project

Paragraph five (5) of Geoscience Australia's submission states that the aim of the project is to improve efficiency and effectiveness of the GA workplace and to meet lease obligations. This increase in efficiency is achieved by reducing the building footprint currently utilised by staff, to the current PRODAC guidelines of 14m² per staff member, and by making part of the building available to lease to a sub-tenant.

The project has been reportedly scoped at a cost of approximately \$17.5 million dollars, some of which is funded through lease incentives.

While, prima facie these aims appear sensible, it is important to note that Geoscience Australia has historically attempted to seek sub-tenants to share the building, and has been unsuccessful. Should it not be possible to secure a sub-tenant, staff may suffer cramped conditions for no tangible reason beyond satisfying a bureaucratic guideline.

The CPSU recognises that high quality and safe working environments including updated fixtures and improved breakout faculties represent a benefit for staff. The CPSU is keen to encourage that improvements are provided in a cost-effective manner to ensure that staff receive the best outcomes possible, without losing current benefits in an unnecessary trade-off.

Recommendation 2: That the committee give consideration to recent research indicating excessive use of open plan offices is actually a detriment to productivity, and give consideration to the scientific and detailed analysis nature of much of Geoscience's work.

<https://www.dezeen.com/2016/09/15/open-plan-offices-co-working-less-productive-more-unfriendly-survey-auckland-university-technology/>

The CPSU notes that the proposed building refurbishment involves removing EL2 staff from offices and out into the open plan work area. EL2 staff members are senior public servants, with managerial and security responsibilities. Moving these staff members to the open office area will likely represent a substantial change to the way these workers do their jobs; and importantly will create challenges with respect to sensitively and discretely managing information.

Geoscience Australia staff advise that research work is conducted most productively in a quiet environment, and the movement of more staff into the open office area is likely to impact on their access to a quiet working environment for research activities.

Given there is little evidence of any benefits associated with open plan work spaces, and the concerns of reducing the ability to meet and discuss sensitive matters privately, the CPSU believes further consideration should be given to this issue before committing the agency to open office space for the next 15 years.

Recommendation 3: That the committee require Geoscience Australia to provide more fulsome information on the stated WHS issues that the building refresh will correct.

Geoscience Australia states in their submission that the office re-fit will correct WHS matters. WHS matters should be resolved more urgently as part of routine maintenance, rather than as part of the building refurbishment. The CPSU recommends that the committee seek a fulsome explanation of what WHS issues exist at the GA site, and an explanation of why they are scheduled for repair in the future rather than treated as an urgent matter to immediately correct.

Recommendation 4: That the committee require Geoscience Australia to provide an explanation of why the \$17.5 million building refurbishment will not include basic maintenance activities such as repairing and painting water damaged ceilings.

The building refurbishment represents a substantial expenditure, and it appears that some basic building maintenance items are being neglected, such as repair and repainting of water damaged ceilings.

The CPSU is happy to provide information on the matters raised in this submission and supplementary information on other relevant issues.

For further information, please contact Megan Baker-Goldsmith

Yours sincerely,

Beth Vincent-Pietsch
Deputy Secretary
CPSU