



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

**Reference: Reserve Bank of Australia business resumption site at Baulkham Hills
in Sydney, New South Wales**

FRIDAY, 3 JUNE 2005

SYDNEY

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JOINT STATUTORY COMMITTEE ON

PUBLIC WORKS

Friday, 3 June 2005

Members: Mrs Moylan (*Chair*), Mr Brendan O'Connor (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Ferguson, Forshaw and Troeth and Mr Forrest, Mr Jenkins, Mr Ripoll and Mr Wakelin

Members in attendance: Ms Moylan, Mr Brendan O'Connor and Mr Wakelin

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

Reserve Bank of Australia business resumption site at Baulkham Hills in Sydney, New South Wales.

WITNESSES

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Committee met at 11.36 am

CAMPBELL, Mr Frank, Assistant Governor, Corporate Services, Reserve Bank of Australia

MAYES, Mr Richard, Head, Facilities Management Department, Reserve Bank of Australia

VALLA, Mr Rudi, Managing Partner, DEM (Australia) Pty Ltd

CHAIR (Mrs Moylan)—Welcome. I declare open this public hearing into the construction and fit-out of our business resumption site for the Reserve Bank of Australia. This project was referred to the Public Works Committee on 11 May 2005 for consideration and report to parliament in accordance with subsection 17(3) of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, which concerns the examination of and reporting on a public work and states that the committee will have regard to:

- (a) the stated purpose of the work and its suitability for that purpose;
- (b) the necessity for, or the advisability of, carrying out the work;
- (c) the most effective use that can be made, in the carrying out of the work, of the moneys to be expended on the work;
- (d) where the work purports to be of a revenue-producing character, the amount of revenue that it may reasonably be expected to produce; and
- (e) the present and prospective public value of the work.

I welcome you all here this morning for the public hearing into the Reserve Bank of Australia business resumption site. I take the opportunity to particularly welcome the Hon. Alan Cadman, the member for Mitchell. We are pleased to have you here. Thank you for joining us on the site inspection earlier this morning.

Earlier this morning the committee received a confidential briefing from the Reserve Bank of Australia and inspected the site of the proposed work. We thank you for making the arrangements for us to do that. The committee will now take further evidence from the Reserve Bank on the public record. The committee has received a submission and a supplementary submission from the Reserve Bank. These will be made available in a volume of submissions for the inquiry and they are also available on the committee's web site. Does the bank wish to propose any amendments to the submissions it has made to the committee?

Mr Campbell—We have no amendments.

CHAIR—I now invite you, Mr Campbell, to make a short presentations to the committee and then we will go to questions.

Mr Campbell—The Reserve Bank is best known in the community for conducting monetary policy and for its role in promoting the stability of the financial system. Largely reflecting these responsibilities, it is also a major financial institution in its own right, with assets of some \$85 billion and operations which place it at the heart of financial markets and the payment system in Australia. The bank also has important domestic and international banking relationships. Flowing from its role as a bank, the RBA has three critical operating functions, each of which is heavily dependant on information and communication technology and key staff.

These critical functions include, firstly, the operation of the high-value interbank payment system in Australia which, through the Reserve Bank information transfer system, which is also known as RITS, enables banks to safely settle their obligations to each other in real time as they fall due. These interbank operations are very large. Banks make payments across RITS amounting to about \$150 billion on average each day. The availability of the system enables commercial banks to control a vital set of risks that they themselves face. Failure of RITS, even a relatively short interruption, at a critical time would put at risk the reputation and efficiency of the financial system in Australia.

The second set of operations is related to the banking business that RBA conducts on behalf of Australian government agencies. An important part of this involves making payments on behalf of Centrelink to pensioners, families, the unemployed and other welfare recipients. The RBA also makes individual Medicare payments on behalf of the Health Insurance Commission and receives taxes on behalf of the Australian Taxation Office. The loss of the RBA's banking operations would result in delays to pension payments, family payments and the like.

The third set of critical operations relate to the RBA's activities in financial markets in Australia and abroad. These operations are undertaken each day—firstly, to manage liquidity in the financial system and to implement monetary policy; secondly, to undertake operations in the foreign exchange market; and, thirdly, to manage Australia's foreign exchange reserves in the markets in which they are invested in the United States, Europe and Japan.

The failure of any of these major systems would be unacceptable. The bank must be able to respond in a timely way to any disruption to avoid a major flow-on to the financial system and the economy more generally. By providing greater assurance about the availability of the RBA systems the proposed BRS is a substantial investment in improving Australia's financial system infrastructure. It should be noted that the Reserve Bank currently has effective business resumption plans for its critical operations and an active program of testing them. However, the technology proposed and the consolidation of staff in one BRS location will enable the bank to improve on its current arrangements and better control a number of risks into the future.

The current proposal was developed after extensive evaluation of the RBA's business continuity needs. This analysis led to the conclusion that a dedicated facility provided the greatest degree of assurance since it would give the bank complete control of its business continuity arrangements at a high level of resilience. Once this assessment was made the bank evaluated a large number of sites in the Sydney area and settled on the current location, bearing in mind the need to balance separation from the CBD against suitable building design, technology constraints, reasonable access and diversity of supply of power and other utilities. Reflecting the bank's dependence on IT and communication systems, the building will include a

highly secure data centre specified to rigorous standards. The data centre design is consistent with the IT security policy of the Australian government.

While office accommodation at the BRS would house critical staff in an emergency for up to three months, IT systems and a dealing room would operate from the data centre for as long as needed to restore systems at head office. Our plans would see the BRS house 220 staff in an emergency, with space for modest growth beyond current demands. As operations from the BRS will augment those at the bank's head office, 55 staff will be located in one wing of the BRS on a full-time basis. This will mitigate the risk of interruption to operations due to serious injury to staff in the event of an incident at head office. The other wing of the facility is designed to house staff when access to head office is lost. It will be in a lights-out situation most of the time. Most staff who will work at the BRS, either full time or in an emergency, will be from the operational and policy parts of the bank, not the IT area. It is for this reason that the facility has been designed to have a corporate feel rather than the look purely of a data centre.

The bank has provided information to staff on the proposal and will continue to do so as the project evolves and occupation of the facility approaches. There has been consultation with the main union that represents staff, namely the Reserve Bank Officers Section of the Finance Sector Union. Concept designs for the building and landscaping comply with relevant planning regulations and have been approved by the Norwest Association. The Baulkham Hills Shire Council supports the proposal. Discussions with council have confirmed that there are no heritage concerns. In particular, the proposals comply with restrictions governing intrusions on lines of sight to and from the Bella Vista farm. We have been advised that the Australian Greenhouse Office regards the building design as consistent with the government's environmental policies. The estimated cost of the proposed work is \$38 million. This cost will be funded from the bank's own resources. Subject to parliamentary approval, the proposed schedule has construction commencing early in 2006, with the facility ready for operation in mid-2007.

CHAIR—Thank you, Mr Campbell. This project is a considerably large project—\$38 million will be spent on this building—but I could not see a line item anywhere for relocation costs. Can you explain what will happen in relation to the cost of relocating—I presume there will be some costs of relocation—and how you propose to meet that cost?

Mr Campbell—There will be costs of relocation. We currently have an interim disaster recovery facility at Cumberland Forest where we have consolidated our IT systems. We would see those costs as something that the bank would incorporate in its budget at the time of relocation. We do not see it as being part of the set-up costs of the business resumption site per se.

CHAIR—So it will essentially come out of your existing operating budget.

Mr Campbell—Yes.

CHAIR—Further to that, you state at paragraph 47 that there is an opportunity to generate some revenue from this particular project. Can you, on the record, give us an outline of how that revenue might be generated?

Mr Campbell—The main source of revenue would be that, as staff relocate from head office to the business resumption site, the demands on floor space at head office would be reduced. The reduction in staff numbers might provide the opportunity to consolidate that space with other vacant space in the building and possibly enable us to let further space in the head office building. As you know, the bank has consolidated its operations in the head office. We have let four floors of space to outside tenants. All the space available from the consolidation project has now been let, but we would be looking for further opportunities to let vacant space as that space becomes available.

CHAIR—Have you conducted any estimates as to how much space you might in fact save at head office, what value that might be and where that revenue goes to?

Mr Campbell—It is early days to have conducted that review; we have not done that. The additional revenue that might become available goes to the Reserve Bank's profits, which are paid over as a dividend to the government after any distribution to the bank's reserves. The amount of space directly related to transferring people to the business resumption site would be relatively small. We would be looking to consolidate to make a whole floor available. We do not share any space on a particular floor with outside tenants. Some mental arithmetic shows that, if we were able to find space for another floor, that might involve rent of about \$500,000 a year on current figures. That would have a range of uncertainty around it, but it is of that order of magnitude.

CHAIR—When do you think you might know how many people would be likely to move from your existing headquarters in the city to this facility?

Mr Campbell—We certainly plan that 55 staff will move. How we manage that will be a matter conducted in our forthcoming enterprise bargaining agreement with staff and with the Finance Sector Union—it is an item on that agenda. As to which staff and when, they will move to the business resumption site when it is commissioned in the middle of 2007. That is the sort of time frame we are looking at. If we were looking to let further space, it would be in that sort of time scale as well—the middle of 2007—that we would be making those assessments.

CHAIR—If you know that you have 55 people who are going to make a move, you would be able to perhaps work that out. How many people per floor of the existing building?

Mr Campbell—That varies between 80 and 100.

CHAIR—So you have really got to find a way to make that up to 100 people to clear a complete floor if it is going to be a revenue producing exercise.

Mr Campbell—That is correct. But that is not out of the question.

CHAIR—Because part of our job is to consider the revenue-producing character of the propositions that are put before this committee as part of our statutory obligations, I think committee members would be appreciative if, when you do progress that work and make those calculations, you would perhaps just give us an update of how that might impact on the project.

Mr Campbell—We will be happy to do that.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. I have no further questions on that issue now.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR—Returning to the question asked of you by the chair in relation to relocation costs, you have made clear that there will be a cost and those costs would be paid out of an operating budget. It is important for us to know at some point at least an estimate of those costs, not necessarily publicly but in confidence. In terms of looking at the net cost of the relocation, whilst it is coming under an operating budget, it is still Commonwealth moneys. I would suggest if you could—along with the last question by the chair—that you provide us with any information on the revenue that you may accumulate. I would seek from you, when possible, some estimate on the relocation costs to be perhaps provided to us in confidence.

Mr Campbell—We would be happy to do that. The point I would make in relation to the relocation costs is that there will be substantial savings as well. There will be savings in rent from the interim business resumption site, which would not be insignificant.

CHAIR—That is also very relevant to our work and the way in which we report back to parliament on this. As I said, it is one of the core issues that we are expected to investigate and reassure the Commonwealth that this is money well expended.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR—Can I firstly say thank you for providing the opportunity to see the plans in detail and, indeed, for the inspection. On the face of it, the construction is certainly an impressive one, but I do have a concern—I am sure you share this in a broad sense—about the relocation. These are not easy things to do. There are easy-to-shift technologies and bricks and mortar, but clearly with personnel and dedicated staff and in seeking to maintain those staff there is the sensitive issue of relocation. You have made it clear in your submissions that you have consulted with staff and with the Finance Sector Union. I was going to ask what strategies you have put in place to mitigate the adverse effects there will possibly be upon some staff who you would wish to transfer. For example, in your mind, is the relocation of staff a voluntary proposition? Are there other factors you take into account in the relocation? If a person would find it too difficult or too far to travel, would you take that into account? How are you dealing with those matters?

Mr Campbell—We have a staged strategy. We would really like to staff the business resumption site on a rotational basis. We see that as having a number of advantages. We talk about permanent staff or full-time staff, and there will always be staff there but they will rotate through the facility. That is the model we would like. There are cultural issues with that and there are efficiencies. We are very keen to make sure that the standards that apply at the business resumption site are the same as the standards and procedures that apply in head office so that, if we need to resort to the lifeboat, staff will be perfectly familiar with both locations. I suspect that we will get to a situation in which some staff will rotate and perhaps other staff will work there permanently, and that will be a satisfactory compromise. So we will be asking for volunteers and we know that a number of staff who live locally—

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR—Some would benefit, I guess.

Mr Campbell—Yes. A number of staff would really like to be working at this location, and to the extent that we can accommodate them we will do so.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—Because in the end you need to have it based on the right skill mix and qualifications at the site and not necessarily the geographical location of someone's residence.

Mr Campbell—That is right. For the staff that we feel we need to rotate through, we accept there will be disruption there. Therefore, in the course of the current EBA negotiations, the bank will be putting an item on the agenda that says we will be discussing with staff the relevant terms and conditions for those who we request go to the BRS. I would not like to pre-empt those discussions, because they are part of the discussion with the FSU. To address your specific concern, if there were someone who said, 'It's just impossible for me to go there'—

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—If it adds an hour or more to their travel.

Mr Campbell—Some staff would still be prepared to do that on certain terms and conditions. Others might find it too difficult. If it were out of the question for them to do it and they could not do it then the bank would be sympathetic to that.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—I certainly distinguish between existing staff who may be adversely affected and any prospective staff. Clearly, it is a totally different situation for those who seek to be employed with you in the future. It is not a concern, because they have full notice of the situation. For existing staff, where this has become a change—potentially a fundamental change for them—it would be good for you to have regard to that, particularly if you want to maintain quality staff.

At paragraph 101 of your submission you make reference to child-care facilities. It was pointed out to us that there is one centre, which I think we drove past. Mr Mayes, I think you said that a number of others were being constructed around the area. The submission states that the availability of child care is an advantage. At paragraph 101, it goes on to state:

The RBA has investigated the child care facilities currently available, and planned for, within or close to Norwest. Places at reasonable cost are currently readily available. In due course, the RBA will provide staff selected for duties at Norwest with the location of child care facilities and available options

Have you explored this to such an extent that you know that places are available for children of your staff who are going to be working here?

Mr Campbell—That is correct. We have investigated that.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—Is it an arrangement that you have entered into with child-care facilities?

Mr Campbell—There are no arrangements at this stage.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—You are confident that there are places?

Mr Campbell—There are places. As a criterion for a suitable location for staff to work, we were concerned that there would be normal family support facilities, and we regard child care as being one of those. That was one of the attractions of coming to a location like this; it has those

supports. The bank does provide child-care support for staff at head office, which is something that we will look at here as well.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—Is that an agreement reached between the employees and the union or something that you have done as a policy thing, or both?

Mr Campbell—It is a policy. The bank has done it.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—That is very good.

Mr Campbell—In its initial stages, the number of spaces is rather limited but there is no excess demand.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—I will go now to the issue of workstations. Your proposal, as I understand it, is that permanent staff would have workstations with a meterage of 2.4 metres by 1.8 metres—a square meterage of 4.32—and, understandably, there would be smaller locations for emergency staff arrangements. In our other inquiries, we have found that workstations have been larger than that. They have been closer to seven, eight or nine square metres. I am just wondering where that size came from. Is that a net increase or a net reduction on your current workstation arrangements?

Mr Mayes—The size of the workstations for the full-time staff, or the permanent staff, who will be located at the business resumption site is the same size as the workstations that we have at our head office buildings. The dimensions which were shown in the evidence are the net dimensions of the L-shaped workstation itself. Clearly, there is the ancillary area associated with the workstation.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—Is it open plan?

Mr Mayes—Yes, it is open plan.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—That is always harder to quantify.

Mr Mayes—As illustrated on the first and second floor plans, the amount of overall space per employee in a full-time area is consistent with the full-time areas that we have in our head office building. We have been at pains to ensure that there is that consistency. The working environment, the size of the workstations and the other related items of equipment and furnishings would be the same as what would exist elsewhere. As you mentioned, the workstations or the work points for the emergency requirements are smaller; but, again, we believe from our benchmarking with other organisations that they are very consistent with other emergency back-up type facilities.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—Are you able to estimate the extent to which you would use the emergency sites, or is that an unforeseeable possibility? By studying the history of your operations, can you anticipate the likelihood of the use of these workstations, or is that something that is clearly unforeseeable?

Mr Campbell—Given the incidence of evacuation of head office in the past, it would be rare. The question is whether the risk of not having the site is worth taking. We see the downside as being considerable. We have evacuated the building on one occasion in recent years—fortunately, it was out of hours. Our overseas offices has been evacuated. Our office in New York is at 1 Liberty Plaza, adjacent to the World Trade Center. After September 11 that office was unavailable for three months, so we are not unfamiliar with emergencies of this kind. But this facility is most likely to be used as we develop our program of testing. We do not see this as just building a facility which will be there and which we can use in the event of an emergency when head office is inaccessible. We will be rehearsing for an emergency and we would expect over time that those tests would become a bit more adventurous and a bit more demanding of the facility. As that process continues, we would be using the facility in emergency mode from time to time.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR—I can certainly see the need for it even if it is never to be used—as, I am sure, other committee members can. Is there a purpose for that area when it is not in use or is that an operational difficulty?

Mr Mayes—It is only for testing.

Mr Campbell—It is only for testing.

Mr WAKELIN—I have a quick question on electricity supply. I take it that the plan is for reliance on the existing grid?

Mr Mayes—In respect of the grid, we are proposing to receive power supplies from two independent sources from two separate zone substations. When we were out at the site, I think our architect indicated that, across the way from us, a new zone substation, the Bella Vista zone substation, will be built. That should be operational by the time our building is complete. That will be one source of supply. In fact, there is an existing source of supply that comes from another part of the park, from another zone substation. In respect of the normal power supply to the facility, the plan is to have two high-voltage supplies into the site which will come to two separate substations within the building, which will go in turn to two separate switchboards, which will in turn be backed up by two separate generators, each of which has the capacity to carry the full load of the building. There will be UPS also able to have that extra resilience. So, in a sense, you will have dual pathways all the way through to the data-centre itself.

Mr WAKELIN—That is fine. It was just the backup generator in the critical area that I needed to know about. What is the Bella Vista farm and why is it considered to be a place of heritage significance?

Mr Mayes—Bella Vista farm was the site of the property that was owned by Elizabeth Macarthur who, as we understand, was responsible for developing the very first merino flock in Australia, which, of course, became the basis of our early agricultural economy. Fortunately for us, that site has survived to this day, possibly because it formed part of a larger site that had been purchased by Norbrick many years ago. Those are its origins. We understand that it is listed on the Register of the National Estate and, because of that, there are certain protections that apply to it.

Mr WAKELIN—Forgive me, Mr Mayes, I am a former sheep farmer. My final point is—and we discussed it earlier—the issue of GST and the questions on notice I am sure you are aware of.

CHAIR—I wanted to go to some questions on the environment. I think committee members would join me in thanking you for an excellent submission. It is clearly a very thorough one and it certainly helps us to conduct our inquiry speedily and efficiently. I notice that you have undertaken discussions with the Australian Greenhouse Office—and in fact the Australian Greenhouse Office made the comment that it was a very positive consultation despite, I think they said, the overriding requirements for a complex and mission critical function. So we congratulate you for that because, as you know, the government has a strong commitment to decreasing the amount of greenhouse gas and to increasing energy conservation in all government buildings—and other buildings really but with a particular emphasis on government buildings. Mr Campbell, I think you said in your opening statement that this building will be built to a 4.5 star energy rating. During our site inspection Mr Valla gave us a very good overview of some of the energy savings built in and other design features. For the record, could Mr Valla give us a brief outline of the considerations that he has taken into account as he has proceeded with the design of what looks like a very handsome building that I am sure will add to this whole estate?

Mr Campbell—Thank you. I am sure that Mr Valla will be very pleased to respond.

Mr Valla—As you noted on site, we have built several considerations within the overall design. I will start at the overall site design, the landscaping design. Utilising the large setbacks which we have got for security, we have also considered the amount of hard paved area which we have around the building for parking. We have minimised the hard paved areas to what we feel is essential for day-to-day operations and then we have structured the overflow parking for emergency use as soft paved landscaped area. We have done that for a number of reasons. Firstly, it obviously gives a better presentation both externally and within the site.

Secondly, and more importantly, it does offer us the opportunity to reduce water runoff from the site and maximise water absorption. We have added an inground water storage tank and we will be collecting water off the roofs and channelling it into that tank for irrigation purposes. We have also selected low water use and low-maintenance landscaping because we do not want to overuse water, particularly in the current environment. We find that a lot of these aspects also have a strong nexus to the requirement for the building to be resilient and to be able to continue without services if need be. So there is a strong nexus between saving energy and satisfying that brief need.

In terms of the building's external fabric, we have adopted large roof overhangs and external sun louvre treatments to enable us to let light in to create good internal work environments but also control that light. We do not want unwanted sunlight or glare which causes high internal heat loads but also an uncomfortable work environment for occupants. We structured a series of roof overhangs and parapet walls which provide useful solar screening as well as security screening, so they form dual purposes.

In terms of the services design, the building will be highly monitored. We will be monitoring the energy use of various components of the building. The service engineers have been briefed to provide energy efficient systems where possible. Obviously we have a requirement for large

backup. The data centre component in particular does store a lot of power. But in the office area components we have treated with best practice engineering techniques to minimise energy consumption whilst maintaining good internal work environments. Other things that are not apparent within the drawings are the roof slabs that we have put underneath the roof coverings. Obviously that creates very good thermal insulation, as well as protection from potential incidents and the environment. That covers the main aspects.

CHAIR—The committee recently did an inquiry into the new fit-out of the Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources in Canberra, which was a purpose-built building by a private developer but to be leased by the department. We were very pleased to see that they were harvesting water from the roof and had an underground tank. The other feature they included in that building was chemical, I think, flushing urinals which save a huge volume of water. Is that a feature?

Mr Valla—We are investigating that at the moment. That is an area that is a higher maintenance item than a normal urinal. Because of the nature of the building, it is a low water use building in that regard. The static population is only 55 but it will expand. Our concern is whether in the event of an emergency, should we need a chemical supply to those urinals, it becomes a disruption or a problem to the operations. But we are certainly investigating that and, if it is found that it is not, it is an area where we would look at implementing that. Should that not be the case, we would be using some of the stored water for grey water use so we would not be drawing off the main system.

CHAIR—I think we were surprised, in the evidence taken, at the amount of water saved—and apparently it has one of the highest water usages in a building. I am not sure how it comes out in terms of cost benefits. I think we did get an analysis of that. I cannot remember the result of that particular aspect. It took a long time to get a benefit from the underground tank.

Mr Valla—Unfortunately, water charges are such that currently it is difficult to draw payback comparisons. But we are talking about a long-term project here. Those charges will change in the future, and that equation will change as well.

CHAIR—And the way we are going—certainly in the east here—with critical water shortage, it is very likely that this is going to drive up the cost of water. The length of time before you get a return for the output is probably going to reduce quite considerably in the near future.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—Paragraph 99 of the main submission states that the proposed new BRS will be designed to meet the accessibility requirements of the Building Code of Australia and referenced Australian standards. I know there is quite a detailed explanation concerning provision for people with disabilities. In your view—and you can take this on notice if you do not readily have the answer—would the works comply with the statutory requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992? Secondly, are you happy or confident that sufficient provision will be made for the safe evacuation of disabled persons from the upper floor of the building in the event of fire or other possible emergencies?

Mr Valla—Yes, we have a specialist access consultant as part of the team who is advising us on access issues. So, yes, we will be providing not only for the BCA requirements but also for the DDA requirements. In terms of the evacuation procedures, we will be looking at safe havens,

fire stair access and things like that. We have two lifts but obviously they cannot be used in an emergency, so we need to be cognisant of that.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR—I have just remembered the television program *The Office*. You would not want to have that happen.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for your help on the site inspection this morning and for the very good submission to the committee. I thank everyone who has been involved.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr O'Connor**):

That, pursuant to the power conferred by section 2(2) of the Parliamentary Papers Act 1908, this committee authorises publication of the evidence given before it and submissions presented at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 12.20 pm