

Introduction

Referral of Work

- 1.1 On 2 June 2005 the proposal to replace the Bureau of Meteorology office on Willis Island, Coral Sea, Queensland, 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 Bureau of Meteorology (the Bureau).
- 1.2 The Hon Dr Sharman Stone MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration, advised the House that the estimated cost of the proposed work was \$8.62 million. She reported that, subject to parliamentary approval, work would commence as soon as possible with a view to completing construction by the end of 2005.

1 Extract from the *Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives*, No. 37, Thursday 2 June 2005

Background

The Bureau of Meteorology

- 1.3 The Bureau is responsible for ensuring that
- “Australia benefits from meteorological and related science and services”.²
- 1.4 The Willis Island meteorological office supports the Bureau’s national operations and severe weather warning services for the north Queensland coast by providing observation data and early warning monitoring of cyclones. The value of the Bureau’s presence at Willis Island lies in its unique maritime location, its long climatological history and its front-line warning capability for tropical cyclones approaching north-east Queensland.³

Location

- 1.5 The Bureau’s meteorological office is located on Willis Island, a 7.7 hectare parcel of land located 240 nautical miles (approximately 450 kilometres) east of Cairns, in the Coral Sea off the coast of Queensland. The island is controlled by the Commonwealth of Australia and occupied solely by the Bureau for meteorological purposes under the *Coral Sea Islands Act 1969*.⁴

Existing facilities

- 1.6 Willis Island accommodates eight buildings of varying structure, including a main building that houses living, recreation and office areas; storage structures; laundry facilities; power generation facilities; and water pumps.⁵

2 Appendix C, Submission No. 1 from the Bureau of Meteorology, paragraph 15

3 *ibid*, paragraphs 1 and 3

4 *ibid*, paragraphs 1, 6 and 40

5 *ibid*, paragraph 6

Inquiry Process

- 1.7 The Committee is required by the Act to consider public works over \$6 million⁶ and report to Parliament on:
- the purpose of the work and its suitability for that purpose;
 - 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.⁷
- 1.8 The Committee called for submissions by advertising the inquiry in *The Australian* on Wednesday 13 July 2005. 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.

Inspections and Public Hearing

- 1.9 A public hearing into the proposed works was held at Parliament House, Canberra, on 12 August 2005.⁸

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

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

8 See Appendix D for the official Hansard transcript of the evidence taken by the Committee at the public hearing on Friday, 12 August 2005 in Canberra

