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THE PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

*Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works*

## REPORT

relating to the proposed construction of a

# COMMONWEALTH OFFICE BLOCK

at

Alice Springs  
Northern Territory

(THIRTY-FOURTH REPORT OF 1972)

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PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

COMMONWEALTH OFFICE BLOCK  
ALICE SPRINGS, NORTHERN TERRITORY

R E P O R T

By resolution on 31 August 1972, the House of Representatives referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for investigation and report to the Parliament, the proposal for construction of an office block at Alice Springs, Northern Territory.

The Committee have the honour to report as follows:

THE REFERENCE

1. The proposal referred to the Committee involves the construction of a three-storey office block providing 30,000 square feet of general purpose office space, and a basement area for plant, a registry filing system, communications, and stores and technical equipment.
2. The proposal is the first stage of a Commonwealth facilities complex in Alice Springs which eventually will include a Supreme Court, a communications building and a new post office. A police station was recently constructed in the area and this, and the future buildings, will be grouped around a landscaped pedestrian plaza adjoining the proposed office block.
3. The work in this reference is estimated to cost \$1,250,000.

THE COMMITTEE'S INVESTIGATION

4. The Committee received written submissions and drawings from the Departments of the Interior and Works and took evidence from their representatives at a public hearing in Canberra. Written submissions were also received from Mr. B.F. Kilgariff, M.L.C., Member for Alice Springs in the Legislative Council for the Northern Territory and from the Water Resources Branch, Northern Territory Administration.

5. The Committee inspected the existing Commonwealth office accommodation in Alice Springs, and the site for the proposed development.

ALICE SPRINGS

6. Alice Springs is the urban focus of Central Australia and has developed into a busy modern town, being the regional centre for medical, education, government, social and business purposes. It has grown quickly since World War II, especially in the last decade. Factors particularly contributing to this growth are tourism, the transport, cattle and building industries, and the establishment of the Joint Space Research Facility near the town.

7. The population grew from 6,390 in 1966 to 11,118 in 1971 at an average annual increase of over 11 per cent. However, that period saw the construction of the Space Research Facility and associated housing which boosted the figure in a manner unlikely to be repeated. Nevertheless, for planning purposes, a growth rate of 8 to 10 per cent has been adopted by the Government and in the light of the major Government and private building projects recently completed, about to commence or planned, continuing growth at this level at least, seems assured.

THE NEED

8. Existing Office Accommodation Commonwealth departments in Alice Springs are housed in both leased and Commonwealth-owned accommodation.

9. Four departments occupy leased premises totalling 22,775 square feet of usable space, but although the accommodation is relatively modern, the premises have some undesirable features. For example, one of the offices is a converted shop and therefore not entirely suitable for office use, and others have no off-street parking facilities for Government or private vehicles.

10. The Commonwealth-owned accommodation, totalling 23,700 square feet of usable space, is mainly substandard. Generally, the buildings are old, and because of their poor condition, allow dust and rain entry causing staff discomfort and reduced efficiency. The climatic extremes at Alice Springs add to the problem as the poor insulation of the buildings make it virtually impossible to achieve comfortable working conditions. Staff amenities are primitive. Wash basins are not provided in some areas, toilet arrangements are unsatisfactory, there are no rest rooms and lunch room facilities are inadequate.

11. The offices are generally overcrowded. In addition, individual departments are dispersed throughout the town and inherent in this situation are inescapable administrative and operational costs, inefficiencies and inconvenience to the public.

12. Future Requirements A recent survey by the Northern Territory Interdepartmental Advisory Committee on Office Accommodation showed a clear requirement for a building programme which will overcome the present accommodation deficiencies and also keep pace with the expansion of Commonwealth activities in Alice Springs.

13. At present 223 persons requiring office space are employed by the Commonwealth in Alice Springs and this figure is expected to grow to 238 in 1973 and to 280 by 1975.

14. The Committee were told that privately-owned accommodation suitable for large scale office use is not presently available in Alice Springs and that in the short term construction of space for leasing is unlikely. In any event, the construction of Commonwealth-owned accommodation of the size proposed would result in an annual saving of \$11,500 under existing lease arrangements.

15. Committee's Conclusion The Committee concluded that due to the generally substandard and overcrowded office accommodation occupied by the Commonwealth in Alice Springs and the unavailability of satisfactory alternative space, there is a need for the work in this reference.

#### THE SITE

16. The site is bounded by Parsons and Bath Streets, on the north-east by a Catholic school, and on the south-east by temporary office buildings. It is Crown land and is allocated on the Alice Springs Town Plan for Commonwealth development. The site is mostly vacant except for an old house and offices which will be demolished on completion of the proposed building. The land is almost flat and no foundation problems are expected.

17. The site is conveniently located to the town's commercial area and within the town centre. The Committee consider that the site selected is suitable.

18. Ultimate Development Sites fronting Parsons Street between Bath and Hartley Streets are planned for progressive development as a Commonwealth facilities complex which will eventually consist of two office blocks and a Supreme Court. A communications building and a post office will be nearby in Hartley Street. A police station was recently constructed in Parsons Street opposite the site for the offices now proposed.

19. The second office block will be linked to the first by a landscaped pedestrian plaza and the Supreme Court will be next to the police station. The communications building will be sited on the north-east corner of Hartley and Parsons Streets and the post office, near the south-east corner.

#### THE PROPOSAL

20. Design The proposed building will have three storeys above ground, each providing 10,000 square feet of general purpose office space, and a basement. Off-street parking facilities will be provided for official, visitor and staff vehicles.

21. The basement will accommodate air conditioning plant, an electrical substation and main switch room and a plant room for central water chiller and boiler plant to serve both the proposed building and the planned Supreme Court building. In addition, it will accommodate a central registry, plan printing, telex, PABX, staff amenities and a stores and technical equipment area. Provision will also be made for a vehicle service entry.

22. The main walls of the building will face north-west and south-east to effectively control sun penetration and reduce glare and heat load.

23. Access to the main entrance has been designed to form part of a future pedestrian plaza and will be landscaped. Where possible the existing trees will be retained. A decorative pool bridged by a ramp will permit access for handicapped persons.

24. Structure The building will have reinforced concrete slab floors supported internally on reinforced concrete columns and load bearing walls surrounding the service core. External perimeter walls will be load bearing concrete masonry blocks, concrete filled and reinforced as required. Walls will be supported on reinforced concrete strip footings and pad footings will be provided under columns. The roof will be framed with steel beams supporting steel purlins and covered with an insulated galvanised steel deck.

25. Finishes Sun screens will be moulded asbestos cement units faced with white aggregate chips. Matching chips on flat asbestos cement panels will form the fascias.

26. Internally, walls will be off-form concrete, face block work or hard plaster finished with paint except for some areas of the main entrance foyer which will be timber panelled. Offices will have acoustic tile ceilings. Floors generally will be covered with vinyl tiles except for the tea preparation and toilet areas, and the main entrance foyer which will have ceramic tiles.

27. Engineering Services Mechanical services include air conditioning of occupied areas, mechanical ventilation, domestic hot water supply, refrigerated drinking water units, tea preparation equipment and sanitary incinerators.



28. Electricity will be supplied through the basement substation by underground cable. Lighting will generally be fluorescent. Provision will be made for a PABX installation, and telephone and general purpose power outlets. A master clock system will be installed and external area lighting will be provided to car parks and the plaza area.

29. Sealed parking areas with kerbs and gutters will be provided for 146 vehicles and paths, steps and paved plaza areas will be constructed. The remaining site areas will be grassed.

30. Water and sewerage services will be connected to the town mains and a lawn watering system will be installed.

31. A thermal fire alarm system will be installed and hose reels, portable fire extinguishers, and fire hydrants will be located as necessary.

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

ESTIMATE OF COST

33. The estimated cost of the work when referred to the Committee was \$1,250,000 made up as follows:

	\$
Building works	724,000
Electrical services	133,000
Mechanical services	274,000
Hydraulic services	40,000
Civil works	79,000
	1,250,000

PROGRAMME

34. It is expected that after an approval to proceed is given, the preparation of final drawings and tender documents will be completed by September 1973. Construction time for the work is estimated at 21 months after a contract is let.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

35. 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. THERE IS A NEED FOR THE WORK IN THIS REFERENCE.	15
2. THE SITE SELECTED IS SUITABLE.	17
3. THE COMMITTEE RECOMMEND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE WORK IN THIS REFERENCE.	32
4. THE ESTIMATED COST OF THE WORK WHEN REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE WAS \$1,250,000.	33

  
(G.R. KELLY)  
Chairman

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

19 October, 1972.