

Issues and Conclusions

Prototype Apartment

- 3.1 In its main submission, DFAT outlined its intention to refurbish a single apartment prior to the commencement of the major works, to serve as a quality model for the remaining 28 apartments in respect of:
- specification;
 - documentation;
 - construction methodology;
 - materials and finishes; and
 - residents' acceptance.¹
- 3.2 At the public hearing, DFAT reported that the prototype apartment had provided a sound basis for costings and had not produced any results that would alter the original budget estimate.
- 3.3 DFAT stated further that the prototype had received the approval of residents and was currently occupied by embassy staff.²

1 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 6.3

2 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, p. 2

Building Codes and Standards

- 3.4 It is DFAT's intention that the proposed works will refurbish the embassy apartments to a modern standard and ensure compliance with current building codes and OH&S legislation.³

Compatibility of Australian and French Standards

- 3.5 It is DFAT's intention that, as far as practicable, the refurbishment will be executed in compliance with the requirements of both the French Building Regulations and the BCA.⁴
- 3.6 When questioned by the Committee as to how the two codes compare, DFAT responded that the codes differ little and are of a comparably high standard.⁵

Constraints upon Achieving Compliance

- 3.7 In its main submission, DFAT acknowledged that, while every effort will be made to comply with all relevant statutory requirements,
- “...some constraints may apply due to the age and architectural status of the building.”⁶
- 3.8 At the public hearing, the Committee asked DFAT to elaborate on the nature of potential constraints. DFAT explained that, due to their split-level design, the apartments do not conform to the requirements of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*. It is envisaged that facilities for disabled residents, such as travelators, could be installed in the apartments as required.⁷

Energy Targets

- 3.9 A submission received from the Australian Greenhouse Office stated that:

3 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 1.1

4 ib id, paragraph 16.1

5 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, p. 4

6 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 16.2

7 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, p. 5

“Section 4.4 of the Commonwealth Energy Policy requires that Commonwealth housing shall achieve a 4-star or better rating using the Nationwide Housing Energy Rating Scheme (NatHERS)”;

and further, that:

“Section 4.5 requires that departments and agencies purchase equipment and appliances labelled as 4-star or better...”⁸

- 3.10 The Committee wished to know if the refurbished apartments would comply with these policy provisions.
- 3.11 DFAT replied that the Parisian post was conscious of energy consumption and that the complex had been designed and constructed in such a way as to provide good thermal insulation. It is proposed that increased energy efficiency will be provided by the installation of low-energy light fittings throughout the apartments and secondary glazing to minimise loss of heat. This latter measure will have the added benefit of reducing noise impacts.
- 3.12 In terms of appliances, DFAT intends to replace all built-in white goods with the latest models available on the French market.⁹

Security Measures

- 3.13 The Committee observed that, with the exception of new lock hardware¹⁰, the DFAT submission made no reference to improved security measures for the apartment complex.
- 3.14 DFAT explained that no security component was included in the current works proposal, but that security arrangements for all overseas posts were currently under review. DFAT assured the Committee that current arrangements at the embassy complex in Paris, which include 24-hour guard services and controlled lifts to the apartments, are deemed sufficient for the prevailing threat environment.

8 Submission No. 3

9 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, p. 5

10 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 24.3

Fire Safety Measures

- 3.15 DFAT's submission stated that, under the proposed refurbishment, the centrally monitored smoke detection and fire alarm system operating in the common areas of the embassy residential building will be extended into each apartment.
- 3.16 At the public hearing, DFAT explained that each apartment was currently fitted with a battery-operated smoke detector, which would be replaced by a hard-wired unit connected to the main board on the ground floor.
- 3.17 DFAT added that there are processes in place at the complex for the evacuation of staff and residents in the event of emergency.¹¹

Preservation of Architectural Integrity

- 3.18 Given that the Australian Embassy Complex in Paris is considered to be a building of architectural significance, the Committee was interested to know what impact the proposed refurbishment may have on the architectural integrity of the property.
- 3.19 DFAT responded that the proposed refurbishment works will have no impact upon the exterior of the building, and that the interior works have been designed to maintain the original style of the apartments, through the preservation of the original configurations and colour schemes.
- 3.20 The Committee asked if the original architects of the building retained any moral rights over the design and whether they had been consulted on the refurbishment design.
- 3.21 DFAT confirmed that Mr Seidler does retain moral rights over the building design, but that he had not been consulted on the present proposal as it was simply an internal renovation. DFAT added that Mr Seidler would be consulted if any alteration was required to the building exterior.¹²

11 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, p. 6

12 ib id, p.7

Costs

Revenue Derived from Project

- 3.22 The Committee noted that, although DFAT's submission stated:
- “no revenue will be derived from the project”¹³,
- it also listed as a factor contributing to the need for the work,
- “protection of the Commonwealth's investment and associated rental income”.¹⁴
- 3.23 At the public hearing, the Committee requested that DFAT clarify whether any revenue would be derived from the project through the leasing of the apartments.
- 3.24 DFAT attested that no additional revenue would be derived from the project. DFAT explained that, while the apartments were leased to individual agencies on a commercial basis, the resulting revenue was spent on administration and maintenance of the property. An annual dividend is also paid to the Department of Finance.

Rental Rates

- 3.25 Further to its query regarding the revenue derived from the project, the Committee inquired as to the amount of rent charged on the apartments.
- 3.26 DFAT stated that rental was charged at the Paris market rate and may be expected to increase accordingly. In this context, DFAT added that the planned refurbishment works were necessary to enable them to attract tenants and
- “...to keep the rents current with the market.”¹⁵

13 Appendix C, Submission No. 1, paragraph 10.1

14 *ib id*, paragraph 3.3

15 Appendix D, Official Transcript of Evidence, p. 4

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the proposed refurbishment of staff apartments at the Australian Embassy Complex in Paris, France proceed at an estimated cost of \$9.5 million.

Hon Judi Moylan MP

Chair

17 September 2003