

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
AUSTRALIAN SECURITY INTELLIGENCE ORGANISATION

Question No. 95

Senator Barnett asked the following question at the hearing on 19 October 2009:

In relation to new ASIO headquarters to be built over the next three years at a cost of \$589 million;

- a) why was the public only given 10 days to comment on the plans,
- b) did the National Capital Authority treat the approval of this building any differently than to any other building approval,
- c) can an explanation be provided as to why the building will be so much larger than ASIO's current facility,
- d) could the large size of the new building contribute to ASIO's profile becoming more public,
- e) are there plans for the new building to be open to the public? Please provide details, and
- f) please provide a report on ASIO's building plan, timelines and related matters.

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

- a) Public comment was sought on the development in April 2009 as part of the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts' (DEWHA) *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) Referral process. The EPBC Act provides a public comment period of ten business days (with no extensions).

As the site location is in a 'Designated Area', as defined in the National Capital Plan, the National Capital Authority (NCA) is responsible for assessing compliance and granting approval of the site development. The NCA is required to ensure the development is compliant with the National Capital Plan. Although this process does not involve public consultation, the National Capital Plan and amendments to the Plan such as 'Amendment 60 - Constitution Avenue' were the subject of lengthy periods of public consultation and parliamentary consideration prior to their enactment.

- b) The process followed by the NCA in providing its approval for this building is no different to any other building that falls within the NCA's responsibility.
- c) In October 2005, the *Review of ASIO Resourcing* recommended increasing ASIO staffing to 1,860. In August 2006, the previous Government announced ASIO would move to a purpose-built building at Section 49, Parkes ACT, to accommodate the staff increases recommended by the review. ASIO expects to occupy the new central office for the long term - it is a special purpose, high security building designed to meet ASIO's specific needs.
- d) No. ASIO's current headquarters is a declared site with signage indicating it is the ASIO building. The new building will also be publicly declared.

- e) No. The ASIO headquarters is a high security building. Access requirements are stipulated in the Australian Government's Protective Security Manual. Access will be limited to ASIO staff and officially authorised visitors.
- f) The project Steering Committee performs the major reporting mechanism for the project. The New Building Project Steering Committee is co-chaired by Finance and ASIO at First Assistant Secretary and First Assistant Director-General level respectively.

Current project update:

The appointment of the main consultants and contractors and planning for the building was completed in November 2008.

The NCA has agreed to a staged works approval process that will progress through the design and construction process. To date the project has received works approvals for *Site Establishment Works* and *Site Works*. The next works approval will be for *Building Works*.

The building is currently being designed and the base building is 85% complete. Works started on site in April 2009 and are currently focussed on the excavation of the site and installing the site services.

The main building works are scheduled for completion in mid 2012 with commissioning works to be undertaken prior to occupation in late 2012.

The project is currently progressing on schedule and to budget.