



1974

PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

**PARLIAMENTARY STANDING
COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

GENERAL REPORT FOR YEAR 1973-74

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PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

GENERAL REPORT FOR YEAR 1973-74

The Committee was appointed under the provisions of section 2 of the Public Accounts Committee Act 1970.

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Mr *Bisdee*
Mr *Gregory*
Mr *McKay*

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

Mr *Mather* (Chairman)
Mr *Baldock*
Mr *Corby* to 5 August 1974
Mr *Batt* (Wilmot) from 27 August
1974

These members were appointed at the opening of the First Session of the Thirty-sixth Parliament on 7 June 1972, with the exception of Mr Baldock who was appointed on 17 October 1972, in place of Mr Lohrey, and Mr Batt (Wilmot), who was appointed on 27 August 1974 in place of Mr Corby.

The functions of the Committee are set out in section 6—

(1) It is the function of the Committee to examine—

(a) the accounts showing the appropriation of the sums granted by Parliament to meet the public expenditure; and

(b) such other accounts laid before Parliament as the Committee may think fit; and to report to both Houses of Parliament, with such comment as it thinks fit, on any matter arising in connection with those accounts or in connection with the receipt or disbursement of the moneys to which they relate to which it is of opinion the attention of Parliament should be drawn.

(2) Where either House of Parliament refers to the Committee for examination any matter arising in connection with the accounts referred to in paragraph (2) of subsection (1) of this section, or any other accounts laid before Parliament, or in connection with the receipt or disbursement of the moneys to which any of those accounts relate, the Committee shall, as soon as practicable, carry out that examination, and report thereon to both Houses of Parliament, with such comment as it thinks fit.

During the year a report was presented on the Bell Bay Rail Link and Associated Works (Paper No. 79 of 1973). The General Report for 1972-73 (Paper No. 77 of 1973) dealt with a number of matters including progress on mechanical services at the Department of Agriculture Laboratories, New Town. A further report on this matter appears below.

Observers from the Audit and Treasury Departments have attended by invitation during the taking of evidence. Their assistance, and also that of the two Departments, is gratefully acknowledged.

The Committee conducted enquiries on a number of matters arising from comments made by the Auditor-General in his 1973 Report. These are set out in a separate report (Paper No. 28 of 1974).

Department of Agriculture: New Town Reserch Laboratories

As mentioned above, the mechanical services for this building, occupied in 1970, were the subject of a progress report by the Committee in 1973, having been first raised the preceding year. (Paper No. 60 of 1972).

The latter report found that the cool rooms were still not in working order. Because of the necessity for this facility to be available for use in fruit research, the Committee subsequently directed further enquiries to the Agriculture and Public Works Departments. Two cool rooms were loaded with fruit and the operation of the plant scrutinized during the period 1 October to 21 November 1973. At the expense of maintenance attention to an extent impracticable for normal duty, the cool rooms were maintained at the environmental status specified by the Department of Agriculture.

The Committee were later told that further works were considered necessary by the Public Works Department to bring the cool rooms into satisfactory operation. In April 1974, the Director of Agriculture advised that \$19 000 had been allocated for this purpose and that 'at this stage it would appear that it could be several months before the cool rooms and plant room are operating successfully'.

Vacant Housing Department Homes

Being aware of complaints made from time to time that some Housing Department homes remain unoccupied for long periods between vacation by one tenant and re-occupation by the next, the Committee sought information on the matter from the Department. The statement provided is reproduced in full for the information of Members:

The major portion of the time elapsed occurs while the dwelling is undergoing maintenance and upgrading.

The following statistical information has been collated on vacated rental homes for the period 1 July 1973 to 31 March 1974.

<i>Days Unoccupied</i>	<i>Number of Homes</i>
1- 4	25
5- 7	13
8-14	78
15-20	31
21-25	16
26-30	4
31-35	4
36-39	2

In addition to these times, it normally takes an average of two days to notify and allocate the home to the new Tenant.

Vacated homes are inspected and upgraded during the vacation period. This work includes redecoration, sanding of floors (if required) replacement of stove and washing machine (if required), upgrading all electrical wiring, plumbing, and any other maintenance work that is required to restore the dwelling, as close as possible, to an 'as new' condition.

The amount of time required to upgrade a dwelling to the Department's and local Council standards depends greatly on the condition in which the dwelling is left by the previous Tenant.

Fluctuations in the numbers of vacations do cause excessive demands on labour and materials. In some instances, where homes are abandoned, there is no prior advice of intention to vacate. This makes it impossible for forward planning of vacation maintenance. The result is that there is a longer than normal time lapse before the home is ready for re-occupation.

The insistence by local Councils to inspect dwellings prior to re-occupation can also cause delays of 2 to 3 days.

The Committee regard the situation revealed by these statistics as wholly satisfactory.

However the statement dealt only with homes directly controlled by the Housing Department. The Department also allocates some homes, built with separate financial resources, to industry, government authorities or the armed services. These are let to the authorities on a master tenancy basis. Provided the master tenant in these cases pays the rent, the Housing Department has no power to intervene when the house remains vacant for excessive periods. The Director of Housing, in evidence was asked about one such home at Waverley: 'Wouldn't you agree that leaving this house vacant for so long, when there is a real need for this type of housing in the community, might do considerable damage to the image of the Housing Department?'

The Director replied that—

I think if people are aware that a house is vacant anywhere they would tend to blame the Department anyway, whether it is a departmental home or not. In fact the home we are speaking of is a Service home and we did get in touch with the Department of Services and Property on several occasions in relation to this particular dwelling. We were very concerned about it, but we were told to 'go jump in the lake', that they were complying with the terms and conditions of the master tenancy agreement and there was nothing further we could do about it. I think the period it was vacant was about 15 months. This house was eventually returned to the Department in a pretty neglected state, particularly externally and the grounds needed a lot of work done to them. This sort of thing certainly does not do us any good at all.

I think it is true to say that this sort of extreme situation occurs only rarely. This is in fact the only case I have heard of in the 6½ years I have been here, that has been unoccupied for that length of time.

In some other cases the Department acts as a constructing agent with funds being provided by the authority. Homes allocated to authorities either on an ownership or a rental basis may be located in Housing Department estates. The Committee acknowledge that it is desirable that homes be provided in this way. However it may not be necessary to allocate particular houses permanently. Consideration should be given to the possibility of replacing master tenancy or construction on an authority's behalf with a system of making agreed numbers of houses in various areas available to employees of authorities on a first priority basis. In this way, all homes constructed by the Housing Department would be controlled by the Department and could be re-let in the order in which they are ready for re-occupation.

Ministerial Party Room,
Parliament House, Hobart,
10 September 1974.

R. MATHER, Chairman.