2008 (No.)

PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

Parliament House Works

Presented to His Excellency the Governor pursuant to the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1914.

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Legislative Council	House of Assembly
Mr *Harriss* (Chairman)	Mr *Best*
Mr *Hall*	Mrs *Napier*
	Mr *Sturges*

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INTRODUCTION

To His Excellency the Honourable William John Ellis Cox, Companion of the Order of Australia, Reserve Forces Decoration, Efficiency Decoration, Governor in and over the State of Tasmania and its Dependencies in the Commonwealth of Australia.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY

The Committee has investigated the following proposal: -

Parliament House Works

and now has the honour to present the Report to Your Excellency in accordance with the *Public Works Committee Act 1914*.

BACKGROUND

A Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP) was developed for Parliament House in 2000 following an intensive planning process; this work included:

- a detailed assessment of the functional requirements of the Legislative Council, the House of Assembly and the joint support services
- condition surveys of the building fabric and building engineering services
- a conservation assessment and a disability access survey.

The upgrading and restoration of the House of Assembly Chamber is one of the packages of works identified in the Parliament House SAMP and the work is being guided by a Conservation Management Plan and a Disability Action Plan. Several works packages involving conservation and restoration, access improvements and engineering services upgrading have already been completed, mostly in the historic core of Parliament House.

The Television Broadcast System is intended to provide comprehensive television access to the proceedings of the Parliament of Tasmania and replace the ad hoc television and still camera usage in the Legislative Council and House of Assembly Chambers, and in the Committee Rooms and the Reception Room.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Functional Objectives for the House of Assembly Chamber Work

The functional objectives are to:

- Provide a working environment for Members, Table Officers and support staff of the House of Assembly that is consistent with occupational health and safety and other statutory provisions, including ergonomic seating, improved ‘workstation’ provisions, and improved circulation.

- Upgrade the Public Gallery and Press Gallery areas to improve safety, security and functionality.
- Provide access for people with disabilities to the Chamber and associated spaces, the Public Gallery and the Press Gallery.

Conservation Objectives for the House of Assembly Chamber Work

The conservation objectives for the House of Assembly Chamber work are to:

- Retain and interpret the layers of history in the Chamber and related spaces.
- Retrieve and retain the Chamber's important 1930s architectural form and detail whilst continuing to allow efficient function as the House of Assembly.
- Ensure that the works are carried out in accordance with the CMP and to the approval of the Tasmanian Heritage Council and the Sullivan's Cove Waterfront Authority.

Functional Objectives for the Television Broadcast System

The proposed Television Broadcast System will:

- Provide improved public access to the proceedings of the Parliament of Tasmania.
- Reduce the occupational health, and safety and security risks currently existing in coverage from the public gallery.
- Provide a High Definition TV broadcast service system, remotely controlled through a Broadcast Standard control room.
- Provide a composite signal (audio and visual) streamed from both the House of Assembly and the Legislative Council Chambers to defined outlets within the Media Room.
- Provide an audio and visual signal streamed from both the House of Assembly and the Legislative Council Chambers to Hansard.
- Make a program composite available for live streaming TV over IP to Parliament House and other executive or nominated buildings on IP addresses as required to allow users to view the proceedings of Parliament on their computer.
- Provide the House of Assembly and the Legislative Council with dedicated cameras and the two nominated Committee Rooms, with portable cameras. All cameras will be interchangeable to allow for quick replacement and maintenance as required.

Procurement Objectives for the Project as a Whole

The works are to be carried out in a manner that:

- Causes minimal disruption to the work of the House of Assembly, the Legislative Council and the occupants of Parliament House.
- Restricts access to contractors to areas which are immediately associated with the works.

- Optimises the use of available funds.
- Ensures continuity of effort and an appropriate allocation of risk over the procurement timeframe.
- Ensures final completion of all the work in a timely manner.
- Upgrades particular elements of the backbone building engineering services in continuance of the long-term asset upgrade program, as necessary.

PROJECT SCOPE AND REQUIREMENTS

General

The general scope of work is detailed below.

The manner in which the work is ultimately packaged for supply and installation or construction purposes will depend upon the supply lead-times and program of work on-site which is yet to be finalised.

Conservation Works

In accordance with the Conservation Management Plan for Parliament House, the ceiling and walls of the Chamber are to be restored to the original design by Sidney Blythe, which included acoustic panels and a different facing to door height on the walls and skylights.

The floor and furnishings of the Chamber are to be reconfigured to reflect the original design, but will have to accommodate the functional requirements of the House of Assembly and contemporary standards for access by people with disabilities (see below).

The Speaker's dais and table at the House are to be replaced by the original *Art Deco* units.

The Public Galleries will be subject to minor repairs and repainting.

The Members' Lobby will be subject to minor improvements including enclosure of the water cooler and upgrade of the telephone kiosks.

The original seating in the Public Gallery will be resprung and reupholstered.

Works to Improve Functionality

The functionality of the work stations of the Members, Clerks and advisers on the floor of the Chamber is to be improved through better ergonomic design and engineering provisions to provide better seating, more space for documents and to support new technologies.

In the Press Gallery, access for people with disabilities is to be addressed, and the seating and work surfaces for members of the Hansard Service and the media are to be improved.

The seating for visitors in the Speaker's reserves are to be rearranged to allow for better access on the floor of the Chamber.

Disability Access

In accordance with the Parliament House Access Action Plan, the alterations to the Chamber include the provision of access for people with disabilities to all areas.

This will include seating to both the front and back benches for the Members, to the Clerks Table and to the Table of the House, to the Advisors seating, the Speaker, and to the Speaker's Reserve. In addition access to the Press Gallery will be addressed. Access is currently provided to the Public Gallery.

Building Engineering Services

All electronic and engineering services throughout the chamber and media centre are to be upgraded.

The backbone engineering services elsewhere in Parliament House will be upgraded to the extent necessary to support the above works and, if funds are sufficient, other longer-term upgrade works of the main building engineering services will be carried out under this Project.

Broadcast Television System

A scoping study of Parliament House has been undertaken by Winning Post Productions and their broadcast engineering consultants. This study provides a detailed plan for the installation of a Television Broadcast System (TBS) which is economical, has a low visual impact and provides high quality and, state of the art equipment.

This work study has included:

- a detailed assessment of the broadcast requirements of the Legislative Council, the House of Assembly, the Committee Rooms, the Long Room and the Reception Room;
- the location of the Control Room and it's ability to accommodate the necessary equipment and staff to operate the TBS;
- the provision of a composite video/audio output for the various media outlets located in the current Media Room; and
- The maintenance of the historical integrity of all aspects of Parliament House.

The proposed upgrading and restoration of the House of Assembly Chamber will provide the opportunity to carry out the required rewiring necessary for the installation of the broadcast equipment.

The Television Broadcast System will provide comprehensive television access to the proceedings of the Parliament of Tasmania and replace the ad hoc television and still camera usage in the Legislative Council and House of Assembly Chambers, Committee Rooms and the Reception Room.

THE DESIGN RESPONSE

The House of Assembly Chamber

Generally
The proposed chamber restoration works are confined within the boundary of the House of Assembly Chamber and the associated spaces of the Press and Public Galleries, and the Member's Lobby. Works to engineering services will extend beyond this boundary only as required to rationalise and upgrade services.

The design of the proposed works is focused on restoring the Sidney Blythe period fabric and design; the Art Deco style restored to the Chamber. Where required to fulfil functional requirements, new elements will be introduced within a design interpretation that is consistent with this design approach.

The Members' seating and 'workstation' arrangements are to be upgraded. The design is to take account of occupational health and safety requirements, function requirements and disability access issues.

Temporary construction access will be needed from the rear of the building, requiring the careful removal and subsequent replacement of an existing window of the rear Chamber corridor, and careful removal and subsequent reconstruction of a section of the Chamber wall.

Original Fabric
Investigation has shown that the original wall panels of Queensland Walnut Veneer, and the acoustic tile wall lining both previously located on the four walls of the Chamber was removed during 1970s works. Examples of the original timber wall lining remain in the Lobby and original acoustic tiles remain on the walls of the Public and Press Galleries.

All original doors remain, complete with the door architraves (some behind the new Blackwood panels).

The original timber skirting is still in place.

The original timber and brass railing exists on the balustrade wall of the Public Gallery.

The Public Gallery ceiling is original, complete with glazed skylight, and it has only been altered to accept modern mechanical duct grills. The original Press Gallery ceiling is believed to exist above the modern suspended tile ceiling. The original roof

structure and external glazed panels over the main Chamber exist, but the original ceiling appears to have been replaced.

The original fluted plaster corner wall details remain on the Chamber side of the Press and Public Galleries.

The original timber panel behind the Speaker, housing the Coat-of-Arms and Clock, is still in its original position.

Conservation Works
In accordance with the Conservation Management Plan for Parliament House, the ceiling and walls of the Chamber are to be restored to the original Blythe design, the ceiling of which included an Art Deco cornice and ceiling level skylights, and the wall treatment included acoustic tiling above door height with timber panelling to door height.

The floor and furnishing of the Chamber is to be reconfigured to reflect the Blythe design, but will accommodate the functional requirements of the House of Assembly and contemporary standards for access by people with disabilities (see below).

The original joinery including the Speaker's dais and Table of the House has been restored and included in the refurbished Chamber.

The Public and Press Galleries building fabrics will be restored to their original form with joinery to the Press Gallery modified to include modern facilities and the Public Gallery to be subject to minor repairs and restoration of the original seating.

The Members' Lobby will be subject to minor improvements including relocation of the water cooler and restoration of the telephone kiosks.

Broadcast Television System – proposed installation

Five broadcast quality cameras are to be installed in the House of Assembly Chamber, two on each side and one under the clock at the rear of the Chamber.

One mobile camera will service the Reception Room and Long Room.

Three cameras will be in the House of Assembly Committee Room 2.

It is proposed that the second floor of the old Media Room (1979 extension) will be refurbished as a control room and all cameras will be connected to it.

Provisions will be made to facilitate the installation of television cameras in other areas at a future date:

- Five cameras in the Legislative Council Chamber, two on each side and one under the clock at the rear of the Chamber;
- Three cameras will be placed in Committee Room 1.

Works to Improve Functionality

The Members' seating arrangements will be based on the installation of commercially produced ergonomic seating, which will provide a greater level of adjustability in height and movement forward and back from the desk as required and provide access to speaking devices and writing and computer work surfaces.

The ergonomic seats will be contained within the low joinery "walls" and be customised to include design features to link the appearance of the seats to the design of the restored Chamber.

The seating and work surfaces for Hansard Service staff and the media will be improved.

The seating for visitors in the Speaker's reserves is to be rearranged to allow better access from the floor of the Chamber. The wall between the Speaker's Reserve and the floor of the House is to be designed to include folding/sliding seating for Legislative Council Members during Joint Sittings of Parliament.

Engineering Services

Engineering services, consisting of lighting, power, data, communications, security, call systems, fire detection and air conditioning, will be upgraded or replaced as appropriate to meet currently accepted standards and the specific needs of the House. Local and external data reticulation will enable ministers to view their portfolios from their desks in the Chamber and from their Ministerial offices.

Disability Access

Disability access to the Chamber has been identified within the formal Parliament House Access Action Plan and is included within the proposed works.

Disability access to the Chamber will be available through new side access doors to select locations on the front and back "benches" for Members and to the existing side doors for Advisors.

Disability access to the Speaker's Reserve is to one side only, and made possible by a (folding) lifting platform alongside the existing stairs. Loose seating will be removed when necessary to accommodate the required number for people with disabilities.

Disability access will be arranged to the floor level of the Chamber, and to Officer's seating positions around the central table and to either end of the Clerks' desk.

It will be possible to provide for a Speaker with disabilities by the introduction of a lifting platform in lieu of one of the stairs at the end of the Speaker's screen. Provision will be made for the installation of a lifting platform in the future by the inclusion of the necessary engineering services in the proposed works.

The access for people with disabilities in the Press Gallery is to be addressed.

PROJECT PROGRAM AND SEQUENCING

All the components of the Project are interdependent and work is to be tendered to allow off-site joinery work to be undertaken before access to the site can be gained in early July 2008.

The sittings for the House of Assembly will take place in alternative locations in the latter half of 2008 during the on-site construction period which is expected to reach completion in January 2009.

Construction access to the Chamber is to be provided from the laneway behind Parliament House through the external wall window openings at first floor level and across the corridor into an opening cut into the wall behind the Speaker's end of the Chamber. Access to the corridor except for contractors will be sealed off at both ends during the construction phase of the works.

It is proposed to undertake the work in three parts:

1. Pre-Construction
    - Documentation of all works.
    - Develop prototype of joinery.
    - Pre-ordering of timber and carpet.
    - Tendering of joinery package
    - Tendering of construction package
    - Tendering the supply and installation of television equipment.
2. Construction Off Site
    - Construction off site of fixed joinery.
    - Construction off-site of ceiling glazing fittings.
    - Ordering of television equipment and loose furniture.
    - Restoration of Art Deco furniture and fittings.
3. Construction On Site
    - Construction of builder's access.
    - Alteration to ceiling and installation of skylights, artificial lighting and air conditioning.
    - Alterations to certain engineering services.
    - Removal of floor, installation of new services and construction of new floor.
    - Installation of power, data and communications services.
    - Installation of carpet, new joinery and connection services.
    - Alteration to walls and painting/staining of all surfaces as required.
    - Upgrading of control room.
    - Installation of television equipment and final connection of all services.
    - Closing off of construction access and reinstatement.

PROCUREMENT

Project Consultants

Architectural Consultant
The Architectural Consultant Architects Designhaus, directed by Andrew Shurman, has been appointed for the House of Assembly component of the project and is leading the team of consultants, is responsible for the engineering and cost planning sub-consultants and the general co-ordination of the work of the specialist consultants (see below). The specialist consultants have been appointed directly by Parliament House.

The general scope of the Consultant's service also includes but is not limited to:

- Briefing, schematic design, design development, documentation and contract administration of the works including the engineering services.
- Participation in the schematic design of the built-in furniture, then the design development, documentation and contract administration of that component of the works.
- Assistance with the selection, then scheduling of the loose furniture for the project (see below).
- Responsibility for contract administration of the project to completion

Specialist Consultant Stephen Firth Architect
Stephen Firth has been appointed as a specialist consultant to work with the team on this Project and is providing services in relation to:

- The design control of Project generally, the design control of engineering integration generally, the design of prototype joinery with furniture designer, and the general design of other joinery items – press gallery, public gallery, advisers, speaker's reserve, screens to floor divisions, wall panelling.
- The resolution of Conservation issues in the context of the Conservation Management Plan.
- The co-ordination of planning approvals in relation to the Tasmanian Heritage Council and Sullivan's Cove Waterfront Authority, participation in the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works process (if required) and consultation with the Joint Committee of the Working Arrangements of the Parliament.
- Direction during construction where design or conservation issues need resolution.

Specialist Consultant Furniture Design
A Tasmanian furniture designer/maker Brendan Sharpe has been commissioned through arts@work to design the Members' seating and new associated joinery, and to construct a prototype for testing and approval prior to construction.

Specialist Consultant Timber Advisory services
Mr Tony Colman is a timber restoration specialist and has had extensive experience in timber sourcing and restoration work at Parliament House – in particular the Long Room Restoration. He is providing advice on the source and supply of specialist timbers required for the Project to be consistent with the existing/restored furniture and the original wall panelling and advice on finishing.

Specialist Consultant Planning Advisory Services
Roy Cordiner is providing project and asset management advisory services for Parliament House and has assisted with the planning for this Project.

Broadcast Television System Consultant
Parliament has appointed Winning Post Productions of Hobart to design a system and assist consultants during the procurement stage in relation to the Broadcast Television System.

Artworks
The artworks component of this project will be co-ordinated by arts@work with a specific brief for housing and interpreting the history and use of the Mace in the Tasmanian Parliament.

Probity Auditor
Specialist priority auditor Mr Ian Shields has been appointed to undertake probity auditing of the project.

Procurement Process

The procurement of the works will be under the Tasmanian Treasury recommended Lump Sum Tendering process using Australian Standards major works contract AS2124 - 1997.

It is anticipated that early contracts for the supply of specialist timber and a joinery package will be let as a nominated subcontract to the main contract to ensure that the procurement and use of rare Tasmanian timbers and work off site can be expedited in a timely manner.

This contract will then be nominated to the main contractor for responsibility of programme, co-ordination and cost. It is anticipated that tenders for the joinery contract will be advertised in early 2008 and the main contract tendered in May/June 2008.

The Chamber itself becomes available on June 3, 2008 with construction works preparation beginning shortly thereafter.

It is anticipated that the project will be completed, commissioned and available for the first sitting of Parliament in early 2009.

Planning and Building Approval

The other approvals required for the works are as follows:

- Approval by the Heritage Council of Tasmania.
- Building approvals by the Sullivan's Cove Waterfront Authority.
- Disability access approval.

COST ESTIMATES

A detailed cost plan is being maintained for the project to ensure that the building and television system cost at completion are contained within the capital funding allocation.

The project budget for the development is $4,500,000, allocated as follows:

ITEM	**$**
House of Assembly Chamber	
Building works	562,000
Curtains & blinds	28,000
Engineering Services	685,000
Joinery & Loose Furniture	532,000
Professional Fees	391,000
Contingency & Provisional sums	402,000
Subtotal $	2,600,000
Broadcast television	
TV equipment, racks, etc	1,635,000
Cabling	5,000
Site Works Labour	35,000
Training	20,000
Professional Fees	65,000
Travel and accommodation	40,000
Contingency	100,000
Subtotal	1,900,000
Grand Total	**4,500,000**

The amount includes all supply, construction and installation work, contractors and authorities fees and temporary works and excludes GST.

EVIDENCE

The Committee commenced its inquiry on Wednesday, 6 February last at Parliament House, Hobart. Accompanied by the Deputy Clerk of the House of Assembly and the consultants, the Committee inspected a prototype of the proposed Members' desks and were conducted on a site inspection which included the Chamber of the House of

Assembly; the Public and Press Galleries of the House of Assembly; the Media Room; and the Press Gallery 'Common Room'.

Following the site inspection the Committee recovened in Committree Room 2, Parliament House. The following witnesses were called, made the Statutory Declaration and examined by the Committee in public:-

- Peter Bennison, Deputy Clerk of the House of Assembly;
- Andrew Shurman, Director, Architects Designhaus
- Roy Cordiner, Consultant;
- Arthur Reid, Consultant Engineer;
- Stephen Firth, Specialist Consultant Architect;
- Phil Wallbank, Consultant, Winning Post Productions; and
- Jim Henry, Consultant, Winning Post Productions.

Background

The Deputy Clerk of the House of Assembly, Mr Bennison gave the following overview of the proposed works:-

> … *As background, the House of Assembly Chamber was designed by the government architect, Sidney Blythe, in the late 1930s and it was opened in 1940. The architect used the prevailing art deco style. In the late 1970s the Chamber received an unfortunate makeover, rendering the art deco theme almost unrecognisable. The functionality of the Chamber for members declined considerably as a result. In addition, the introduction of technology and changing patterns of usage by members in the last decade or so have made an upgrade of facilities an urgent priority.*
>
> *Apart from the facade of Parliament House, the House of Assembly Chamber is the most visible element of the institution, appearing frequently on television in the homes of Tasmanians. The present physical state of the Chamber hardly reflects well on Tasmania. The architectural consultant to parliament, Stephen Firth, was commissioned by the House in 2004 to assess the restoration of the Chamber. His investigation brought up a number of significant issues. Making the Chamber compliant with OH&S legislation was a vital finding. The aims are to return art deco elements to the Chamber while making it an efficient debating and working area.*
>
> *It is proposed that two new doors be inserted in the side corridors to allow better access for people or members with disabilities. A wheelchair lift will be inserted to allow access to the Speaker's Reserve from the nearby elevator. Disability action organisations have been consulted and they support the project. The new seating will provide access and places for members with disabilities on both front and back benches. A ramp forward of the Bar of the House will allow wheeled access onto the Floor of the Chamber.*

The Chamber will be completely rewired, including power outlets for members' computers, revamped lighting, computer wiring, new call buttons, Hansard microphones, television and telephone access.

The 1970s blackwood panels will be removed and disposed of by tender. The aim is to reproduce the original 1930s dark veneer panelling as closely as possible, using local timbers. Some other art deco highlights will be reinstated. The 1930s ceiling skylights will be reinstated, and light improved to OH&S standards. An acoustics consultant will be engaged to advise regarding general acoustics and for Hansard and televising.

The members' seating installed in the 1970s was poorly designed in the first place and is now dilapidated. It requires immediate replacement with ergonomic seats. The desk design has been completed. The primary feature of the revised desk is its suitability as a workstation. The prototype desk and chair, viewed today in the Long Room, will be available for other members' opinions prior to final construction. Their feedback is welcome. Seats will be provided for 17 members on either side of the Speaker's Chair - a total of 34 seats on the Floor of the House. The built-in seating for members of the Legislative Council adjacent to the Speaker's Reserve will be reinstated. These will be used for joint sittings such as for Senate vacancies or on budget day. Seating in the Speaker's Reserve and advisers' boxes will also be upgraded. The Chamber will be recarpeted in plain green carpet, with gold strips indicating Chamber thresholds for non-members.

The press and visitors galleries were virtually untouched by the 1970s works. Ergonomic desks and chairs will be installed in the Press Gallery and repairs will be undertaken in the Visitors Gallery. Another area of attention is the installation of a glass screen in the Visitors Gallery. Consultants have advised that the present railing at the front of the public gallery does not comply with Building Code of Australia standards. There are advantages to such an installation. It would alleviate a potential OH&S and public liability problem should a visitor be injured by falling down the Gallery steps and over the rail into the Chamber. That this has not previously occurred can only be regarded as fortuitous. However, now that the matter has been brought to the attention of the House we are obliged to take action.

A number of complaints have been received over many years from visitors that the debate is hard to hear in the Gallery. Difficult conditions exist for sound reproduction in the Gallery. Unlike most other parliaments in Australia which use a stenographic form of Hansard, Tasmania has always used an electronic recording process. A full screen is desirable in that all of these sound difficulties arising from Hansard microphones and Gallery amplification would be eliminated. It would also allow a viable hearing loop for people with hearing impairments to be installed in the Gallery. At present this cannot be implemented because of the feedback factor.

Enhanced sound relay, as well as two large flat-screen monitors, will be installed in the Visitors Gallery. This will provide the necessary amplification and eliminate visual blind spots where visitors are unable to view parts of the Chamber from their seats. The screen will also allow for teachers and guides to explain to student groups the operations of the House while in session. Tasmanian Police have previously provided reports recommending the installation of a glass screen for security of members. Some other parliaments have made such installations to prevent potential injury from suspect powders and from other objects being thrown into the Chamber.

The original 1930s Speaker's desk, Clerk's desk and Table of the House have been restored and will be reinstated. Following the success of the lectern arrangement at the Launceston sitting in 2006, three lecterns will be introduced to allow members the option of making their contributions in debate other than from their places.

The Government has made funds available to introduce televising of both Houses and their committees. Present filming of Assembly sessions from the public gallery is another potential OH&S hazard. The House proposes to take up the funding and televise Chamber proceedings and its various committees. This will require cameras in the Assembly Chamber and committee room 2, and mobile units in the Reception Room and Long Room. A control room will be situated on the second floor above the present media conference room. The Legislative Council has also been offered the provision for televising its proceedings and has been consulted. Funds exist within the project to achieve that, but it is a matter for the Council to decide. Five cameras will be positioned in the Assembly Chamber: two each on the Government and Opposition sides and a fifth below the clock at the entrance to the Chamber. This will allow a full coverage.

The Joint Standing Committee on the Working Arrangement of the Parliament will be considering operation conditions and guidelines for telecasting prior to the commencement of that process.

Consultations have been held with the following organisations to assess design and works: members of the House of Assembly, Tasmanian Heritage Council, Sullivans Cove Waterfront Authority, the Joint House Committee, Tasmanians with Disabilities, and ParaQuad Tasmania.

The project is timed to be underway following the end of the Autumn sittings at the beginning of July and completed by December 2008. An alternative chamber will be required for the Assembly while work is being undertaken. A one-week sitting is planned for Burnie, two weeks in Launceston and the remainder in the Reception Room of Parliament House.

For construction access to the Chamber, a hole will be inserted from the front of the Chamber near the Speaker's Chair, out through the corridor

and into the rear laneway. The area will be secured and sealed, so there should be minimal disruption to officers in Parliament House. Tenants in 10 Murray St will be consulted as necessary. I commend the project for your approval.

Broadcast/Television

The Committee questioned the witnesses as to what the recurrent cost of the proposed television facility would be. Mr Bennison submitted:-

> *We have done some investigations on the recurrent expenses and we think at this stage the cost will be in the vicinity of $120 000 a year.*
>
> *… We will be looking at contracting a production firm in to provide the necessary expertise, so that Parliament would not be employing anyone directly as a parliamentary official. It will be a contractual situation.*

The Committee questioned the witnesses as to whether television footage would not be archived. Mr Bennison responded:-

> *Initially that is correct, but provision will be made within the system to allow for the hardware add-ons to provide for archival footage.*

The Committee sought clarification as to the cost/benefit of providing a service for television networks which has hitherto been provided at no public cost. Mr Bennison responded:-

> *It will also be available for streaming on the Internet so that anyone who has a computer can view the telecast of the debate from their homes or wherever. When the Speaker went to the Government to seek money for the chamber works, the project was taken on board and at that time it was suggested by the Government that televising would be an advantage. The Speaker decided that it was a pretty good idea and basically he took it from there. The money was made available and so we proceeded along those lines. The Speaker has decided that the House of Assembly and its committees will be broadcast, but the Premier has made it clear that any televising in the upper House is a matter for that chamber and their decision.*

The Committee sought an estimate of the cost if such work was postponed. Mr Reid responded:-

> *At this point I cannot give you an accurate figure, but obviously there would be an additional cost - both from building works and engineering services points of view - to come back later and put the cabling through, with the associated services and the control rooms and everything that goes with them. So you would probably pay a 50 per cent penalty over and above what you would have paid in doing the project now.*

The following exchange occurred in relation to the issue of archiving footage:-

Mr BEST *- Mr Chairman, while we are on that subject, what will be presented is pretty much live as it occurs and that will be streamed over the Internet. Is the access only live or is it available for a certain time to go back?*

Mr WALLBANK *- It can be either way. As Peter alluded to, down the track we have made allowances to archive all that material but that takes a fair amount of memory and so it is a matter of deciding, as we move forward, which is the best option.*

Mr BEST *- At this stage then is it feasible that you would archive the day's proceedings at least and that would be able to be accessed that evening - at least at this stage?*

Mr WALLBANK *- In terms of the day?*

Mr BEST *- Yes.*

Mr WALLBANK *- It happens - absolutely.*

Mr HENRY *- Six weeks - that is for Hansard.*

Mr BEST *- Right. That is pretty good. I have been at a couple of public debates, on ABC Radio and a few other places, where it has been made pretty clear to me that people want that access, so live is good, that is excellent, but if people can access it at the library the next day or whatever that is far better than waiting. ... I can see huge benefits, certainly for my electorate anyway, in being able to access that information on topical issues affecting people, and also in a school environment. We get a lot of school trips and I can see the benefit there for younger people to understand the importance of being involved. They can see it when they come down to do the tour and that sort of thing.*

Mr BENNISON *- If I might make a comment about the live feed, one of the chief reasons the working arrangements committee is going to be consulted about this is that other parliaments have gone down this track before. They know what is going on with guidelines and parliamentary privilege matters about live feed and things like that. So these matters need to be investigated and proper guidelines drawn up so that all the members are protected. We do not want any slip-ups. That is the reason it is heading in that direction.*

Mr WALLBANK *- To add to your question, Mr Best, from the point of view of equipment set up, we are able to do all of those things. It is a question of the protocols and the guidelines that you decide.*

The Committee questioned the witnesses as to the anticipated benefits of streaming the proceedings of Parliament and whether any assessment had been undertaken in other jurisdictions. The witnesses responded as follows:-

Mr BENNISON *- Not that I am aware of, apart from those parliaments in Canada that have been involved with the cable or satellite television broadcasts. They know how many subscribers they have and, of course, the telecast of those feeds is heavily subsidised by buying airtime from those satellite stations. But we are in a different situation here in that we are proposing to provide signals to television stations and to stream on to the Internet. I suppose we will be able to quantify that amount when it gets going because we will know how many hits we are getting through the Net. But, no, as far as I am aware, there is no relevant data to be had, unless Mr Wallbank has something.*

Mr WALLBANK *- No, I haven't any detail on that, Peter. But in Queensland there has been a hell of a lot of interest from remote areas. I think your earlier comment was that the whole idea is to provide an opportunity for those people outside the urban areas to have the same access without having to hop in a car and drive from Stanley or Smithton to Hobart to view the Parliament in action.*

Mr SHURMAN *- It is quite interesting to look at what is happening in our universities and in other fields - this idea of teleconferencing can have a broader educational aspect, so that students of politics in, say, the University of Tasmania can directly access parliament, watch debates, discuss the issues and bring that real relevance to their studies. These are somewhat side issues in one respect, but they are about accessibility and democracy. We have a small chamber - I suppose that is our issue - the public gallery cannot be increased; we have to stay within the chamber and it has a limited number of seats. We also have limited access for the press. So there are a number of reasons why we should jump on the general accessibility issue from a purely technological point of view. As to how you manage it as a parliament, as Peter said, that is yet to be decided.*

Mr BENNISON *- For large debates in either chamber we will be able to telecast that through to the Reception Room or to a committee room, or you can watch it on your computer. The physical constraints of the chamber have suddenly evaporated as far as the public is concerned.*

Teleconferencing arrangements will be part of the televising package.

Mr WALLBANK *- We are making the whole system portable so that we can do teleconferencing from the Reception Room, from the Long Room and certainly from committee rooms by streaming that out and doing the teleconferencing two ways. That is built into the system.*

Mr BENNISON *- And hooking into the fibre-optic network so that if you have a teleconferencing facility in another city you can talk to each other.*

Mr SHURMAN *- Interestingly, Mr Chairman, we had a visit from the Clerk of the House from the Western Australian Parliament in December,*

and they were telling us how they set up a big plasma screen in the chamber to use as a method of opening up public access to areas such as the north-west of Western Australia and Bunbury in the south. They are following your move to have various sittings in various parts of the State as well. It is all about accessibility.

The Committee cited examples of 'on-screen' interpretation of proceedings provided in the Parliament of the United Kingdom and questioned the witnesses as to whether such provision would be provided for in the proposed streaming system. Mr Bennison responded:-

… *There will be the title of the member who is speaking and the matter that is being debated.*

Mr Henry added:-

From a technical point of view, the system is capable of doing that. That has been built in. There are character generators and feeds to different points. At the moment there is a point in the Reception Room to allow for overflow from the visitors area. Any signal can be put out on that monitor. If you had a DVD for educational purposes it could be played. The day's proceedings could be played out to any monitor.

Mr Bennison concluded:-

It is envisaged that the system will also replace the squawk box arrangement, which is becoming antiquated and hard to repair. It is old-fashioned, solid-state stuff and its shelf life is nearly over.

… *There will also be an improved feed to Hansard under the proposed system. It is not just about television; it's audio as well.*

Acoustics

The Committee sought clarification as to what will be provided for hearing impaired Members of the House of Assembly. Mr Bennison responded:-

… the problem is the feedback with the electronic signals going through to Hansard. We have been looking into this for 15 years and trying to do something about it, but our advisers say that it is virtually insuperable. Having a hearing piece seems to be the logical outcome. Perhaps Andrew or Arthur could elaborate on what has been going on with the acoustics and looking after hearing impairment issues.

Mr Shurman added:-

Certainly from an architectural/building perspective, we are obviously looking at the whole chamber in terms of accessibility. I guess that is the fundamental thing in the modern world - accessibility, not only for members in the chamber, but also for members of the public and the press.

That is the way modern parliaments are being addressed around Australia. We are probably coming along behind a series of developments that are happening in other parliaments - Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory - and we are trying to bring Parliament here up to an equal standard. That includes the Federal Parliament, of course, as well. So all of those issues about acoustics are being treated very seriously by us, as is lighting, and we are aware of these issues about hearing the interjections, what will be recorded for Hansard, what will come through to individual members and what will also go to the press and the public gallery. We are keenly aware of that. I would like to let this committee know that we are on top of that and we are going to be looking at that in more detail as we go through the documentation if this project is approved to go ahead.

Mr Reid explained the engineering response to the issue:-

As we mentioned, particularly regarding the public gallery, every member has his own directional microphone. Those microphones can be muted momentarily but otherwise any interjection or verbal response from the Chamber will be taken through and ultimately end up in Hansard. So that feed really is the sum total of what is happening within the Chamber. What is going to be processed and sent out as part of the television broadcast can be not so much manipulated but restricted to the current speaker and therefore there is the possibility of having two separate feeds. How that is brought to assist in hearing impairment can either be through wired means or wireless means, headphones, augmentation loops - the technology is there for any of those. If it is more convenient for something like a Bluetooth wireless link then we could look at that and look at the latest technologies.

… (The decision regarding Bluetooth or alternatives) *will come through further design development. We can seek input from other parliaments as to what people are going to have to wear or what their preferences are. With the technology that is available at this point, Bluetooth is one that I threw up but there are many other technologies available.*

Mr Cordiner added:-

And apparently the functionality of the technology currently is not as good as direct connections and there are certain things that it cannot do - a wired connection we are talking about. Videoconferencing and other high-tech communications are much more feasible through a wired connection than through a wireless connection. It is possible that the quality or the bandwidth is limited.

The Committee questioned the witnesses as to what capacity, if any, the proposed system will have to provide captioning of proceedings on monitors installed in the Public Gallery for hearing impaired visitors. Mr Henry responded:-

It does not have the capacity to do it but it has been future-proofed so that that is an add-on if that was required. If down the track that was required, it is an add-on and it will work with the system.

… *There are a couple of ways it can be done. There is voice recognition software and that is available to add into the system.*

Design

The Committee questioned the witnesses as to the proposed seating configuration of the Chamber, in particular what consideration was given to accommodating the current size of the House of Assembly with the current seating configuration which provides separation between parties. Mr Bennison responded:-

There still will be (separation) *in the new situation. If all the front benches were occupied in the same way as now they would not be so occupied in the new arrangement because there would be an extra seat on the front bench. Likewise for the Opposition. You currently have four on the front bench and the Greens have two, but there will be provision for seven at the front and 10 on the back bench. There will be gaps on the back bench. It is possible not to put the seats in but it would harm the symmetry to remove them. There are plenty of chambers where there are more seats than members - like the House of Representatives and the Senate.*

Mr Shurman added:-

The reason we haven't put in divisions is for such flexibility. We have designed the seating to be constructed in modules, even the ones on the curve. When we designed the layout we also considered members with physical disabilities, so some chairs or groups of chairs can be pulled out. We are trying to make it as flexible as possible for Parliament. If we put in divisions where we think an independent will be or try to anticipate party numbers we might miscalculate the number of seats. They should all look roughly the same.

Mr Firth added:-

The simpler solution is really not to occupy the seats or to take the loose seats out and leave the screen there because there is still an obvious space and the screen still gives you the definition of the circulation space around.

We have designed the panels behind the rear seats to be removable and enable wheelchair accessibility up to the desks so they are designed to be removable but specifically a couple of them have been identified as being more easily removable.

… At the moment we have two positions on the front bench and four positions on the back for wheelchair access but there are modifications in

addition to that that if we are forced into a position to look at it, I am sure we would be able to adjust to do it.

… There are some future issues that we are going to build in that we are not necessarily going to implement and one of them was to provide accessibility for the Speaker, if the Speaker was disabled. We are putting wiring into the system to enable the introduction of a lifting platform if we needed to so that we can take a section of steps out and do that. So in the same way we can deal with the issues of manipulating the space in the future if we are faced with that, rather than having everything totally flexible at all times, which is not practical when you are hardwiring the services into the vents, which is what we are looking at.

Mr Reid concluded:-

Just on that point. They are not necessarily hardwired in, they are modular, and services can be disconnected from each location. The furniture can be taken out, the services do not restrict that.

… The data points that you would have seen in the furniture - the two data points - are capable of being either data or telephone, an integrated system, and therefore any point can be configured as a telephone point.

Air conditioning

The Committee questioned the witnesses as to the impact on the Chamber of the proposed air conditioning system. Mr Bennison responded:-

At present the system has a tolerance of about four degrees either way of 21, I think, but the trouble we have is that if you have half a dozen members in the Chamber the temperature can be x but if you have 25 members and 50 in the Gallery, the temperature will be y. The constant change between those factors makes it very difficult for any system to cope with.

Mr Reid added:-

We look at the airconditioning systems as having a fully populated parliament but as Peter said, that can change between the public gallery and the Chamber itself, depending on the number of people. With the addition of the glass screen we will be making the public gallery a separate zone so that will remove the interaction between the two spaces. The base system within the Chamber itself will be altered cosmetically but at this stage there is no provision to increase its capacity, decrease its capacity or modify the controls so any changes to the environment that are occurring at the moment due the zoning between the public gallery and the Chamber will be taken account of because of the separation.

… It will be better controlled in that loadings within the public gallery will not influence the Chamber, and vice versa.

Public Gallery

The Committee observed that, notwithstanding the heritage value of the existing seating in the public gallery, the proposed refurbishment of such seating will not address the inadequate size of the seats and spacing between the rows of seats. The witnesses were questioned as to what, if any, consideration had been given to improve the spacing of seats to better accommodate adult visitors to the Public Gallery. Mr Bennison responded:-

> … *Obviously from the inspection we undertook this morning, we had an opportunity to reconsider the proposal. As far as I can see, the only possible difficulty we might have is with the Heritage Council. If we are going to change original fabric we need to consult them, but as far as the administrators of the project are concerned, they are keen to see some real improvements up there, and the suggestions you have made are, I think, very worthy and we will take those on board if we possibly can - subject to the Heritage Council, and I cannot speak for them.*

DOCUMENTS TAKEN INTO EVIDENCE

The following documents were taken into evidence and considered by the Committee:

- Parliament House Works – Submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, dated January 2008; and
- Tasmanians with Disabilities Inc., submission dated 4 February 2008.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The Committee considers that the works proposed to be undertaken on the House of Assembly Chamber will greatly improve its functionality and access for people with disabilities, whist restoring the former dignity of the fabric of the building in keeping with its heritage significance.

The Committee further considers the installation of a broadcast television system for Parliament will greatly improve public access to the proceedings of the Parliament of Tasmania in the Chambers, the Committee Rooms, the Reception Room and the Long Room.

Accordingly the Committee recommends the project, in accordance with the documentation submitted, at an estimated total cost of $4,500,000.

Parliament House
HOBART
13 February 2008

Hon. A. P. Harriss M.L.C.
CHAIRMAN