



31 July 2011

Committee Secretariat
Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration
Legislation Committee
The Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT 2600

Attention: Ms Christine McDonald, Secretary

Dear Madam:

**SUBMISSION – INQUIRY INTO THE PERFORMANCE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF
PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES**

1. Introduction

The following letter constitutes my submission under the terms of inquiry set by your Committee into the performance of the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS) at Parliament House.

I refer in particular to the Inquiry Terms of Reference Item (b): *“policies and practices followed by DPS for the management of the Parliament House and its contents”*.

I make this submission on the basis that I was formerly an Associate and Partner of Mitchell/Giurgola & Thorp Architects (MGT), the architectural firm contracted for the design and documentation of New Parliament House. I am not an architect. My role throughout more than twenty-two years of work within the firm, starting in 1978-79 with the international design competition for New Parliament House, was in working closely with the Design Teams and Partners of the firm to prepare and refine written design statements and project reports documenting the firm’s designs.

In addition to the collaborative preparation of selected design reports and papers throughout the Parliament House project, I also led MGT Architects’ inception and coordination of the site-specific commissioned works of art and craft for the building, working closely with Founding Partner Romaldo Giurgola AO LFRAIA LFAIA, other key Design Team members, and the Parliament House Construction Authority’s national Art Advisory Committee.



2. Preserving the Building's Design Integrity: Recording the Building's Design Intent

Pertinent to your Committee's Inquiry is the fact that, ten years after the completion of Parliament House, I served from 1997 – 1999 as the part-time Design Integrity Consultant working within the Joint House Department through a consultancy contract with MGT Architects.

As the Consultant reporting to the Department's Secretary and presenting regularly to the Interim Design Integrity Advisory Committee (IDIAC), an inter-Departmental committee set up by the Joint House Department, my role was to:

(a) **propose and help instigate** procedures and strategies for the maintenance of the Parliament House's design integrity in the areas of:

- capital works,
- engineering works,
- furniture replacement/procurement,
- furniture maintenance,
- carpet/fabric/curtain replacement;
- technical investigations/research;
- the impact of functional change in the building and furnishings,
- the impact of technological change in the building and furnishings,
- landscape management/design development,
- building maintenance activities,
- building security and locking systems,
- signage/graphics within and outside the building,
- commercial government tenancies within the building,
- food services and marketing/publicity/visitor services,
- Art Program acquisitions, activities, and maintenance, and
- document archiving and management;

(b) **instigate and deliver** a training program for all Joint House Department staff, whether senior executives or carpenters or technical officers, in understanding the Parliament House's design intent and the application of appropriate procedures for the management of requests for change; and

(c) **write** a central reference document between 1999 and 2004 whose purpose was to record the Architect's essential design intent principles underlying the Parliament House's architecture, interior design, landscape design, furniture/furnishings, and Art Program.

The degree to which these original steps towards establishing procedures for the maintenance of the building's design integrity were retained during the subsequent transition from the Joint House Department to the Department of Parliamentary Services is unclear.

However, this consultancy resulted in the preparation of the five-volume massive work entitled *The Architect's Design Intent for Parliament House, Canberra: Central Reference*



Document (CRD), the current draft of which was completed in August 2004 and was submitted to DPS for its ongoing reference and use as an internally-published bound volume of interrelated chapters and topics.

Each of the thirty-one chapters of this document was prepared in consultation with MGT Architects' Founding Partner Romaldo Giurgola and MGT Design Partner Harold (Hal) Guida to prevent errors in the recording of key ideas within the design.

It is obvious that any proper assessment and preservation of heritage values and the building's design integrity now and in the future requires a record of what the intent of the design was.

This *Central Reference Document* is incomplete and requires refinement, revision, and additions in order to fulfill the Joint House Department's original intention, i.e. that the document should stand as a basic **record of the Architect's design intent** to be utilized in the assessment and management of proposals for change and maintenance for the specified 200-year lifespan of the Parliament House building. There is considerable urgency in the need to complete and finalise this document while MGT Founding Partner Romaldo Giurgola and other key Design Team members are still alive, able to contribute, and be consulted.

3. The Need for Independent Expert Advice in the Preparation of an Integrated Policy, Strategy, & Procedures Manual for the Maintenance of the Building's Design Integrity

From my experience in recording aspects of the design intent of Parliament House over a 23-year period in the face of ongoing change, I believe that the Australian Parliament has not yet fulfilled its responsibility to put in place policies and strategies capable of preserving the integrity of the design and heritage values of Parliament House for the long term without significant degradation.

The process of doing so is obviously challenging and complex for a building and precinct which is a "working" parliament in a state of continuous functional development and change. However, this complexity does not mitigate or remove the need for the Parliament to put these policies and procedures in place, but instead **increases the urgency of doing so**.

The Parliament's planning and preparation of the original Design Brief for the international design competition for New Parliament House took nearly seven years and utilised the skills of a wide variety of experts in their fields. The very fact that the Australian Parliament made the decision to hold an international design competition (from which there were over three hundred entries from around the world) and to specify a 200-year lifespan for the building demonstrates **a clear determination to secure an outstanding symbol of Australian democracy for the long-term future of the nation**.

In my view, the broad and far-reaching vision of the Parliament, demonstrated in these previous acts, needs to be exercised again now in the commissioning of independent expert advice to formulate the necessary strategic policy and implementation plan for the identification and preservation of the essential design integrity and heritage values of the building and its precinct.



The quality of independent advice and expertise to be commissioned for this task should be equivalent to the quality and complexity of elements of this national icon building which requires protection and preservation.

It is obvious that the process of determination of the best, most workable method for the protection of the building's design integrity and management of ongoing change by experts in the field needs to be conducted in formal, ordered consultation and collaboration with the building's key external and internal stakeholders, including representatives from all of the Parliamentary Departments and the building's original architects. However, the provision of the expert advice needs to be **independent and at arm's length** from those Departments.

At the outset of its commissioning the external preparation of this long-term strategy for preservation of the building's design integrity and putting it into proper execution, the Parliament needs to assert its understanding of and support for two underlying facts:

- a) The process of determining an appropriate means of preserving the design intent and heritage values of Parliament House over time will require **a significant commitment of funding into the future** for the building's proper care, maintenance, management, and preservation, which cannot be achieved if adequate ongoing funding is not dedicated for that purpose; and
- b) There must be a clear commitment by the Parliament **that it believes in and endorses the value of that preservation and care** on behalf of the nation, and that it requires the Departments of the Parliament and other associated agencies to carry out this ongoing preservation and care in a highly professional and knowledgeable manner.

Without both of these, the endeavour to put in place an adequate strategy will inevitably fail.

4. The Role of the Department of Parliamentary Services

In my view, achieving both of those essential commitments and preparing the required integrated policies and strategies is **well beyond the capability and role of the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS)**. The nation expects the Parliament at the highest level to source independent expert advice and to make the proper decisions about the immediate and ongoing implementation of that advice on preservation and management of change, after which DPS can be and properly resourced and tasked to carry out the day-to-day policy and management functions, clearly set out in the approved policy and strategy documents, which are appropriate to DPS's property and asset management role.

To expect that DPS has had in the past or will have in the future the in-house staffing capability and expertise in multiple fields **to generate** that highly-specialised advice is unrealistic.

Many of us with close connections with the original design and construction of Parliament House and its ongoing care are very concerned about the need for the Parliament to

instigate and preserve appropriate checks and balances by multiple parties and interests within the future management-of-change process for Parliament House.

The varying and often contradictory interests of Members, Senators, Presiding Officers, the Parliamentary Departments, the building's original designers, the design and construction professions in Australia, artists, craftspeople, heritage planners and advocacy groups, the care-givers and managers of the building and precinct, and members of the public all need to be balanced within the very serious task of the effective preservation of Parliament House's heritage values and significance into the future.

If the building is to survive with its essential design integrity intact into the future, it is essential that no one party among these special interests, including the Presiding Officers and the Department of Parliamentary Services, is allowed to make unfettered or unreviewed decisions about change.

These varying interests **can** be represented in a workable, efficient, management-of-change strategy and step-by-step procedures for the building's care and evolution if they are integrated into several carefully-structured bodies with clear terms of reference in an ongoing check-and-balance process, providing advice and recommending approval at appropriate points in the ongoing annual processes for projects and ongoing policy refinement.

5. The Seriousness of the Task of Preserving Parliament House as a Whole into the Future

The task of preserving intact the careful design, symbolic, and aesthetic interrelationships within the architecture, interior design, custom furniture and furnishings, interior and exterior landscape design, and commissioned and rotating works of art and craft is not just one of bureaucratically **preserving an asset** of the nation, as if Parliament House were a Navy frigate or an expensive aircraft carrier. This national project was in so many ways conceived and executed as "the work of a whole people". In this highly symbolic and working building full of content and associations, we as a nation present and characterise ourselves by means of all of the building's design and fitout details, not only to each other in this country, but also to the rest of the world.

This sense of how broad the task is of preserving and protecting Parliament House is conveyed in Romaldo Giurgola's words below, part of a fundamental paper which he prepared in May 1982 entitled "Parliament House Interior Design and Art Works: Description of Itineraries & Spaces", which was presented to Sir Billy Snedden, then-Speaker of the House, and key members of the Joint Standing Committee on New Parliament House:

"...But in addition to the natural desire for the Parliament House to be expressive of the aspirations of the Australian state, we believe the building must have an equally important function in expressing and elucidating what Australia is at heart: as a culture, as a nation, and as a diverse society.

"Why is it important for the building to take on this role of elucidation and manifestation? Because what we are has a strong effect on what we may be...

“Furthermore, the building’s role of manifestation is important because this is a crucial moment in Australian life. Australia, in building a Parliament now, so long after its incorporation as a Federation, is automatically in a position of reflection and self-examination. This is also the moment at which Australia appears to have become confident about its own emergence as a culture, about its own essence. Hence **this building becomes a self-characterisation**, whether made consciously or not; the very fact of its being built means that Australia is giving form to what it believes itself to be...” (quoted in *The Architect’s Design Intent for Parliament House, Canberra: Central Reference Document, Volume 1, Chapter 2, pp. 3 – 4*).

As a concrete example of Giurgola’s words, Australians quietly proved what they were capable of as a nation when, as part of the Parliament House project, the entrenched hierarchical quality distinctions inherent within the furniture usually provided in government buildings for senior executives or Members versus typists or office personnel were erased through the fact that over 100 separate furniture items were specially designed by MGT Architects as a suite of related furnishings for the public and Parliamentary areas of the building. These carefully-related, superbly-constructed furniture items were documented and put into Australian-manufactured limited production runs in Australian timbers, leathers, and other materials for installation throughout the building’s thousands of rooms in accord with the building’s approved furniture layouts. Such an undertaking has rarely happened anywhere in the world in recent times as an integral part of a national building.

Given this remarkable undertaking, whenever these specially-designed Parliament House furniture items are sold off in periods of change, the remaining suite of furniture items is weakened for the projected 200 years of the building’s future life. The U.S. government has spent millions of dollars over recent decades, tracing and buying back the original furniture de-accessioned over time from the White House and other historic government buildings.

The formulation and ongoing scrutiny of the policies and procedures for the de-accessioning of furniture, light fittings, and the myriad of other furnishing items which were specially-designed and manufactured solely for use in Parliament House **needs to be based on “whole-building” values well into the long-term future**, and not only upon the perceived short-term difficulties of administratively managing change and storage requirements in the present.

Similarly, rather than the Construction Authority purchasing and installing ubiquitous plastic planter pots for internal landscaping throughout the public and Parliamentary circulation areas of the building, the same Australian ceramicist, Cameron Williams, who was selected nationally and commissioned through the Art/Craft Program for the design and fabrication of the four giant terracotta planters in the corners of Members Hall, was also contracted for the special design and hand-fabrication of the large-scaled terracotta planters which have graced circulation areas throughout the building as part of the approved seating plans since its opening.

My colleagues and I have been advised that some of these hand-fabricated terracotta planters have been sold off in recent years, apparently on the grounds of OH&S difficulties in their movement and storage within the building (despite consultancy advice having been provided in the late 1990s suggesting how they could continue to be safely moved and maintained). If this is true, it weakens this special presence in the building’s public and working areas which is not merely aesthetic, but rather which intentionally speaks to



occupants and visitors about Australia's remarkable capacity for contemporary craft and hand-fabrication in natural materials.

As these two examples show, it is both **the realisation and perpetuation of the knowledge of what the Parliament House project constitutes**, as well as the structuring of the clear checks-and-balances of the different essential stakeholders' views on **how to interpret and act on that knowledge**, which the Parliament needs to put in place. Only then will DPS be provided with an adequately-resourced 200-year strategic framework, with ongoing advice and scrutiny from changing panels of experts and stakeholders, within which to carry out its day-to-day property management role.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute this submission to your Inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

M. Pamille Berg AO Hon. FRAIA
Director