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**PRIME MINISTER**

22 NOVEMBER 1978

**STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER ON THE  
NEW AND PERMANENT PARLIAMENT  
HOUSE**

Mr Speaker, for the first 27 years of its existence, the Commonwealth Parliament operated in borrowed premises. In 1913 an international competition was announced for the design of a permanent Parliament House in the new national Capital. This was first deferred and then cancelled due to the world war.

Since coming to Canberra in 1927 the Parliament has operated in a house that was intended to accommodate it for a temporary period. Now that we approach the Bicentenary of Australia's settlement by Europeans, the Government has decided that funds ought to be provided for the design and construction of a permanent Parliament House.

The permanent Parliament House will be the focal point of the Bicentenary celebrations in 1988 and largely complete the Capital's principal national constructions.

From 1955 to the present day successive Parliaments and successive Governments have considered the question of a new Parliament House.

In 1965, a joint select committee was appointed. Its main recommendation was to proceed with the new and permanent Parliament House.

To facilitate this it recommended the establishment of a "client" committee which in due course resulted in the setting up of a Joint Standing Committee on the New and Permanent Parliament House.

For a considerable time a decision could not be reached on a site for that new building. This difficulty was resolved in 1974 with the passage of the Parliament Act which declared that the new and permanent Parliament House will be on Capital Hill.

Since 1975, successive Parliaments have appointed the Joint Standing Committee on the New and Permanent Parliament House, and the Committee has undertaken the detailed enquiries which have led to the decision I am now announcing.

On behalf of the Government, I pay tribute to the Committee for its detailed and painstaking work over recent years. All Honourable Members are indebted to the Committee for the way

in which it has advanced this matter.

The Government has given thought to the managerial arrangements needed to ensure that the project goes ahead efficiently, and that all parties involved are fully consulted at each relevant stage.

I take this opportunity to outline to the House the proposals which will be given legislative form early next year. First, we intend that, at each major stage in the design and construction of the new building, the Parliament itself will be the authority to approve the next step to be taken.

It is essential that the Parliament itself take the important threshold decisions and we shall ensure this happens.

Second, we believe special and flexible administrative arrangements will be needed to facilitate the work over the next ten years. Therefore we have decided to create a statutory authority - to be known as the New Parliament House Construction Authority - to control the design and construction of the new Parliament House.

It will do so in close association with the National Capital Development Commission and will be responsible to the Minister for the Capital Territory.

It will have a chairman and four members, one of whom will be the Commissioner of the N.C.D.C.

The authority will have available the services of an operations unit, of skilled professional people located within the N.C.D.C. drawn from the N.C.D.C., the Department of Construction and elsewhere and available to carry out the day-to-day directions of the Authority.

Third, we propose that the Joint Standing Committee on the new and permanent Parliament House should be seen as the advisory authority on behalf of the Parliament. It will be available to advise the Authority on any relevant matter and to report to Parliament if it wishes. In effect it will be a watchdog on behalf of the Parliament.

Some consequential revision of the Joint Standing Committee's resolution of appointment may be appropriate, and proposals will be submitted to the Parliament early next year. The Committee will continue in operation because an immediate problem will be the design competition and the advice of the Committee on this will clearly be needed.

The arrangements I have outlined are designed to ensure that all the talents needed to advance this great project will be available in a sensible and co-ordinated way. The interests and requirements of the Parliament remain pre-eminent and our proposals are designed to that end.

A procedure for selection of an architect was proposed in the Joint Standing Committee's third report. In general the Government believes the procedures set out there are appropriate, but we feel that the new Authority should also be involved immediately it is established.

I take this opportunity to foreshadow the intention that a design competition will be conducted, broadly along the lines of the recommendations in the third Report. In brief, these were as follows: invitation to architects registered in Australia to enter a design competition; selection of a few of the best entrants for development of their ideas to a second stage; selection of the winning architect and development of that architect's design.

The total project cost has been estimated at \$151 million in May 1978 prices, and funds will be progressively required over the next ten years.

Significant expenditure will not be incurred for some years yet, with the larger annual costs falling in the years 1983-87. Over the last ten years, in 1977-78 prices, an average of \$165 million per annum has been spent by the Government on capital works in Canberra under N.C.D.C. programmes.

The Government believes that it can encompass the construction of Parliament House within the same order of annual expenditure on capital programmes for Canberra over the next ten years, and the expenditure in relation to the new Parliament House will be taken into account when decisions are made on other public buildings.

When this Parliament House was constructed in 1927, it was built as a provisional accommodation, with facilities and services of a corresponding standard. Over the years, piecemeal extensions and alterations have been made to the building. The total area is now about two and a half times that of the original building.

All Honourable Members know that this accommodation, having grown haphazardly over the years, is not suited to the needs of a modern Parliament. The simple fact is that the Parliament is hampered in the performance of its works in this building. It would clearly be extraordinarily difficult to renovate or modify this building to provide necessary services and facilities for the years ahead.

I should also say that if a new Parliament House is not built in the near future, it will be necessary to proceed immediately with substantial extensions to the present building, extensions which could not be more than a short-term stop-gap.

We believe that expenditure of funds on the present building other than those for essential maintenance would not be responsible. As a corollary of the decision to proceed with the new Parliament House, it will need to be accepted that there will have to be maximum restraint in respect of additional expenditure on this building. That will mean that Senators and Members will have to accept basically the present facilities in the period until the new building becomes available.

The Government recognises that this decision not to proceed with short-term expedients will impose upon all those who work in Parliament House a further measure of inconvenience. Nonetheless, we believe this inconvenience is justified in the interests of finding a permanent solution to the problem of adequately housing the Parliament.

The design of Parliament House will give an unparalleled opportunity for the architectural design and building skills of Australians. Here in the Parliamentary triangle, we have our great National Library and the new National Gallery and High Court are already under construction.

The new Parliament House which is now to be built will take its place amongst the other great buildings which symbolise our culture, learning and system of justice. It will be the centrepoint of modern Canberra, the peak of the Parliamentary triangle, the hub of the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia, a place in which the affairs of the nation can be conducted in a more efficient way.

Australians justifiably take pride in this city, which is the symbol of our nationhood. The new Parliament House will greatly enhance the national capital, and it will also be a focal point for the ever-increasing number of Australians and visitors from overseas who wish to see at first hand the centre of Australian democracy.

The symbolic importance of the new Parliament House is made even more important by our anticipation that the opening of the building will take place in 1988, the bicentennial of the first European settlement in Australia.

Since that settlement, Australians by working together as a people sharing common ideals and a common purpose, have achieved great things. The decision to proceed now with the design and building of Parliament House reflects a confidence in the future, in which the people of this nation can justifiably share.

The 1980's, the decade of our bicentennial will be a period of optimism and excitement, a period of growth and development. I am certain that in this decade by working together with determination, with common purpose and the sense of national unity, which the new Parliament House itself will symbolise, we can make Australia the great country we know it can be.

I am delighted that the Leader of the Opposition has written to inform me that the unanimous view of the executive of the Parliamentary Labor Party is in favour of proceeding with a new and permanent Parliament House. It is fitting that both Government and Opposition should concur in their views on the construction of a House which symbolises our unity as a nation, which is an expression of our joint pride, faith and confidence in Australia.

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