

NATIONAL LIBRARY

The Government has reached a number of conclusions upon the future of the National Library, about which I should like to inform the House.

As Honourable Members will know, the National Library has grown directly from the Library of the Commonwealth Parliament. The Parliamentary Library Committee under the leadership of the President of the Senate and the Speaker has been the main source of advice in the Parliamentary and National Libraries, and I should like to acknowledge the value of its work over the years. The advice of the present Committee and of its Chairman, Sir Alister McMullin, has been most helpful to the Government in considering the future of the National Library.

It has been clear for some time that the National Library has outgrown the scope of the Parliamentary Library and has become a research and reference institution with nation-wide responsibilities. It is generally recognised that a different form of control has become desirable.

In 1956, therefore, the Government set up a Committee with Sir George Paton, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, as Chairman to study the matter. The Committee included three members of the Parliament representing all parties and both Houses. The report of the Committee was tabled in Parliament and we are all greatly indebted to the Committee for its work.

Last year, the Government set up an Interdepartmental Committee to advise on the detailed measures which were necessary to make effective the main recommendations of the Paton Committee. This Committee worked last year in the closest association with the Presiding Officers and the Parliamentary Library Committee.

The Government's conclusions can be summarised as follows:

1. There should be a Parliamentary Library and a National Library of Australia, each to be a separate institution.
2. The Parliamentary Library should be controlled, as it is now, by the Presiding Officers of Parliament with the advice of a Joint Committee of Members of both Houses.

3. The National Library would be controlled by a small Council. The Council would be given substantial responsibility for the control and development of the National Library, with Ministerial responsibility limited, so far as possible, to such matters as the review of annual expenditure and the appointment of members of the Council.
4. The present Division of the Library concerned with the records and archives of the Commonwealth Government should become a separate agency of the Government, within an appropriate Department, under the direct control of a Minister.

The Government intends that there should be the closest co-operation between the Parliamentary and the National Libraries in order to avoid overlapping wherever possible and to ensure economies in administration. This co-operation, will, of course, be especially close in the early stages because we do not have, as yet, a building to house the National Library adequately. The Government has agreed that design and planning work for a new National Library Building should begin. Naturally, the timing of construction will have to be considered in relation to requirements for other public works.

The Parliamentary Library will have its own stock of books, periodicals, newspapers and so on for the use of Members of Parliament. It will have access to the resources of the National Library by arrangement between the Parliamentary Library Committee and the Council of the National Library - an arrangement which will strengthen the reference and reading services available to Parliament itself.

The Government has given special attention to the future of Government archives and has reached the conclusion that Government archives should be under Government control as they are essentially a collection of the Government's own confidential papers, records and files, many of which for a number of reasons should not be made public at least until a certain period of time has elapsed. This is the normal practice in countries overseas.

The Government proposes to take early action to give effect to the conclusions it has reached. The first step will be to appoint a National Library Council and its Chairman on an interim basis.

I should perhaps emphasise that we are not in essence establishing new institutions but are rather introducing new methods of control and divisions of responsibilities which are more suitable for the present needs and which are similar to those operating in many countries in the British Commonwealth and elsewhere.

I am confident that the Government's legislation which, it is hoped, will be brought down in the next session of Parliament, will command a large measure of support, both in this Parliament and the Australian community.

CANBERRA,

4th May, 1960.