

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON. R.G.
MENZIES IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ON
THURSDAY, THE 10TH NOVEMBER, 1960

1. Introduction - History

This is the first major Bill on library services to be introduced into this Parliament. It provides for the establishment of the National Library of Australia. Honorable Members will of course understand that we are not in reality creating a new institution, but are rather proposing that the library services of the Commonwealth which have grown up without formal provisions since Federation should now be the subject of legislation by this Parliament. But we are also looking to the future in that we seek to define the functions and role of an institution which will increasingly play a national role of the greatest importance similar to that of the great national libraries in other countries.

The existing National Library collections and services are already widely used throughout Australia and are increasingly known abroad. Members are aware that they grew directly from the Library of the Commonwealth Parliament.

The first Federal Government and the first Joint Library Committee of Parliament gave imaginative and farsighted consideration to library needs and took expert advice both from within Australia and abroad. It is worth noting that by 1907 the idea of a national library had crystallised and was reported to Parliament as follows -

"The Library Committee is keeping before it the ideal of building up, for the time when Parliament shall be established in the Federal Capital, a great Public Library on the lines of the world-famed Library of Congress at Washington; such a Library, indeed, as shall be worthy of the Australian Nation; the home of the literature, not of a State, or of a period, but of the world, and of all time ..."

The development of such collections was limited during the first 27 years in Melbourne both by the resources available and by the presence of the excellent collections of the Public Library of Victoria and of the Library of the Parliament of Victoria in whose premises the Library functioned. However successive Library Committees were active in collecting and publishing material of Australian interest.

The Petherick Collection Act of 1911 brought to the national collection a great contribution of Australiana. It was developments such as these, culminating in the purchase of the notable collection of Captain Cook manuscripts, which led the Library Committee in 1923 to adopt the name "Commonwealth National Library" by which the institution has been increasingly known since.

It is important to remember that these national collections and services and many others which have developed since which are in fact records of Australian life and achievement have not been separated from the collections and services for the Parliament itself. The need for some identification of the extra Parliamentary services of the Library was recognised as early as 1935 when a sum was placed on the Estimates of the Prime Minister's Department for the purposes of the National Library. In explaining the new item the Minister representing the Prime Minister said that -

"because of the Australia wide nature of these services, which are of benefit to scholars and libraries throughout

the Commonwealth, it is not thought fitting that appropriation for them should continue to be made on the vote for Parliament."

As these services developed and their cost increased, the Prime Minister became responsible to Parliament for the greater part of library expenditure. At the same time the Presiding Officers were becoming increasingly responsible for library matters outside their normal sphere of interest.

2. The Paton Committee's Report

By 1956 the Government felt that the time had come to review the functions and the form of control of this growing research and reference institution which was discharging nation wide responsibilities. It therefore set up a representative Committee on the whole question and to advise on the future development of the library.

The National Library Inquiry Committee, under the chairmanship of Sir George Paton, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, included three members of Parliament representing all parties and both Houses. The Report of the Committee was tabled and ordered to be printed and the Government is most indebted to the Committee for its work.

Its main recommendations were as follows -

- there should be a Parliamentary Library and a National Library of Australia, each to be a separate institution, though closely related to achieve maximum efficiency and economy;
- the Parliamentary Library should be controlled, as at present, by the Presiding Officers of Parliament with the advice of a Joint Committee of Members of both Houses;
- the National Library should be controlled by a body with substantial responsibility for its development;
- the present Division of the Library concerned with the records and archives of the Commonwealth Government should become a separate agency of Government under the control of a Director, within an appropriate Department, the Minister for which should appoint a small committee for his guidance;
- the National Library should be provided as soon as possible with a building appropriate to its functions
- meanwhile the separation should be put into effect so far as possible;
- during this time the positions of Parliamentary Librarian and National Librarian should be filled by the one person;
- an examination should be made as soon as possible by the body controlling the National Library into the desirability of securing a greater co-ordination of Commonwealth Government Library Services.

As these recommendations appealed to the Government as providing a satisfactory basis for future development it set up an Interdepartmental Committee in 1959 to advise on the detailed measures necessary to make them effective.

The Committee worked in the closest association with the Presiding Officers and the Parliamentary Library Committee whose co-operation and assistance have been most helpful to the Government in reaching the decisions on which the present Bill is based.

3. The Government's consideration of the Matter

In reaching the conclusions to which the present Bill seeks to give effect, the Government has been greatly assisted by having before it the views of the Paton Committee, of the Interdepartmental Committee, and of the Parliamentary Library Committee. The Government gave special consideration to the following matters -

- the separation of Government archives from the National Library;
- the maintenance of library services to Parliament
- the functions of the National Library
- the form of control of the National Library.

I should like to say a few words on each of these matters, before passing on to some of the more detailed matters dealt with in the Bill.

First, Archives.

Until 1942 the records and archives of the Departments and authorities of the Commonwealth Government were wholly under the control of the agencies which created them. Administrative arrangements were then made which brought archives and semi-current records under the Ministerial control of the Prime Minister, advised by a Commonwealth Archives Committee of historians and senior officials presided over by Dr. C.E.W. Bean, Official Historian of the first World War. The Archives themselves were provisionally administered, initially by the Commonwealth National Library and the Australian War Memorial jointly and more recently by the Library alone. During this time systems have been developed, in co-operation with Government Departments, to bring the Archives together and under systematic control.

The Government reached the conclusion that, as these Archives are essentially a collection of the Government's own papers, many of which must remain confidential until at least a certain time had elapsed, they should come directly under the control of a Departmental authority as recommended by the Paton Committee, rather than under the Governing Body of the National Library.

My own experience has convinced me that this is desirable. I attach great importance to the necessity for effective control over the disclosure of archives, particularly those of a private or semi-private nature. In my time as Prime Minister I have had applications made to me by authors and other people for access to certain documents written by my predecessors. When I have found that the document involved in a particular case has been marked "confidential" or "private", I have always said that it could not be disclosed unless the person who wrote it was available to give his consent or his personal representatives expressed their views on the matter. That, I think, is the proper approach.

Whether any part of the non-governmental archives in the possession of the National Library should pass to the

Archives Organisation is, we think, a matter which can best be left to the National Library Council and the Archival Organisation to consider. In any event there must always be the closest co-operation between the two authorities.

Next, as to Parliament. The Government has been concerned to ensure that the development of the National Library as a separate institution should not prejudice, but rather strengthen, the reference and reading services available to the Parliament itself. The Government agrees that the Parliament of the Commonwealth needs the best library service that can be provided for it. Members should be able to draw with freedom and confidence on facts and opinions affecting the important public issues with which they have to deal.

The Bill therefore imposes a special responsibility in Section 6 on the governing body of the National Library to provide services to the Parliament. The nature and extent of these will clearly depend on the needs of the Parliament and on arrangements made from time to time between the respective governing bodies. Co-operation between these bodies, which will necessarily be most close during the period of separation of collections and services, will be greatly assisted by the presence on the National Library Council of two members of Parliament. This will be facilitated by the fact that, at least during this period, the one person will occupy the positions of National and Parliamentary Librarian.

The provisions in the Bill to enable the transfer of much of existing collections and services to the National Library will, we believe, enable the Parliamentary Library to retain and develop specialised services and a specialised collection of material designed to meet the particular requirements of the Parliament.

The statement of functions in Section 6 of the Bill is a very general one. It reflects the Library's present activities but provides for their development. This bill is so drafted as to permit and encourage the Council to adapt the growth of the National Library of Australia to national needs as they develop and in the fullest co-operation with other authorities providing library services.

Members will be aware of the powers and responsibilities for the provision of basic library services for the people. The remarkable progress of recent years which has brought free public library services to so many local communities throughout Australia for the first time reflect great credit on State and local governments. Universities libraries are also being greatly encouraged, and many public authorities and private organisations, including business firms, have also set up libraries. Together these libraries, which co-operate freely, make up a national system of library services which can be greatly strengthened through the development of a great national library. Already much is being done in association with the Australian Advisory Council on Bibliographical Services which represents all major libraries in Australia. Union catalogues are being compiled which will ultimately reveal to inquirers the location of any important book or periodical in the country.

As to the control of the National Library, the bill seeks to establish the library on a formal basis as a body corporate. The arrangements follow the pattern for such bodies and the provisions are broadly similar to those of other government instrumentalities in related fields. The intention is that the affairs of the library will be effectively under the control of a small council of nine representatives and experienced men and women. As honorable members know, the

council has already been established on an interim basis, with Dr. A. Grenfell Price as chairman, two members of Parliament - the President of the Senate (Sir Alister McMullin) and the honorable member for Parkes (Mr. Haylen) - and six others: Mr. K.B. Myer; Dr. H.S. Wyndham; Mr. Justice Crisp, of Tasmania; Associate Professor Kathleen Fitzpatrick; Professor L.G. Huxley, the new Vice-Chancellor of the Australian National University; and Mr. E.J.B. Foxcroft, of my own department, who is a man of great and special interest in these matters. This council has already met, and the Government has had the benefit of its advice, and that of the parliamentary Library Committee, in framing this bill. The Government is confident that the National Library will flourish under the control of this council, comprising as it does a group of people who are eminent and experienced in many walks of life in the Australian community.

There are some other provisions of the bill which I should perhaps mention. It makes the normal provision, as I have said, for a council controlling a corporate body. It is the view of the Government that the library should be a substantially autonomous body, with ministerial responsibility limited wherever possible. The finance - which will be provided, of course, by annual appropriation - the staffing - which will come under the Public Service Act - and the other matters provided for in the bill all are quite consistent with the substantial autonomy of the council in the discharge of its responsibilities.

We then think about a National Library building, Sir. We are under enormous pressure in Canberra in relation to building. This library is a going - and growing - concern, with some 500,000 books, as well as pictorial material, maps, films and so on. All these things lack a suitable building. At present, the library is accommodated in various places in a makeshift and highly inconvenient fashion and, I would have thought, in rather dangerous situations, some material being in a factory building in this city and other material being in these elegant igloos here.

Mr. Thompson: There is a good road to the library.

Mr. MENZIES: Yes. That is one thing. The Government has agreed that design and planning work for a new National Library building should begin, and the interim council is now discussing requirements with the National Capital Development Commission. The Government is very much aware that the library is experiencing acute difficulties in its day-to-day work and that these will increase as the collections grow, and therefore we are keen to see a suitable building. I cannot hold out any particular date to honorable members. The first thing to do in this matter - it will not be simple but will require a lot of work - is to have consultations between the council and the National Capital Development Commission in relation to design and requirements.

It may occur to some honorable members that the matter of copyright should be dealt with, because one of the oldest concepts of a national library which has persisted and has been adopted by many countries, including our own, is that a national library is the proper place to collect and preserve, for current and especially future use, material of all kinds illustrating the life and achievements of the people. This activity is usually supported by the law of copyright deposit, and provision was made in the Copyright Act 1912 for such deposit of copyright work in the library of the Commonwealth Parliament. The Paton Committee recommended that

this privilege be transferred to the National Library. All I need say, Sir, is that this is just one aspect of the copyright law. Together with others, it is receiving the Government's attention. The Attorney-General (Sir. Garfield Barwick) would like to have a comprehensive piece of legislation on that matter. We propose that until that is produced the material continue to be deposited in the library of the Parliament. It can be transferred to the National Library as we adopt the change.

Mr. Beazley - I should like to ask a question about the site for the new National Library building. Is it to be down by the lake?

MR. MENZIES - I cannot tell the honorable member. I have had it said to me - with what authority, I do not know - that the building would be near the lake and on the flank, so to speak, of the proposed new Parliament House. But I have seen so many other things that have to be done in Canberra that I have not allowed my mind to speculate so much.

Mr. Haylen - the right honorable gentleman has refused to be out-flanked, as it were.

MR. MENZIES- Yes.

The Government's aim in giving the National Library a statutory basis and a wide charter is to allow it to play a significant and appropriate part in the Australian Library system and in Australian life generally. This, as I do not need to emphasize to the House, is of great importance, Sir. We have, we think, done a good deal - and so have governments over a long time - to intensify research and inquiry through universities and through a variety of research bodies and agencies of government. The development of library resources is a necessary and natural corollary.

I think that before I conclude I should pay a special tribute to the successive Library Committees of this Parliament. These committees have over many years, by their far-sighted policies, laid the groundwork for the institution which this bill, when it is passed into law, will make a reality.
