



Building the New Generation National Library (C - Epilogue)

On 29 April 2009, Richard Worth, New Zealand's Minister responsible for the National Library, announced "the Government has decided to scale back the revamp of the National Library's Wellington building but will ensure the nation's treasures are protected by increasing storage, fixing leaks, upgrading equipment and addressing deferred maintenance."¹

Instead of an estimated costing that had risen to \$90 million from the original \$69 million capital expenditure plus \$13 million operating costs, the government would now spend \$52 million on the revamp. This included \$35 million in capital spending and \$17 million in operational spending over the next four years.

Dr Worth said the Government had been forced to reconsider the previous government's decision in light of the international recession, and had made a responsible decision that would address the critical problems the Library faced. Relocation of the Library's collections, a process already started, would continue, with the Library assuring him that care and protection of the heritage collections would be paramount.

"The scaled back project would require the design work to be revisited."²

In announcing the changes to staff National Librarian Penny Carnaby was very clear

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¹ <http://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/govt+scale+back+national+library+revamp> downloaded 7/5/2009

² Ibid

that the change to the building redevelopment programme did not compromise the New Generation National Library strategy.

“The modernisation of the National Library was always much more than a building, and we will continue to work hard to deliver a 21st century library with services that will be relevant and responsive to the next generation of New Zealanders,” she said.

The announcement came during a period when other departments and agencies, in line with the government’s request for cost savings during a time of recession, were also announcing reductions in services and in some cases staffing. Unlike other departments, however, the Library’s redevelopment plans had been subjected to published criticism, with the new building described as a “digital Disneyland” (in an opinion piece contributed by one-time Turnbull Librarian Jim Traue, also a vocal critic of changes proposed to the library in 1999).³ The nationally circulated *Listener* magazine editorialised about the “monstrous extravagance” of the proposal to turn the library into a digital “penny arcade”.

The magazine’s letters pages featured a more diverse range of views about the impact, validity and value of the digital environment to an institution like the National Library. Elsewhere in the media, some robust arguments were made for the decision to move to a digitally-based future, in particular as it opened up access to the treasures of the Turnbull.

As scientist Simon Nathan wrote to the *Dominion Post*, digital resources such as Tapuhi, the online catalogue to the Turnbull collections,⁴ “are a reminder that Alexander Turnbull gifted the library to the people of New Zealand, not just to those who live in Wellington”.

“Digitisation is not [a] dirty word... but a blessing to many in the research community. In 2009 the Turnbull Library is accessible to many more researchers than in the past.”

³ <http://www.stuff.co.nz/opinion/2333070/From-library-to-digital-Disneyland> downloaded 8/5/09

⁴ <http://www.stuff.co.nz/opinion/2347476/Mass-digitisation-only-way-to-go>