

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

FOR WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION NO 510

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Dr A. Lotriet (DA) to ask the Minister of Arts and Culture:

Whether (a) document preservation has been endangered in any way or (b) damaged during the renovations of the Archives Repository in Pietermaritzburg; if so, (i) what are the relevant details and (ii) what steps have been taken to prevent this from occurring during any other renovations?"

NW623E

REPLY:

PIETERMARITZBURG ARCHIVES REPOSITORY

(a) Yes

(b) Yes

(i)

1. The archives function in KwaZulu-Natal was transferred to the province in 2001, but responsibility for the infrastructure was not included at the same time.

Therefore the renovation of the archives repository building in Pietermaritzburg is being undertaken by the National Department of Public Works.

2. The renovation of the Archives Repository in Pietermaritzburg was aimed at bringing the building to meet minimum standards for storage of archival material and address preservation related matters. The scope of work included all corrective measures to be taken so that the building will provide the prescribed protection to the archival material and also to contribute towards the long-term preservation of this heritage collection which has long been compromised due to the dilapidated condition of the building. These corrective measures include the following:
 - Replacement of the entire roof
 - Replacement of the fire protection system
 - Replacement of the air quality control systems (HVAC)
 - Revamping of the entire electrical system
 - Damp proofing and underground drainage system
3. When the renovations project started in 2007, the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Archives Service had to continue providing the services in the building and the renovations programme had to be developed around service delivery. To mitigate against the risk to the collections and service delivery, collections from two top floors were relocated to an off-site commercial document storage facility to allow the contractors to move material around as they worked throughout the building.
4. There was an incident where the contractor had removed the roof sheeting and left the roof open over the weekend and rain resulted in water damage to parts of the office block. Only two volumes of archivalia were affected but these were dried and the damage was very minimal. The renovation project

ran into contractual challenges between the contractor and the employer (DPW) which then resulted in the contract being eventually terminated.

5. The termination of the contract exposed the repository to certain service delivery, protection and preservation challenges. The process of appointing a new contractor and the follow-on renovation process took several months (scheduled for finalisation in April 2010) and in order to ensure the protection and preservation of the holdings it was recommended that the entire holdings and services of the Archive Repository in Pietermaritzburg be moved out of the building to a safe off-site location.
6. Conditions for the storage and transportation of the records have been developed by the National Archives and the commercial storage company has made various adaptations to bring the facility in line with minimum standards for the storage of records. Therefore the completion of the renovations work on the Archives Repository in Pietermaritzburg will not compromise the preservation of the records during the renovation work. The records will only return after the renovation work is complete and regular monitoring and inspection of the storage facility will be conducted until the return of the holdings to the renovated building.

(ii)

The National Archives has learned a great deal as a result of the experience gained with the renovations in Pietermaritzburg including the need to move staff and archival records off-site during renovations. This has resulted in the staff of the National Film Video and Sound Archives in Pretoria being moved into the Old State Library building while the Film Archives buildings are being renovated.

