

## Introduction

- 1.1 Section 16 of the *Public Works Act 1969* (the Act) requires that the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works report to the Parliament annually on its proceedings during the preceding calendar year. This is the Sixty-fifth Annual Report and covers the work of the Thirty-third Committee for the period 1 January 2001 to 8 October 2001 when the House of Representatives was dissolved for the election and the Parliament was prorogued.
- 1.2 This Report has four chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the Committee – its role and functions. Chapter 2 provides a summary of the Reports tabled by the Committee in the year ended 31 December 2001, together with the Government responses to each report. Chapter 3 includes a report on the 2001 National Conference of Australian Parliamentary Public Works Committees hosted by the Committee in August 2001. Issues raised in Committee reports during 2001 are highlighted in Chapter 4.

## Role

- 1.3 The Act sets out the duties of the Public Works Committee. Its major statutory requirement is to consider each public work referred to it and to report the Committee's recommendations and conclusions to both Houses of the Parliament.
- 1.4 The Act empowers the Committee to comment fully on each public work referred to it. In particular, the Committee comments on the ways and means that a Commonwealth agency proposes to undertake a public

work. The Committee is also empowered under the Act to recommend any alterations to a given proposal, if in its opinion, that ensures a more cost-effective outcome.

## Establishment

- 1.5 The Parliament appointed the Thirty-third Committee on 8 December 1998. Section 7 of the Act provides that the Committee comprise nine members, including a Chair and Vice-Chair.
- 1.6 The Committee is supported by a secretariat with staff employed by the Department of the House of Representatives. The secretariat also supported the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs during the 39<sup>th</sup> Parliament. Staff who supported the Public Works Committee during 2001 were:

Secretary	Mr Trevor Rowe
Inquiry Secretaries	Ms Gillian Gould
	Ms Marie Kawaja
	Ms Gemma Stone
	Mr Peter Roberts
	Mr Ian Ireland
	Mr Stephen Boyd
Administrative Staff	Ms Maria Pappas
	Ms Tiana Gray

## References to the Committee

- 1.7 The Committee receives its public works referrals by means of a motion moved in either House of the Parliament.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the Governor-General may, at any time when the Parliament is not in session or when the House of Representatives is adjourned for a period exceeding one month or for an indefinite period refer a public work to the Committee.<sup>2</sup>

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1 *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, Section 18 (1).

2 *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, Section 18 (4).

During 2001 all references to the Committee were made in the House of Representatives on motions moved by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration.

- 1.8 A public work referred to the Committee under Section 18 of the Act cannot commence before a report of the Committee concerning the work has been presented to both Houses of the Parliament.<sup>3</sup> The limit of cost for a public work referred to the Committee is currently set at \$6 million.<sup>4</sup>

## The Committee's Operations

### Conduct of Inquiries

- 1.9 When a public work has been referred to the Committee, the proponent Commonwealth agency provides a statement of evidence (submission) to the Committee, which provides full details of the proposed project.
- 1.10 The Committee advertises these referrals, as inquiries to be undertaken by the Committee, and seeks submissions from organisations and members of the public with a specific interest in the particular public work.
- 1.11 Following receipt of submissions from relevant stakeholders, the Committee inspects the proposed site for the work and holds a public hearing as close to the proposed site as possible. The public hearing provides an opportunity for the proponent agency to elaborate on points made in its submission and to respond to any concerns raised by other stakeholders. The public hearing also gives those who have made written submissions, and who have been invited to give oral evidence, an opportunity to expand on matters of concern.
- 1.12 The Committee presents its findings in the form of a report to Parliament and makes recommendations either to proceed or not to proceed with the project under investigation. The Committee's reports are available through:
- legal deposit libraries;
  - the Commonwealth Government Info Shop in all capital cities;
  - the Committee's secretariat; and

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<sup>3</sup> *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, Section 18 (5).

<sup>4</sup> *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, Section 18 (8). The threshold was increased from \$2 million in 1985.

- the Committee's webpage: [www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/pwc](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/pwc)

- 1.13 While the Government will normally consider recommendations made by the Committee as soon as reports are tabled, the Committee has adopted the practice of forwarding reports to those Ministers whose portfolios are responsible for the implementation of the Committee's recommendations. Reports are also forwarded to relevant Commonwealth agency heads for information and, when appropriate, for response to recommendations.
- 1.14 Each report is forwarded to the Minister for Finance and Administration as the relevant portfolio Minister for public works.

## **Government responses**

- 1.15 The Government normally responds to each report by way of an expediency motion in the House of Representatives. Current practice is for the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration to move the expediency motion and in doing so detail the Government's response to the Committee's recommendations. Following the passing of an expediency motion, a public work may proceed.