PREFACE

On 10 May 2005, the Senate referred to the Committee the examination of estimates of proposed expenditure for the financial year 2005-2006. The Committee is responsible for the examination of the Attorney-General's portfolio and the Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs portfolio. The portfolio budget statements were tabled in the Senate on 10 May 2005.

The Committee was required to report on its consideration of the budget estimates on or before 20 June 2004.

Estimates hearings

The Committee met in public session from 23 May to 27 May 2005 for a total of 56 hours 27 minutes.

Recording of proceedings

The Hansard of the proceedings records the examination of estimates and may be accessed through the internet at:

http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard

The Hansard is also available on the Parliamentary database.

An index of the Hansard for each portfolio appears at Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

Ministers

The Committee heard evidence from Senator the Hon Chris Ellison, Minister for Justice and Customs who represented the Attorney-General and from Senator the Hon Amanda Vanstone, Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs.

Officers from both departments and associated agencies also appeared. The Committee thanks Ministers and officers for their assistance.

Questions on Notice

The Committee notes that the Standing Orders require the Committee to set dates for the lodgement of any written answers or additional information and for supplementary hearings. The Committee resolved that the deadline for the submission of written answers and additional information by both portfolios would be close of business on Friday, 15 July 2005.

Report

In this report, the Committee draws the attention of the Senate to issues and concerns raised in the five days of hearings. These included:

> The Committee inquired into the costs associated with security arrangements in a number of courts including the NNTT, Family, Federal and High Courts, the Administrative Appeals Tribunal and the Federal Magistrates Court. The Committee was interested to hear not only the cost associated with any upgrade but also the type of security and related equipment being considered.
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> The APF was questioned regarding investigations into the unauthorised disclosure of government documents/information. Concerns were also raised by the Committee regarding the potential impact on the overseas deployment of AFP officers of a PNG Supreme Court ruling. The ruling effectively removed prosecutorial immunity from AFP officers serving in PNG.
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> The Committee questioned officers from DIMIA extensively on a number of issues including the conduct and expected duration of the Palmer inquiry and the deportation of an Australian citizen from Australia to the Philippines. Both Minister Ellison and Minister Vanstone undertook on notice to provide the Committee with advice concerning the authority by which the Palmer inquiry can receive documents classified as 'law-enforcement-in-confidence.'
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> Officers from DIMIA were also questioned on the role of the newly appointed National Indigenous Council and costs associated with the Council's operation.