

No. 136

for the sitting period 20-30 September 1999

5 October 1999

LEGISLATION

The Electoral and Referendum Amendment Bill (No. 2) 1998, which was last dealt with in May, was reconsidered on 27 September in respect of two Senate amendments disagreed to by the government in the House of Representatives and proposed substitute amendments, relating to assisted voting and loans to political parties. The question that the Senate amendments not be insisted on and the substitute amendments be agreed to was divided, and the Senate accepted one set of substitute amendments but insisted on its other amendment, relating to assisted voting, rejected the substitute amendments and made further amendments to the bill. This outcome was then accepted by the government, allowing the bill finally to pass.

The Further 1998 Budget Measures Legislation Amendment (Social Security) Bill 1999 was the subject of extensive debate and was finally passed on 22 September with both amendments and requests for amendments, the latter involving increased expenditure from standing appropriations in acts amended by the bill. This bill was not resolved before the end of the period.

The National Health Amendment (Lifetime Health Cover) Bill 1999, containing the government's measures to encourage lifetime health insurance, was also extensively considered and passed on 27 September with lengthy amendments originating from both government and Opposition. All of the Senate's amendments were accepted by the government.

Debate on the Superannuation Contributions and Termination Payments Taxes Legislation Amendment Bill 1999 on 29 September provided a demonstration that government drafting of amendments is not always faultless. Some government amendments neglected to cover one of the principal acts which needed to be amended, and further amendments had to be hastily

produced while the debate was in progress. Opposition amendments had avoided this error. The bill was passed with considerable amendments which were accepted by the government.

Two supplementary appropriation bills to provide money for greenhouse gas emission policies and the book industry assistance plan were debated on 29 September but not finalised. Because the content of these bills was not referred to legislation committees for estimates hearings, there is no limitation on consideration of them in the Senate (standing order 115(4)).

The Australian Tourist Commission Amendment Bill 1999, a non-controversial bill considered on Thursday, 23 September, was the subject of a successful amendment moved by Senator Ridgeway relating to ecological and cultural impact of tourist development.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION DISALLOWED

The Senate disallowed on 23 September a set of regulations relating to petroleum retail sites. The Senate was informed that one oil company, in anticipation of legislation to expand the number of retail sites permitted to be owned by the companies, had exceeded its quota of sites and the regulations sought to validate this situation. Their disallowance was widely predicted, and there was even a suggestion that the disallowance motion be passed as a formal motion without debate, but debate was insisted on by the Opposition.

ORDERS FOR PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

After a great deal of controversy about a government paper on reform of the welfare system, which was said to have been produced and then withheld, an order for the production of the document was passed on 30 September, with a deadline of 12 October.

On the same day, the government produced a report on the appointment of a person to the Civil Aviation Safety Authority Board which had been ordered on 12 August and which the government said did not exist at that time (see Bulletin No. 135, p. 1).

PRIVILEGES COMMITTEE

The Privileges Committee on 29 September produced its 79th report relating to the question of whether misleading statements had been made to the Senate in the course of the Colston affair in May 1997. The committee at that time had been required not to proceed with its inquiry until police investigations and the prosecution of former Senator Colston for fraud were concluded. The committee reported that, the Director of Public Prosecutions having dropped the prosecution of Senator Colston because of his ill-health, the committee should

not proceed with its inquiry. This recommendation was adopted by the Senate on the following day.

COMMITTEES

After a great deal of negotiation, but still with controversy about the terms of reference, the Select Committee on Superannuation, now called the Select Committee on Superannuation and Financial Services, was re-established on 22 September on the motion of Senator Allison. An unusual feature of the resolution of appointment was that it provided for the chair to be appointed by the Senate. Senator Watson was appointed chair by the Senate on 30 September.

The following committee reports were presented during the period:

Date tabled	Committee	Title
20.9	Economics Legislation	Report—Superannuation Contributions and Termination Payments Taxes Legislation Amendment Bill 1999
“	Community Affairs Legislation	Additional Information—Estimates 1999-2000
22.9	Scrutiny of Bills	14 th Report and Alert Digest No. 14 of 1999
“	Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Legislation	Additional Information—Estimates 1999-2000
“	Community Affairs Legislation	Additional Information—National Health Amendment (Lifetime Health Cover) Bill 1996
23.9	Community Affairs Legislation	Additional Information—Social Security Administration Bills
27.9	Community Affairs Legislation	Additional Information—Social Security Administration Bills
“	Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References	Report—Hinchinbrook Channel
28.9	Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation	Report—Stevedoring Levy (Collection) Amendment Bill 1999
29.9	Privileges	79 th Report—Possible false or misleading statements tabled in the Senate
“	Economics Legislation	Additional Information—Estimates 1999-2000
“	Scrutiny of Bills	Alert Digest No. 15 of 1999
30.9	Scrutiny of Bills	15 th Report

Date tabled	Committee	Title
30.9	Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References	Interim Report—East Timor
“	Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation	Report—Veterans’ Affairs Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 1) 1999
“	Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References	Report—Regional Employment and Unemployment

TIMOR DEBATE

Tuesday, 21 September, was entirely devoted to debate on a motion supporting the dispatch of the United Nations peacekeeping forces to East Timor. The motion was passed that evening.

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