

The Year in Review

Overview of Activities

- 2.1 Committee activities during 2003 comprised:
- 18 private meetings;
 - 16 public hearings; and
 - 10 inspections.
- 2.2 Committee members also attended a PWC Information Day for the Department of Defence (Defence) in Canberra and the National Conference of Public Works and Environment Committees in Perth and Karratha, WA. These activities are discussed in Chapter 4 of this report.

Committee Inquiries

- 2.3 During 2003 the Committee conducted inquiries into 16 public works. A summary of the issues raised and conclusions reached during the Committee's investigations is given in Chapter 3.

Works Exempt from Committee Scrutiny

- 2.4 The Act provides that certain works and organisations may be exempt from scrutiny by the Committee. Such exemption may be granted because:
- the work is urgent;
 - the work is being undertaken for defence purposes and scrutiny of the work would be contrary to the public interest;
 - the Governor-General is satisfied that the proponent agency is engaged in trading or competition with another body; or
 - the work is repetitive; that is, substantially similar to other works that have been, or are being, carried out.
- 2.5 In 2003 four works were exempt from Committee scrutiny. The circumstances of each exemption are briefly outlined below.

Repairs to Living-in Accommodation, Holsworthy Barracks, NSW

- 2.6 On 6 February 2003, having reviewed information on proposed repairs to living-in accommodation at Holsworthy barracks, NSW, as supplied by Defence, the Committee wrote to the Honourable Peter Slipper MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration, stating that it considered the work to be a repetitive work under Section 18(8a) of the Act, and recommended that the work be declared as such in the *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette*.
- 2.7 Mr Slipper concurred with the Committee's decision and the work was subsequently declared a repetitive work by notification in the *Gazette* on 26 March 2003.¹

Maintenance to Road Infrastructure, Townsville Field Training Area, Qld

- 2.8 In May 2003 Defence notified the Committee of its intention to undertake maintenance of road infrastructure at its field training area in Townsville, Qld, and requested that the works be exempt from Committee scrutiny due to their repetitive nature.

¹ *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette*, No. GN 12, 26 March 2003

- 2.9 The Committee reviewed the detailed information provided by Defence and recommended that the proposal be declared a repetitive work by notification in the *Gazette*.
- 2.10 Notification of the work was published in the *Gazette* by the Honourable Peter Slipper MP on 30 July 2003.²

Australian Pavilion, 2005 World Exposition, Aichi, Japan

- 2.11 On 16 September 2003 DFAT wrote to the Committee outlining a proposal to erect an Australian pavilion at the World Exposition 2005 to be held in Aichi, Japan. In its letter, DFAT requested that the work be exempt from Committee scrutiny in order that the project might be completed within the required timeframe.
- 2.12 Following a comprehensive briefing on the proposal, the Committee agreed that the work was urgent and wrote to the Honourable Peter Slipper MP recommending that the project be exempt from Committee scrutiny under Section 18(8b) of the Act.
- 2.13 In a letter to Mr Slipper of 9 October 2003, the Committee noted that two previous Expo pavilions had likewise been exempt on the grounds of urgency and suggested that the Government might in future give early consideration to Australia's participation in these events to allow time for appropriate scrutiny of expenditure on the works.
- 2.14 On 25 November 2003 the House of Representatives passed a motion that, by reason of the urgent nature of the work, it was expedient that it should be carried out without referral to the Committee.

Defence Imagery and Geospatial Organisation, Defence Building Refit, Russel, ACT

- 2.15 The proposed refit and expansion of the Defence Imagery and Geospatial Organisation (DIGO) premises at Russell Offices, ACT at an estimated cost of \$14.9 million was brought to the Committee's attention on 28 October 2003. Defence informed the Committee of its intention to obtain an Order from the Governor-General to exempt the work from Committee scrutiny under Section 18 8(c) of the Act.

² Commonwealth of Australia Gazette, No. GN 30, 30 July 2003

- 2.16 On 6 November 2003 the Governor-General ordered that, as the proposed DIGO works were for defence purposes, the reference of the works to the Committee would be contrary to the public interest.

Concurrent Documentation

- 2.17 Concurrent documentation is the preparation of contract documentation before the Committee has completed its inquiry and reported to Parliament.
- 2.18 In order to avoid unnecessarily pre-empting the outcome of the Committee's deliberations, agencies should only seek approval for concurrent documentation if the project has a strict deadline that cannot be met by any other means.
- 2.19 During 2003 concurrent documentation was sought for eight of the works referred to the Committee.

Proposed Fit-out of New Leased Premises for the Bureau of Meteorology, 700 Collins Street, Docklands, Melbourne, Vic

- 2.20 On 12 February 2003 the Bureau of Meteorology wrote to the Committee requesting concurrent documentation for the fit-out of its new Docklands premises. The Bureau stated that it needed to award a number of minor communications contracts prior to the completion of the Committee's report in order to meet its relocation deadline of 31 March 2004.
- 2.21 The Committee considered the Bureau's request and granted approval of concurrent documentation on 13 February 2003.

Provision of Facilities for the Australian Capital Territory Multi User Depot, HMAS Harman, ACT

- 2.22 Following the public hearing into the proposed HMAS Harman Multi User Depot (MUD), Defence requested that the Committee grant approval for concurrent documentation on the grounds that the early completion of the MUD would allow Defence to minimise lease-back costs by sooner vacating RAAF Base Fairbairn.
- 2.23 The Committee agreed to Defence's request on 19 June 2003.

Provision of Facilities for the Collocation and Re-equipping of the 1st Aviation Regiment at Robertson Barracks, Darwin, NT

- 2.24 Defence sought permission for the early commencement of design documentation and tendering for the Robertson Barracks works in order that the construction phase might begin with the next 'dry season' in March-April 2004.
- 2.25 The Committee gave its approval for documentation to proceed on 14 August 2003.

Construction of a New Chancery Building for the Australian High Commission at Colombo, Sri Lanka

- 2.26 The Committee granted approval of concurrent documentation for the construction of the Colombo chancery on 19 June 2003. This action was taken to allow DFaT to commence works as planned in mid-2003.

Construction of a New Chancery, New Delhi, India

- 2.27 DFaT sought approval to commence documentation in relation to the construction of the New Delhi chancery as any delay would affect the timely completion of the works and, thereby, the speedy redress of accommodation and security problems at the existing chancery.
- 2.28 The Committee agreed to DFaT's request on 11 September 2003.

Refurbishment of Staff Apartments, Australian Embassy Complex, Paris, France

- 2.29 Following the public hearing into the Paris apartments proposal, DFaT wrote to the Committee requesting concurrent documentation to ensure the early commencement of refurbishment and the expeditious implementation of interim accommodation arrangements.
- 2.30 The Committee considered DFaT's request and granted approval for the commencement of documentation activities on 11 September 2003.

RAAF Base Richmond Reinvestment Project, Richmond, NSW

- 2.31 Defence requested concurrent documentation for the Richmond Reinvestment Project to allow construction to commence at the beginning of 2004, and thereby to minimise project escalation costs.

- 2.32 The Committee granted approval for Defence to proceed with project documentation on 9 October 2003.

Proposed Redevelopment of Radiopharmaceutical Building No. 23 at Lucas Heights, Sydney, NSW

- 2.33 On 21 October 2003 the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO) wrote to the Committee requesting that concurrent documentation be granted for the redevelopment of Radiopharmaceutical Building Number 23 at Lucas Heights.
- 2.34 In its letter ANSTO explained that the project was subject to strict time constraints as the works had to be completed to coincide with the commissioning of the Replacement Research Reactor in 2005-06.
- 2.35 The Committee wrote to ANSTO granting its request on 31 October 2003.

Proposed Respecified Christmas Island Immigration Reception and Processing Centre

- 2.36 Following the public hearing into the respecified Christmas Island Immigration reception and Processing Centre (IRPC), the Department of Finance and Administration (DoFA) wrote to the Committee requesting approval to undertake concurrent documentation and short-listing activities prior to the tabling of the report.
- 2.37 DoFA wished to invite tenders for an early works package (comprising supplementary civil works, construction of a sewer line and the establishment of a plant nursery and storage warehouse) in December 2003 in order to meet the proposed project timeframe.
- 2.38 The Committee wrote to DoFA granting concurrent documentation for an early works package on 5 November 2003.