

Introduction

- 1.1 Under the *Public Works Committee Act 1969* (the Act), the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works is required to enquire into and report on public works referred to it through either house of Parliament. Referrals are generally made by a delegate of the Minister for Finance.
- 1.2 All public works that have an estimated cost exceeding \$15 million must be referred to the Committee and cannot be commenced until the Committee has made its report to Parliament and the House of Representatives receives that report and resolves that it is expedient to carry out the work.¹
- 1.3 Under the Act, a public work is a work proposed to be undertaken by the Commonwealth, or on behalf of the Commonwealth concerning:
 - the construction, alteration, repair, refurbishment or fitting-out of buildings and other structures;
 - the installation, alteration or repair of plant and equipment designed to be used in, or in relation to, the provision of services for buildings and other structures;
 - the undertaking, construction, alteration or repair of landscaping and earthworks (whether or not in relation to buildings and other structures);

¹ *Public Works Committee Act 1969* (the Act), Part III, Section 18(8). Exemptions from this requirement are provided for work of an urgent nature, defence work where it would be contrary to the public interest to conduct an open inquiry, repetitive work, and work undertaken by prescribed authorities listed in the regulations to the Act.

- the demolition, destruction, dismantling or removal of buildings, plant and equipment, earthworks, and other structures;
 - the clearing of land and the development of land for use as urban land or otherwise; and
 - any other matter declared by the regulations to be a work.²
- 1.4 The Act requires that the Committee consider and report on:
- the purpose of the work and its suitability for that purpose;
 - the need for, or the advisability of, carrying out the work;
 - whether the money to be expended on the work is being spent in the most cost effective manner;
 - the amount of revenue the work will generate for the Commonwealth, if that is its purpose; and
 - the present and prospective public value of the work.³
- 1.5 The Committee pays attention to these and any other relevant factors when considering the proposed work.

Matters addressed in this report

- 1.6 Agencies are required to seek the Committee's approval for any changes in scope or cost to approved projects. On occasion, significant changes in scope occur and the Committee will report on the matter in order to ensure that there is transparency in this process.
- 1.7 This report deals with a change in scope to the Murchison Regional Radio-astronomy Observatory (MRO) for the Australian SKA Pathfinder (ASKAP) project at Boolardy Station, WA and the Pawsey High Performance Computing Centre in Perth, WA.
- 1.8 The Committee received a written briefing outlining the proposed works on 23 June 2010 and conducted a public hearing with the CSIRO on 24 June 2010. The CSIRO subsequently provided a copy of advice received from the Australian Government Solicitor.
- 1.9 A list of witnesses at the public hearing is listed at Appendix A, the written brief is at Appendix B and the Australian Government Solicitor's advice is at Appendix C.

2 The Act, Section 5.

3 The Act, Section 17.