

Auditor-General for Australia



19 May 2009

Ms Sharon Grierson MP
Chair
Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Grierson

During the course of the Committee's inquiry into the *Role of the Auditor-General in scrutinising government advertising* on 13 May 2009, Mrs Bishop asked me for the details of the (advertising) campaign, or campaigns, which did not go ahead as a result of our comments. At the hearing I asked for time to reflect on the question.

By way of background, agencies commonly contact the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) to discuss our approach to dealing with campaigns when there is a prospect that their agency may be responsible for developing a campaign. We encourage early contact so that we are aware of possible campaigns and timing. As you may be aware, the Department of Finance and Deregulation has a role in assisting agencies in relation to campaign processes, and also encourages them to contact the ANAO as early as possible to discuss the requirements of the review process.

As you would expect, some of the early contacts by agencies do not progress beyond initial discussions as circumstances or priorities change, or it becomes apparent that the proposed activity does not fall within the ambit of the guidelines (eg: business-as-usual communications by agencies). Most discussions, however, do lead to the further development of campaigns which are the subject of review reports by the ANAO.

The campaign that I had in mind when responding to Mrs Bishop had progressed beyond initial discussions. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) had raised with us a proposed campaign on "Celebrating Teachers". The ANAO was provided with information concerning the strategy and scope of the proposed campaign, and we also discussed with the department a range of matters in relation to the guidelines, in particular, the importance of supporting research and cost-benefit analysis. Subsequent to these discussions and some email communications, DEEWR advised the ANAO that "based on your advice, timelines, and also on initial research findings" the department had decided to postpone the proposed campaign. In these circumstances, as the campaign was not developed further, no certificate was provided by the departmental Secretary and no review report was issued.

The Guidelines on Campaign Advertising provided a suitable frame of reference for DEEWR in making its decision to postpone the campaign, and our review activity in relation to the consideration of this campaign.

For your information, we are separately seeking legal advice on the interpretation of 'free from partisan promotion of government policy and political argument' in the context of the application of Guideline 3 of the Government's Guidelines, as requested by the Committee, and seeing if we can locate the judicial statement(s) referred to by Mrs Bishop.

I have copied this letter to the Secretaries of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, and Department of Finance and Deregulation for their information.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian McPhee', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ian McPhee
Auditor-General