

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### Referral and consideration of the bill

1.1 The International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill 2015 was introduced as a private senators' bill by Senator Rhiannon on 5 March 2015.<sup>1</sup> The Explanatory Memorandum for the bill states that:

[The bill] directs Commonwealth aid officials to consider the impact of any official development or humanitarian assistance in reducing gender equality.<sup>2</sup>

1.2 In her second reading speech, Senator Rhiannon argued that:

The measures set out in this Bill are needed to help recalibrate Australian aid to meet the needs of women and girls in low income countries. In some cases, projects with the simple aim of increasing economic activity may actually exacerbate gender inequality.<sup>3</sup>

1.3 Having originally been referred to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee,<sup>4</sup> on 12 May 2015 the bill was referred to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee for inquiry and report by 17 June 2015.<sup>5</sup> The deadline for reporting was extended until 17 September 2015.<sup>6</sup>

1.4 The reasons for referral initially cited by the Selection of Bills Committee were:

Two of the Millennium Development Goals (3 and 5) state the importance of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Our Foreign Minister has stated a recognition that the empowerment of women and girls is fundamental to promoting economic growth and stronger aid-recipient communities.

An inquiry offers the chance to investigate the following:

- Australia's official development and humanitarian assistance does not recognise that simply increasing economic activity in the recipient country fails to address the specific historical and cultural bases for gender equality.
- There is no legislated requirement that gender equality be considered in the delivery of aid programs, regardless of any stated intention.

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1 *Journals of the Senate*, 5 March 2015, pp 2261–2262.

2 *Explanatory Memorandum*, p. 2.

3 Second reading speech, *Senate Hansard*, 5 March 2015, p. 1287.

4 *Journals of the Senate*, 26 March 2015, p. 2459.

5 *Journals of the Senate*, 12 May 2015, p. 2557.

6 *Journals of the Senate*, 25 June 2015, p. 2831.

- In some cases, projects with a simple aim of increasing economic activity may indeed exacerbate these problems.<sup>7</sup>

### **Operation of the bill**

1.5 The bill has two substantive provisions. Clause 4 creates a duty for Commonwealth aid officials to have regard to how the provision of official development assistance will contribute to reducing inequality between persons of different gender. Commonwealth aid officials who make a decision relating to the provision of humanitarian assistance must have regard to any gender-related differences in the needs of those affected by the disaster or emergency so that those with specific needs can be accommodated.<sup>8</sup>

1.6 Clause 5 requires the Minister for Foreign Affairs to present to each House of Parliament a report 'setting out how, during the previous financial year, the Commonwealth used international aid to promote gender equality in recipient countries'. This report is to be presented annually, within 15 sitting days after the end of the financial year.

### **Conduct of inquiry**

1.7 The committee advertised the inquiry on its website. The committee also wrote to individuals and organisations likely to have an interest in the bill, drawing their attention to the inquiry and inviting them to make written submissions.

1.8 The committee received 16 submissions to the inquiry. These submissions are listed at Appendix 1, and are available on the committee's website. The committee held a public hearing on 14 August 2015. Witnesses who appeared at the public hearing are listed at Appendix 2.

### **Acknowledgements**

1.9 The committee thanks all those who assisted with the inquiry.

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7 Selection of Bills Committee, *Report No. 4 of 2015*, 6 March 2015, Appendix 13.

8 International Aid (Promoting Gender Equality) Bill 2015, s. 4.