

OPENING

The President (Senator the Hon. Kerry Sibraa) - Honourable senators, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, I am very pleased to welcome you to this seminar to mark the tenth anniversary of the Senate Standing Committee for the Scrutiny of Bills, the first such Committee to be established in the Commonwealth. I am delighted that so many colleagues from other parliaments within the Commonwealth of Australia have been able to join us today for the seminar which, I hope, will help to convince you of the value of a scrutiny of bills committee. In addition, I extend a particularly warm welcome to Lord Thurlow, a member of the House of Lords Select Committee which has been established to examine committee work of that House, including proposals for new committees. Lord Thurlow has come from the United Kingdom, accompanied by the Clerk to the Committee, Mr William Sleath, to see at first-hand how the Senate's Scrutiny of Bills Committee operates.

I am pleased to note that the Lords Committee's interest has been stimulated by contributions made by Australian delegates to the British Commonwealth Conference on Delegated Legislation, hosted by the British Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, held just two years ago. The worth of such contacts is reinforced by your presence, Lord Thurlow. I have recently been involved with one of your colleagues, Lord Tordoff, on a very important task - I suppose you could call it the Commonwealth scrutiny of elections committee - when we were together in Zambia, overseeing the election campaign. I know that he is a member of your Committee and he made an outstanding contribution to our task there.

As you will all be aware, the Senate Standing Committee for the Scrutiny of Bills was established on 19 November 1981. It is fair to say that, as with all bodies of this nature, its establishment was not without controversy. Indeed, it had to prove itself for an experimental period before its permanent appointment was assured. I shall leave the description of those early days to some of the people who were there and who will speak to you in the course of today's proceedings.

I must, however, take this opportunity to record the debt of gratitude which the Scrutiny of Bills Committee owes to its first chairman, the late Senator Alan Missen. His role in the establishment of the Committee was pivotal. He was not, however, alone in his endeavours, and I acknowledge on behalf of the Senate - and indeed the Parliament and the people - the debt owed to a number of people, both known and unknown, whose work has ensured that the Scrutiny of Bills Committee is the vibrant force that we celebrate here today.

This tenth anniversary provides a great opportunity both to reflect on the Committee's first 10 years and to contemplate what might happen in the next 10 years. The fact that so many of you here today are from other parliaments and have travelled great distances so that you may evaluate the scrutiny of bills process, offers hope that very soon the Committee will no longer be the only one of its kind.

It is now my great pleasure to introduce to you Professor Dennis Pearce, who will give the opening address. Professor Pearce is currently the Dean of the Faculty of Law at the Australian National University and is an acknowledged expert in the field of scrutiny of primary and delegated legislation. Immediately before resuming his professorial role, Professor Pearce was for several years the Commonwealth Ombudsman. However, he appears today principally in his capacity as the first legal adviser to the Scrutiny of Bills Committee. Those who know the workload involved have long acknowledged that without his commitment, insight and speedy advice, the experimental Committee might never have survived those early times.