

PART FIVE
THE INQUIRY

Background and conduct of the inquiry

Terms of reference and initiation of the inquiry

On 2 June 1976, the Senate agreed to a motion by Senator Peter Baume setting out the terms of reference which appear at the front of this report, on the reverse of the title page.

The inquiry was advertised in the national press on 9 June 1976, with advice that the Committee intended first to examine only points 1 and 2 of the terms of reference. The advertisements produced little response. Factors which contributed to this meagre and generally unproductive result were the breadth and complexity of the subject, lack of resources within some agencies for the preparation of submissions, and real fears by some about possible implications of the Committee's work.

In the initial stages, the Committee also wrote to a dozen Commonwealth Ministers seeking the assistance of Commonwealth authorities, to all State Premiers and to 229 non-government organisations, academics and individuals.

Ten out of fifteen Commonwealth authorities responded to invitations to present submissions, as did the New South Wales, Victorian, South Australian and Western Australian Governments. The Queensland and Tasmanian Governments provided no information, but assured us of their willingness to co-operate. The Tasmanian Government subsequently provided written material and offered witnesses if required.

After the Committee had decided to pursue points 3 and 4 of the terms of reference, an oral invitation to present a submission on these points was extended to representatives of the Department of Social Security at the public hearing held on 4 July 1978. This was followed by a further, written invitation on 11 September 1978. We believe that the functions of this Department are central to major concerns in the inquiry and regret that no submission on points 3 and 4 had been received by the time the final text of this report was settled early in 1979.

Of 218 non-government organisations invited to provide submissions, seventy-six responded. An additional twenty-seven organisations spontaneously forwarded material to us. Of eleven individuals approached, four responded, and another nine persons spontaneously provided information. A further nine submissions were received late in the inquiry.

We can only guess at the reasons why many of those to whom we wrote did not respond. In some instances, as we learned later, our letter had not been received; in others, pressure of work inhibited a response; in yet others, the reference was not considered to be relevant to the particular organisation.

Initially, there was considerable misunderstanding of our objectives and we noted a disposition on the part of some departments and organisations to treat the exercise as one emphasising a need for self-justification. The value of some early public hearings in three States was limited because organisations saw the visit of the Committee as an opportunity to display their activities rather than to address the issues raised by the reference.

Interruption of the inquiry

After the initial processing and assessment of submissions, the Committee was able to conduct only a limited number of public hearings before interrupting work on the reference at the end of October 1976 to concentrate its full attention on completing an inquiry into the problem of drug use in Australia which had been initiated earlier and had then reached a crucial stage. The report on that inquiry, entitled *Drug Problems in Australia—an intoxicated society?*, was presented to the Senate on 25 October 1977. An election campaign for both Houses of the Parliament which followed in November of the same year caused some further postponement of Committee activity.

The earlier work done on the evaluation reference had demonstrated the need for a review of our strategy. In particular, the Committee had found in the community a belief that the real purpose of the inquiry was to examine and evaluate individually a vast array of health and welfare programs and services. But this was not the Committee's intention at all. We were trying to determine, and to understand, what evaluation activity was occurring; by what means it was being undertaken; the nature of the responses to it; and, ultimately, the requirements for ongoing evaluation as an integral feature of the development of health and welfare programs and services. To state our purposes succinctly, we were attempting to evaluate evaluation.

Following reconsideration of the program early in 1978, and bearing in mind particularly the delay of more than twelve months in progress with the reference, the Committee determined that, in the circumstances, all four points of the terms of reference should be considered together. Where appropriate, this decision and the resumption of work on the reference were notified to interested parties. The active phase of collecting evidence was then resumed.

Gathering of evidence

Public hearings began in Adelaide on 28 September 1976 and continued in Perth, Brisbane, Rockhampton and Townsville over the next month. They resumed in 1978 on 4 July and concluded on 24 October. All these later hearings were held in Canberra. Altogether, 120 witnesses were heard at a total of twenty public hearings. Fifteen of these witnesses were representatives of organisations which had not responded to our original letter. We deliberately sought evidence from this group to satisfy ourselves that its views had been presented. In addition, 166 written submissions were received and considered, and a large volume of supporting material was gathered and studied.

Other activities

Over the period of the inquiry, members and staff of the Committee were able to attend a number of seminars and conferences on various aspects of evaluation in health and welfare services. These helped to augment the background of theory necessary for the work of the Committee and were also in themselves indicative of the developing general interest and involvement in evaluation. Participation in these seminars and conferences enabled the Committee to derive considerable benefit from contacts with numerous academics and professional workers actively engaged in administrative and operational work in a wide range of programs and services.

When reviewing the program for the inquiry in the early part of 1978, the Committee was fortunate enough to be able to bring together a selected group of experts for special discussions designed to clarify some important issues that were central to our strategies and plans. These discussions were of signal value in helping us to determine the program for completion of the inquiry.

In May 1978, in a further attempt to make the best possible use of the available pool of expertise, the Committee commissioned a series of papers on particular aspects of evaluation activity. The experts who undertook to write for us on those topics included academics with both Australian and international expertise, and professional persons with active experience in programs and services in the health and welfare fields. Their skills and experience covered the provider, agency and client levels of participation. The four expert papers received have provided valuable information and insight. At the time of settling the final text of this report early in 1979, three further papers were expected. We intend to take the initiative of bringing all these papers together and publishing them later as volume two of this report for easier reference, as a contribution to the understanding of evaluation activity.

Expert adviser

Because of the intricate and technical nature of the reference, the Committee found a need for expert assistance and advice. We were fortunate enough to be able to approach Professor Stephen R. Leeder, who had studied, and been engaged in, evaluation activity both in Australia and overseas. The Committee secured his services, temporarily and on a part-time basis, on 31 May 1977, and on 22 November of the same year his engagement was extended for the duration of the inquiry.

Acknowledgments

The examination of this reference has presented an opportunity, for the first time, to attempt a national assessment of evaluation in health and welfare programs and services. The inquiry has been notable for the extensive range of activity and involvement at many levels. In such a broad and complex reference, the assistance of a great many persons and organisations has been indispensable. Firstly, we thank the witnesses for their contribution. Like ourselves, many found difficulty with an intricate subject having hidden and often unsuspected ramifications. The effective discharge of our responsibilities would have been impossible without the co-operation given to us by State Premiers and their departments, by many Commonwealth Ministers, departments and authorities, by voluntary agencies and by individual witnesses.

The Committee is particularly grateful for the assistance of Mr Colin Benjamin, Mrs Merle Hurcomb, Mr David Jones, Mrs Anne Kern and Mr Tony Wiseheart, who were members of the consultative group that helped us to clarify our task early in 1978. We are indebted also to the expert authors of the papers on special topics who responded to our call on them.

We would be remiss if we did not thank also the National Health and Medical Research Council for having made it possible, initially, for us to obtain the services of Professor Leeder, and the University of Newcastle for subsequently allowing him to continue his work for us. We were especially fortunate in receiving his help at a time when he and the University were heavily committed in the development of a new medical faculty. As our expert adviser through most of our inquiry, Professor Leeder has, with great dedication, contributed his skills for our benefit.

The Committee also places on record its deep appreciation of the work done by its dedicated secretariat. The Secretaries, originally Mr R. P. Joske, and later Mr R. G.

Thomson, Assistant Secretary, Mr K. L. Bone, and Research Officer, Mrs Patricia Mayberry, organised a large volume of material and produced excellent theoretical working papers on complex subjects. To Mrs D. Devir the Committee expresses its appreciation for her efficient stenographic and general office assistance.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Baume', written in a cursive style.

PETER BAUME
Chairman

The Senate
Canberra
May 1979