Senate Standing Committee
for the
Scrutiny of Bills

Alert Digest

No. 7 of 2010

23 June 2010
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ISSN 1329-668X
Senate Standing Committee for the Scrutiny of Bills

Members of the Committee

Senator the Hon H Coonan (Chair)
Senator M Bishop (Deputy Chair)
Senator D Cameron
Senator L Pratt
Senator R Siewert
Senator the Hon J Troeth

Terms of Reference

Extract from Standing Order 24

(1) (a) At the commencement of each Parliament, a Standing Committee for the Scrutiny of Bills shall be appointed to report, in respect of the clauses of bills introduced into the Senate, and in respect of Acts of the Parliament, whether such bills or Acts, by express words or otherwise:

(i) trespass unduly on personal rights and liberties;
(ii) make rights, liberties or obligations unduly dependent upon insufficiently defined administrative powers;
(iii) make rights, liberties or obligations unduly dependent upon non-reviewable decisions;
(iv) inappropriately delegate legislative powers; or
(v) insufficiently subject the exercise of legislative power to parliamentary scrutiny.

(b) The committee, for the purpose of reporting upon the clauses of a bill when the bill has been introduced into the Senate, may consider any proposed law or other document or information available to it, notwithstanding that such proposed law, document or information has not been presented to the Senate.
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Banking Amendment (Delivering Essential Financial Services for the Community) Bill 2010

Introduced into the Senate on 15 June 2010
Portfolio: Senator Bob Brown

Background

This bill amends the Banking Act 1959 in four ways. The bill:

- requires banks to offer basic transaction accounts that are free from account keeping fees and penalty fees for the actions of third parties, and that limit other fees to a level sufficient to recover the cost to the bank of the penalised conduct;

- provides that transactions at a bank's own-branded ATMs are to be free of charge, and caps charges for the use of a bank's ATMs by customers of another authorised deposit-taking institution (ADI) at the cost of service provision;

- requires ADIs to offer a mortgage product (a 'fixed interest gap mortgage') with an interest rate fixed at a negotiated margin above the institution's cost of funds; and

- caps mortgage exit fees at a level sufficient only to recover the cost to the lender of the early termination, and requires that exit fees are mentioned in advertising and included in mortgage contracts in a uniform way to ensure customers are aware of them when deciding whether to sign the contract.

The Committee has no comment on this bill.

Any Senator who wishes to draw matters to the attention of the Committee under its terms of reference is invited to do so.
Civil Dispute Resolution Bill 2010

Introduced into the House of Representatives on 16 June 2010
Portfolio: Attorney-General

Background

This bill encourages the resolution of civil disputes outside of the courts and seeks to improve access to justice by focusing parties and their lawyers on the early resolution of disputes.

*The Committee has no comment on this bill.*
Health Insurance Amendment (Professional Services Review) Bill 2010

Introduced into the House of Representatives on 17 June 2010
Portfolio: Health and Ageing

Background

This bill amends the provisions for the Professional Services Review Scheme and the Medicare Participation Review Committee (MPRC) in Parts VAA and VB of the Health Insurance Act 1973.

The bill seeks to:

- remove the requirement for the Director of PSR to refer practitioners, who have been found to have engaged in inappropriate practice on two or more occasions, to the MPRC and provides for the Director and the Determining Authority to apply a disqualification period of up to five years to those practitioners;
- clarify the meaning of the 'prescribed pattern of services';
- enable the PSR Scheme and the MPRC to be applied to allied health professionals who provide Medicare services;
- amend the protection of the public under the PSR Scheme; and
- make a number of minor administrative changes to the Scheme.

Determination of important matters by regulation
Schedule 1, item 4

Item 4 of Schedule 1 inserts a new section 82A into the Health Insurance Act. This provision replaces the existing section dealing with the meaning of the term ‘prescribed pattern of services’. Like the existing provision, section 82A enables circumstances in which services constitute a prescribed pattern of services to be prescribed by regulations. The explanatory memorandum notes at page 7 that the new section 82A permits flexibility in the making of regulations and claims this is warranted given that ‘what constitutes a
prescribed pattern of service for different health professions, or for individual specialties within professions’ is subject to variations ‘in the way in which different health professions and individual specialties within professions practice and that the point at which the quality of the clinical service provided to patients may be undermined varies between professions and specialties.’ Although the Committee prefers that important matters are included in the primary legislation whenever possible, given this detailed explanation the Committee makes no further comment on this provision.

In the circumstances, the Committee makes no further comment on this provision.

**Determination of important matters by regulation**

**Schedule 1, items 13 to 22**

Part 2 of Schedule 1 introduces a number of provisions (see items 13-22) which are related to the empowerment of the Minister to, by legislative instrument, determine new categories of health practitioners and vocations for the purposes of the scheme. The introduction of these provisions is a result of the Commonwealth having broadened the categories of health professionals permitted to provide Medicare-eligible services to include categories not currently specified under the *Health Insurance Act* (see page 9 of the explanatory memorandum).

At page 9, the explanatory memorandum gives a list of examples of health professionals who provide health services under the legislation but are not currently included in the Professional Services Review Scheme. Although the intended operation of legislative instruments to be made by the Minister is clearly explained (for items 15 at page 10 and item 22 at page 11) the explanatory memorandum does not explain why these matters cannot be included in the primary legislation. However, in the context (including the applicability of the *Legislative Instruments Act*) it does not appear that these provisions inappropriately delegate legislative power to the Minister.

In the circumstances, the Committee makes no further comment on these items.
International Monetary Agreements Amendment Bill (No.1) 2010

Introduced into the House of Representatives on 16 June 2010
Portfolio: Treasury

Background

This bill amends the International Monetary Agreements Act 1947 to allow the Commonwealth of Australia to make loans to the International Monetary Fund in the event of calls under the amended New Arrangements to Borrow.

Possible delayed commencement
Clause 2, table item 2

Clause 2 of the bill provides that the amendments will apply from the later of (1) the day the bill receives Royal Assent, or (2) the day the amendments to the New Arrangements to Borrow adopted by the IMF Executive Board on 12 April 2010 become effective. The amendments may therefore not commence for some time, and it is unclear whether the commencement date would be within the normal expectation that commencement be within six months of an Act receiving the Royal Assent. However, at page 3 the explanatory memorandum explains that this is necessary as the IMF’s New Arrangements to Borrow scheme becomes effective only when existing participants representing 85% of total credit arrangements have concurred to the proposed changes.

In the circumstances, the Committee makes no further comment on this clause.
Preventing the Misuse of Government Advertising
Bill 2010

Introduced into the Senate on 16 June 2010
Portfolio: Senator Bob Brown

Background

This bill provides the Auditor-General with new functions to review government information and advertising campaigns with a cost in excess of $250,000 and to report whether they comply with the principles and guidelines set out in the bill and do not contain electoral matter. The bill allows the Auditor-General to use the powers available under the Audit Act to undertake these new functions.

Determination of important matter by regulations
Part 2, item 6

Clause 6 of the bill allows for a national emergency exemption to the application of the guidelines. Subclause 6(4) of the bill, however, allows for ‘national emergency’ to be defined in the regulations. The Committee prefers to see important matters dealt with in primary legislation and thus expects the need for such matters to be prescribed in regulation to be well justified.

As the explanatory memorandum does not address this issue, if the bill proceeds to further stages of debate, the Committee seeks the Private Senator's advice as to the justification for this delegation of legislative power.

Pending the advice of the Private Senator, the Committee draws Senators’ attention to the provisions, as they may be considered to delegate legislative powers inappropriately, in breach of principle 1(a)(iv) of the Committee’s terms of reference.
Determination of important matter by regulations
Part 2, item 7

Clause 7 of the bill allows for the regulations to revise the substantive guidelines. Although the Committee prefers to see important matters dealt with in primary legislation, it is noted that subclause 7(2) sets out a process for the making of such regulations which requires detailed ‘notice and comment’ procedures facilitating consultation with the public and, also, requires that the Auditor-General be consulted. It is also the case that a report on the consultation process must be tabled in each House of Parliament. In these circumstances, the Committee leaves to the Senate as a whole the question of whether this particular delegation of legislative power is justified.

Pending the advice of the Private Senator, the Committee draws Senators’ attention to the provisions, as they may be considered to delegate legislative powers inappropriately, in breach of principle 1(a)(iv) of the Committee’s terms of reference.

Any Senator who wishes to draw matters to the attention of the Committee under its terms of reference is invited to do so.
Radiocommunications Amendment Bill 2010

Introduced into the House of Representatives on 16 June 2010
Portfolio: Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy

Background

This bill amends the Radiocommunications Act 1992 to:

- provide the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) with greater flexibility in the timeframe in which it can commence spectrum licence re-issue processes;

- allow the ACMA to issue class licences in the same radiofrequency spectrum as expired or re-issued spectrum licence allocations as well as spectrum in which a spectrum licence is not currently in force, conditional upon there being adequate interference safeguards and it is in the public interest;

- make class of service determinations made by the Minister under subsection 82(3) of the Act legislative instruments that are not subject to disallowance; and

- make spectrum access charge directions by the Minister to the ACMA under subsection 294(2) of the Act not legislative instruments.

Exemption from disallowance

Ministerial direction not a legislative instrument

Schedule 1, item 4 and 9

Items 4 and 9 respectively exempt a legislative instrument from disallowance and specify that a Ministerial direction is not a legislative instrument. The explanation for these items, including in the background discussion contained in the explanatory memorandum at pages 6 and 9, is detailed and the Committee accepts that the proposed approach is satisfactory.

In the circumstances, the Committee makes no further comment on this provision.
Service and Execution of Process Amendment (Interstate Fine Enforcement) Bill 2010

Introduced into the House of Representatives on 16 June 2010
Portfolio: Attorney-General

Background

This bill implements a decision of the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General to establish a framework that enables States and Territories to register interstate court-imposed fines that have a cross-border element.

Retrospective application
Schedule 1, item 1, proposed subparagraphs 112(1)(c)(ii) and 112(1)(c)(iii)

This bill provides for a ‘scheme whereby a State or Territory that is owed a fine may request the fine’s enforcement in another jurisdiction’, replacing the existing scheme. In particular the new scheme no longer relies on apprehension and imprisonment for enforcing court-imposed fines across State and Territory borders.

In general, the new scheme applies in relation to the enforcement of fines imposed after the commencement of the relevant amendments. However, the new scheme (see item 1 of Schedule 1 which inserts a new subparagraph 112(1)(c)(ii) into the Service and Execution of Process Act 1992) can also apply to ‘pre-commencement fines’ if ‘related to a post-commencement fine’.

The explanatory memorandum at page 3 states that this provision is specifically targeted ‘at persistent or recalcitrant fine defaulters’. The new section 110 (also inserted by item 1 of Schedule 1) defines when a pre-commencement fine is ‘related’ to a post-commencement fine, namely, where the same offender is involved, the pre-commencement fine originates from the same State as the post-commencement fine, and the liability in relation to the post-commencement fine has not been full discharged.

It is also the case that (pursuant to the new subsection 113(3)) that a pre-commencement fine can only be registered if the post-commencement fine to which it is related has been registered in the same State. Although (1)

Any Senator who wishes to draw matters to the attention of the Committee under its terms of reference is invited to do so.
there are limits to the application of the new scheme to pre-commencement fines, and (2) the new scheme changes the way in which fines imposed under existing laws are to be recovered (as opposed to altering the nature of the substantive rights of those who owe fines), it remains the case that the scheme will apply with retrospective effect in relation to some fines.

The same difficulty arises in relation to the new subparagraph 112(1)(c)(iii), which permits the registration of ‘pre-commencement serious fines’. The new section 110 provides that such fines are pre-commencement fines which the originating State considers to be a serious fine because, for example, of the value of the fine, the nature or seriousness of the underlying conduct, or the fact the fine is not the first fine imposed in relation to similar offences. Although subparagraph 112(2)(d)(ii) requires the originating state to provide reasons as to why a pre-commencement fine is considered to be serious, the explanatory memorandum does not squarely address the question of whether the application of the new scheme for the enforcement of fines should apply to fines incurred prior to its commencement.

The Committee is concerned that these arrangements might be considered to unduly trespass on rights and liberties therefore seeks the Attorney-General's further advice as to why the pre-commencement fines arrangements proposed in these sections are justified.

Pending the advice of the Attorney-General, the Committee draws Senators’ attention to the provisions, as they may be considered to trespass unduly on personal rights and liberties, in breach of principle 1(a)(i) of the Committee’s terms of reference.
Tax Laws Amendment (Public Benefit Test) Bill 2010

Introduced into the Senate on 13 May 2010
Portfolio: Senator Xenophon

Background

This private Senator's bill seeks to insert a public benefit test into the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997* which will require religious and charitable institutions seeking tax exemption to demonstrate public benefit through its aims and activities.

**Determination of important matter by regulation**

**Schedule 1, item 1**

The purpose of this bill is to insert a public benefit test into the tax legislation so that religious and charitable institutions seeking tax exemption must be able to demonstrate a public benefit through their aims and activities. This item would insert a new section 50-51 into the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997*.

In the Committee's view the proposed application of a test to the taxation of religious and charitable institutions does not give rise to concerns under the Committee's terms of reference. The Committee is aware of section 116 of the Constitution relating to limits on the Commonwealth's power to legislate in respect of religion. Without making any comment on the general applicability of that provision, the Committee considers that it also does not give rise to concern about the bill under the Committee's terms of reference.

However, subsection (2) of proposed section 50-51 provides that the public benefit test must include a number of principles, but the intention is that the test itself will be formulated in regulations by the Minister. The explanatory memorandum does not include an explanation as to why it is not possible for the public benefit test to be adequately formulated in the primary legislation.

Although the regulations will be disallowable and therefore subject to Parliamentary scrutiny, the Committee prefers that important matters are included in primary legislation to increase the level of parliamentary scrutiny and to assist those whose rights may be affected by the provision.

Any Senator who wishes to draw matters to the attention of the Committee under its terms of reference is invited to do so.
Given the importance of the content of the test, the Committee requests that if this bill proceeds to further stages of debate the Committee seeks the Private Senator's advice as to whether the test can be described with greater specificity in the primary legislation or further explanation as to why it is not possible to do so.

Pending the advice of the Private Senator, the Committee draws Senators’ attention to the provisions, as they may be considered to delegate legislative powers inappropriately, in breach of principle 1(a)(iv) of the Committee’s terms of reference.
Tradex Scheme Amendment Bill 2010

Introduced into the House of Representatives on 16 June 2010
Portfolio: Industry, Science and Research

Background

This bill amends the *Tradex Scheme Act 1999* to clarify the eligibility of partnerships and remove redundant provisions.

*The Committee has no comment on this bill.*
Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Amendment Bill 2010

Introduced into the House of Representatives on 16 June 2010
Portfolio: Environment Protection, Heritage and the Arts

Background

This bill amends the Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Act 2005 to provide that a WELS Standard may require a product to comply with requirements relating to plumbing as contained in a specified document before the product can be registered as a WELS Product.

Incorporation by reference
Subsection 18(1)

This bill provides that a WELS Standard, which must either be set out or incorporated by reference into determinations (which are legislative instrument) under subsection 18(1) of the Act, may require a product to comply with requirements relating to plumbing as contained in a specified document as in force from time to time. In this way such documents may be incorporated by reference into a legislative instrument. This approach, however, is justified in the Explanatory Memorandum at page 3 by reference to the fact that relevant ‘plumbing requirements may change’. The Committee acknowledges that the use of delegated legislation is appropriate for highly technical detail.

*The Committee has no further comment on this bill.*
COMMENTARY ON AMENDMENTS TO BILLS

ComSuper Bill 2010

On 15 June 2010 a revised explanatory memorandum was tabled in the Senate. This contains (at page 9) additional information about the justification for delegating the ability to outsource the administration of the PSSAP as discussed in Alert Digest No. 2 and Report No. 5 of 2010.

The Committee thanks the Minister for providing this additional information, which addresses its concerns.

Governance of Australian Government Superannuation Schemes Bill 2010

On 15 June 2010 a revised explanatory memorandum was tabled in the Senate. This includes (at page 8) further explanation of the justification for Part 2, Division 1, subclause 5(1) as discussed in the amendments section of Alert Digest No. 6 and in Alert Digest No.2/10 and 5th Report of 2010.

The Committee particularly thanks the Minister for taking action to provide this additional explanation.

International Arbitration Amendment Bill 2010

(Previous title: International Arbitration Amendment Bill 2009)

On 13 May 2010 a supplementary explanatory memorandum was tabled and 15 government amendments were agreed to in the House of Representatives.

On 15 June 2010 a revised explanatory memorandum was tabled in the Senate. None of the amendments fall within the Committee's terms of reference.

Paid Parental Leave Bill 2010

On 1 June 2010 the bill was passed in the House of Representatives. On 16 June 2010 a supplementary explanatory memorandum was tabled in the Senate and five government amendments were agreed to. On 17 June 2010 a further two government and 14 opposition amendments were agreed in the

Any Senator who wishes to draw matters to the attention of the Committee under its terms of reference is invited to do so.
Senate. On the same day the House of Representatives agreed to Senate amendments nos. 1, 15 and 23 and disagreed to Senate amendments nos. 2 to 14 and 16 to 22 and subsequently the Senate did not insist on these amendments. None of the amendments agreed to falls within the terms of reference of the Committee.

Paid Parental Leave (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2010

On 17 June 2010 the Senate agreed to one amendment which on the same day the House of Representatives did not agreed to. Subsequently the Senate did not insist on this amendment.

Superannuation Legislation (Consequential Amendments and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2010

On 15 June 2010 a revised explanatory memorandum was tabled in the Senate.

Tax Laws Amendment (2010 Measures No.2) Bill 2010

On 17 June 2010 a supplementary explanatory memorandum was tabled in the Senate and two government amendments were agreed to. Neither of the amendments falls within the Committee's terms of reference.
BILLS GIVING EFFECT TO NATIONAL SCHEMES OF LEGISLATION

The Chairs and Deputy Chairs of Commonwealth, and state and territory Scrutiny Committees have noted (most recently in 2000) difficulties in the identification and scrutiny of national schemes of legislation. Essentially, these difficulties arise because ‘national scheme’ bills are devised by Ministerial Councils and are presented to Parliaments as agreed and uniform legislation. Any requests for amendment are seen to threaten that agreement and that uniformity.

To assist in the identification of national schemes of legislation, the Committee’s practice is to note bills that give effect to such schemes as they come before the Committee for consideration.

Service and Execution of Process Amendment (Interstate Fine Enforcement) Bill 2010

This bill implements a decision of the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General to establish a framework that enables States and Territories to register interstate court-imposed fines that have a cross-border element.
SCRTUNITY OF STANDING APPROPRIATIONS

The Committee has determined that, as part of its standard procedures for reporting on bills, it should draw senators’ attention to the presence in bills of standing appropriations. It will do so under provisions 1(a)(iv) and (v) of its terms of reference, which require the Committee to report on whether bills:

(iv) inappropriately delegate legislative powers; or
(v) insufficiently subject the exercise of legislative power to parliamentary scrutiny.

Further details of the Committee’s approach to scrutiny of standing appropriations are set out in the Committee’s *Fourteenth Report of 2005*. The following is a list of the bills containing standing appropriations that have been introduced since the beginning of the 42nd Parliament.

**Bills introduced with standing appropriation clauses – 42nd Parliament**

* Indicates new entries

<table>
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<th>P</th>
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<td>N</td>
<td>Australian Business Investment Partnership Bill 2009 — clauses 13 and 14</td>
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<td><strong>Australian National Preventive Health Agency Bill 2009</strong> — clause 50</td>
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<td>(SPECIAL ACCOUNT: CRF appropriated by virtue of section 21 of the <em>Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997</em>)</td>
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<td>Automotive Transformation Scheme Bill 2009 — clause 10</td>
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<td>Car Dealership Financing Guarantee Appropriation Bill 2009 — clause 5</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td><strong>Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill 2009</strong> — subclauses 103B(5), 139(4) and 291(4)</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td><strong>Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill 2009 [No. 2]</strong> — subclauses 103B(5), 139(4) and 291(4)</td>
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Any Senator who wishes to draw matters to the attention of the Committee under its terms of reference is invited to do so.
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Financial System Legislation Amendment (Financial Claims Scheme and Other Measures) Bill 2008</td>
<td>Schedule 1, item 49, section 54A, and Schedule 2, item 23, section 70E (SPECIAL ACCOUNTS: CRF appropriated by virtue of section 21 of the Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fisheries Legislation Amendment (New Governance Arrangements for the Australian Fisheries Management Authority and Other Matters) Bill 2008</td>
<td>Schedule 1, item 79, section 94B (SPECIAL ACCOUNT: CRF appropriated by virtue of section 21 of the Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Governance of Australian Government Superannuation Schemes Bill 2010</td>
<td>paragraphs 33(1)(b), 33(2)(b), and 34(3)(a), and subsection 34(4)</td>
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<td>Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and Other Legislation Amendment Bill</td>
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<td>Guarantee of State and Territory Borrowing Appropriation Bill 2009</td>
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<td>Bill 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nation-building Funds Bill 2008</td>
<td>clauses 13, 61, 68, 75, 82, 132, 181, 188, 215 and 255 (SPECIAL ACCOUNT: CRF</td>
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<td>appropriated by virtue of section 21 of the Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997)</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Consumer Credit Protection Bill 2009</td>
<td>Schedule 1, subclause 115(2)</td>
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<td>2009</td>
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<td>Paid Parental Leave Bill 2010</td>
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<td>Protection of the Sea Legislation Amendment Bill 2008</td>
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<td>Renewable Energy (Electricity) Amendment Bill 2010</td>
<td>Schedule 1, item 58, section 30R (SPECIAL ACCOUNT: CRF appropriated by virtue of section 21 of the Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safe Work Australia Bill 2008</td>
<td>clause 64 (SPECIAL ACCOUNT: CRF appropriated by virtue of section 21 of the Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997) [bill laid aside by House of Representatives on 4 December 2008]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safe Work Australia Bill 2008 [No. 2]</td>
<td>clause 64 (SPECIAL ACCOUNT: CRF appropriated by virtue of section 21 of the Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools Assistance Bill 2008</td>
<td>clause 167</td>
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