

Preface

Introduction

1. The committee is responsible for examining annual reports of departments and agencies within two portfolios: Defence (including the Department of Veterans' Affairs), and Foreign Affairs and Trade.¹

2. Under Standing Order 25(20), the committee is required to report on annual reports tabled by 31 October each year by the tenth sitting day of the following year, and on reports tabled by 30 April each year by the tenth sitting day after 30 June of that year.

3. The standing order states:

Annual reports of departments and agencies shall stand referred to the committees in accordance with an allocation of departments and agencies in a resolution of the Senate. Each committee shall:

- a) Examine each annual report referred to it and report to the Senate whether the report is apparently satisfactory;
- b) Consider in more detail, and report to the Senate on, each annual report which is not apparently satisfactory, and on the other annual reports which it selects for more detailed consideration;
- c) Investigate and report to the Senate on any lateness in the presentation of annual reports;
- d) In considering an annual report, take into account any relevant remarks about the report made in debate in the Senate;
- e) If the committee so determines, consider annual reports of departments and budget-related agencies in conjunction with examination of estimates;
- f) Report on annual reports tabled by 31 October each year by the tenth sitting day of the following year, and on annual reports tabled by 30 April each year by the tenth sitting day after 30 June of that year;
- g) Draw to the attention of the Senate any significant matters relating to the operations and performance of the bodies furnishing the annual reports; and
- h) Report to the Senate each year whether there are any bodies which do not present annual reports to the Senate and which should present such reports.

1 See Appendix 1 for a list of all departments and agencies under these portfolios.

Role of annual reports

4. Annual reports place a great deal of information about government departments and agencies on the public record. Accordingly, the tabling of annual reports continues to be an important element of accountability to Parliament. The information provided in annual reports assists Parliament in the effective examination of the performance of departments and agencies and the administration of government programs. Indeed, as noted in the *Requirements for Annual Reports*:

Annual reports serve to inform the Parliament (through the responsible Minister), other stakeholders, educational and research institutions, the media and the general public about the performance of departments in relation to services provided. Annual reports are a key reference document and a document for internal management. They form part of the historical record.

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Annual reports and Portfolio Budget Statements (PBSs) are the principal formal accountability mechanisms between government and departments and from departments through (or on behalf of) government to the Parliament.²

Assessment of annual reports

5. The annual reports are examined by the committee to determine whether they are timely and 'apparently satisfactory'.³ The committee considers whether the reports comply with the relevant requirements for the preparation of annual reports of departments and authorities.

6. The requirements are set down in the following instruments:

- for portfolio departments: *Public Service Act 1999*, subsections 63(2) and 70(2), and the *Requirements for annual reports for departments, executive agencies and FMA Act bodies*, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 23 June 2010;
- for Commonwealth authorities and companies: the *Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997*; in particular, the Commonwealth Authorities and Companies (Report of Operations) Orders 2002; and
- for non-statutory bodies: the guidelines are contained in the government response to the report of the Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Government Operations on Non-statutory Bodies, Senate *Hansard*, 8 December 1987, vol s124, pp. 2643–45 (requirements were modified in 1987).

2 *Requirements for annual reports for departments, executive agencies and FMA Act bodies*, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 23 June 2010, p. 2. Also at www.dpmc.gov.au/guidelines/index.cfm

3 See Appendix 2 for a compliance table of the reports referred to the committee for scrutiny.

Excerpts of the reporting requirements are at Appendix 3.

Annual reports considered

7. The annual reports of the following organisations have been examined by the committee:

Defence portfolio

Army and Air Force Canteen Service (trading as *Frontline Defence Services*)
ASC Pty Ltd
Australian Military Forces Relief Trust Fund
Australian Strategic Policy Institute Limited
Australian War Memorial
Defence, Department of
Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal
Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Authority
Defence Housing Australia
Defence Materiel Organisation
Judge Advocate General
Military Superannuation and Benefits Board
Repatriation Medical Authority
Royal Australian Air Force Veterans' Residences Trust Fund
Royal Australian Air Force Welfare Trust Fund
Royal Australian Navy Central Canteens Board
Royal Australian Navy Relief Trust Fund
Veterans' Affairs, Department of
Veterans' Review Board.

Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio

Australian Agency for International Development
Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research
Australian Safeguards and Non-Proliferation Office
Australian Trade Commission
Export Finance and Insurance Corporation
Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department of.

General comments on the annual reports

Timeliness in tabling reports

8. It should be noted that on 19 July 2010, the Governor-General prorogued the 42nd Parliament and dissolved the House of Representatives. An election was held on 24 August 2010 and the 43rd Parliament sat for the first time on 28 September 2010. As a result, the Department of Defence and a number of statutory agencies did not table their reports until November 2010 after the due date of 31 October. The Secretary of the Department of Defence, Dr Ian Watt AO, provided an explanation for the delay in tabling Defence's annual report (see paragraph 1.1). A table detailing the dates relating to the timeliness of presentation is at Appendix 2.

Comments made in the Senate

9. The committee is obliged, under Senate Standing Order 25(20)(d), to consider any remarks made about these reports in the Senate. There were no comments in the Senate on any of these reports.

Matters of significance

10. In accordance with SO25, the committee is to note any significant matters relating to the operations and performance of the bodies presenting their annual report. The committee found no matters of significance relating to the operations and performance of the bodies presenting their report. It draws attention, however, to findings contained in the *Audits of the Financial Statements of Australian Government Entities for the Period Ended 30 June 2010*.

11. Last year the committee commented on the financial statements of the Department of Defence. It expressed an interest in seeing progress on outstanding matters identified by ANAO. The audit found that the Department of Defence had resolved six moderate audit risk issues previously identified. At the conclusion of the 2009-2010 audit, one significant and 17 moderate risk issues remained outstanding.⁴ These matters are mentioned in detail in the relevant sections of this report.

Bodies not presenting annual reports to the Senate

12. The committee is required to report to the Senate each year on whether there are any bodies that do not present annual reports to the Senate and which should present such reports. The committee is satisfied that there are no bodies, within these portfolios, which do not meet their reporting requirements to the Senate.

4 Australian National Audit Office, *Audits of the Financial Statements of Australian Government Entities for the Period Ended 30 June 2009*, Audit Report No. 17, 2009–2010, p. 88.

Standard of reports

13. The committee found all reports to be generally of a high standard. They effectively described the function, activities and financial positions of the various departments and agencies. The committee therefore finds all of the annual reports to be 'apparently satisfactory'.

