

No. 145

for the sitting period 14—17 August 2000

18 August 2000

SELECT COMMITTEE ON NUCLEAR CONTRACT

The Senate embarked on potentially a major inquiry with the appointment on 15 August of a select committee to inquire into the controversial awarding of the contract for a replacement for the Lucas Heights nuclear reactor to an Argentinian firm. The resolution of appointment of the committee requires it to report by 4 December. In response to a Senate order for production of documents relating to the contract (see Bulletin No. 144, p. 1) the government produced some documents, but has already raised claims of commercial confidentiality in relation to others.

ORDER FOR PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

An order passed on 17 August calls for documents relating to the SES scores of schools, which determine the provision of federal funding. It will be interesting to see whether the government claims that any of the required information should be withheld on any ground. The deadline for the production of the documents is the next day of sitting.

ESTIMATES HEARING — EMPLOYMENT ADVOCATE

The extra estimates hearing ordered by the Senate on 28 June (see Bulletin No. 144, p. 2) duly occurred. The Employment Advocate clarified the basis on which he had declined to provide information about workplace agreements, indicating that he did not claim that he was prevented from doing so by the statute, but merely that he thought it inappropriate to provide information about particular firms. As a result of the hearing some compromise may have been reached about the information to be supplied.

LEGISLATION: BILL REJECTED

The Workplace Relations Amendment (Unfair Dismissals) Bill 1998 was rejected on the second reading on 14 August. Although the issue involved in the bill, exempting small

businesses from the unfair dismissal laws, has been before the Senate on previous occasions, this is the first rejection for this particular bill. There were claims that the government brought forward the bill in the hope of having it rejected twice to give itself the option of a double dissolution under section 57 of the Constitution.

Another workplace relations bill, the Workplace Relations Amendment Bill 2000, is opposed by the opposition, and extensive amendments have been circulated by the Democrats. Proceedings on that bill were not concluded by the end of the period.

Proceedings on another complex bill, the Environmental Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 1) 2000, were also not concluded, but the bill has already been extensively amended.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Workplace relations also provided the subject for the disallowance by the Senate on 17 August of a set of regulations, accompanied by heated debate on the motives of the responsible minister in seeking to enact provisions which are known not to have the support of the Senate.

The Regulations and Ordinances Committee presented on 17 August its annual statement on its work during the past year, indicating that the committee has scrutinised a very large volume of legislation and brought about changes to significant numbers of instruments.

VACANCY

Another vacancy was created in the Senate on 15 August by the sudden resignation due to ill-health of Senator Quirke (Labor, South Australia).

SENATE DAILY SUMMARY

This bulletin provides Senate staff and others with a summary of procedurally significant occurrences in the Senate. The *Senate Daily Summary* provides more detailed information on Senate proceedings, including progress of legislation, committee reports and other documents tabled and major actions by the Senate. Like this bulletin, *Senate Daily Summary* may be reached through the Senate home page at www.aph.gov.au/senate

Inquiries: Clerk's Office

☎ (02) 6277 3364

