

Australian Greens Dissenting Report

The Australian Greens are broadly supportive of the Nation Building Funds Bill and the COAG Reform Fund Bill, but believe that the issues of transparency and accountability identified in the Committee's report should be addressed, and that the roles and mandates of the independent advisory bodies established should be clarified before the Bill is adopted.

It is not appropriate that the Advisory Board's advice to the Minister is not transparent. While disallowable, the Evaluation Criteria against which the Advisory Boards and the Minister will assess projects are not clear and will be difficult to amend.

There has been an unreasonably short time frame provided by the government for review of these lengthy and complex Bills. The extremely short time allowed for comment and input to the Committee's Inquiry resulted in unrepresentative input from only five organisations, with no independent experts or NGOs able to comment in the time provided. While the global economic crisis has prompted the call for swift passage of the Bill, the global economic crisis will not be fixed with policy on the run. Given the sums involved, it is worth taking a little more time than has been allowed to reach a consensus about how these funds will be managed and invested, particularly given the expressed concerns of the Australian National Audit Office.

The overarching principles of the Nation Building Funds are very general and vague and importantly, do not address the urgent and fundamental priorities of reducing emissions, adapting to climate change impacts and preparing for peak-oil.

The overarching principles and the criteria by which projects are approved must address national infrastructure priorities; demonstrate high benefits and effective use of resources; address climate change mitigation and adaptation; prepare for the global oil production peak and subsequent decline in oil production; efficiently address infrastructure needs; and demonstrate achievement of established standards in implementation and management.

In order to provide expert advice related to this mandate, two members of Infrastructure Australia should be people with specific expertise and experience in climate change mitigation and adaptation and the global oil production peak and expected decline in oil production.

The Minister is required to have regard to the advice provided by the various Advisory Boards, however, the Ministers have not yet developed evaluation criteria which Infrastructure Australia and other advisory bodies have to apply when giving this advice. While the details may require further refinement, the principles and scope of this evaluation criteria should be included in the legislation.

The Advisory Board's advice to the Minister is not transparent. These Advisory Boards will be making decisions and providing advice about what is in the national interest. To enhance transparency, the Australian Greens believe the advice provided by the Boards should be tabled by the relevant Minister within 3 sitting days.

The Australian Greens would like to see the establishment of a Parliamentary Joint Committee on Nation Building to consider advice that is referred by the various Advisory Boards to the Minister. This Committee would report to both Houses of the Parliament on any matter appertaining to or connected with that advice to which, in the opinion of the committee, the attention of the Parliament should be directed, and which would examine each annual report on Infrastructure Australia and report to the Parliament on any matter appearing in, or arising out of, any such annual report.

Senator Scott Ludlam

Australian Greens