

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

4.76 The Committee recommends that the Senate refer to the Finance and Public Administration References Committee for inquiry and report the matter of the impact of outcome budgeting for appropriations on Parliamentary consideration and approval of government expenditure, and the accountability of government for such expenditure.

Recommendation 2

5.70 The Committee recommends that for all major government advertising campaigns, the responsible department should conduct or commission a qualitative evaluation of key facets of the campaign (such as media placement strategy, campaign concept, response of target audience, value for money and so on) and report the evaluation results to the MCGC.

Recommendation 3

6.71 The Committee recommends that the government update the 1995 Guidelines on Australian Government Information Activities as a matter of urgency.

Recommendation 4

6.72 The Committee recommends that the Government adopt the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit's draft guidelines for government advertising, amended as follows:

- insert after the third dot point under 'Material should be relevant to government responsibilities' three additional dot points as follows:

(a) No expenditure of public money should be undertaken on mass media advertising, telephone canvassing or information services, on-line services, direct mail or other distribution of unsolicited material until the government has obtained passage of legislation giving it authority to implement the policy, program or service described in the public information or education campaign.

(b) Nothing in (a) should be taken to prohibit the government from seeking a public response to draft legislation or to Green or White papers. Advertising for public response to draft legislation, however, must take the form of inviting submissions and formal comment on a published bill or discussion paper.

(c) Where a proposed public information or education campaign covers a matter which does not require legislation, an appropriation for the specific purpose of the public information or education campaign must be obtained.

(d) The only exclusions to these requirements are where major issues of public health, public safety or public order may arise at short notice.

- replace the guideline heading 'Material should not be liable to misrepresentation as party political' with heading 'Material should not be directed at promoting party political interests'.

Recommendation 5

7.81 The Committee recommends that the government implement, as a matter of urgency, a mechanism to monitor and enforce compliance with guidelines on government advertising activity.

Recommendation 6

7.84 The Committee recommends that once an advertising campaign valued at \$250,000 or more has been given final approval by the MCGC, the advertisements must be submitted to the Auditor-General by the department that is incurring the expenditure. The Auditor-General must report back to the department and the portfolio minister as soon as possible whether the campaign complies with the revised guidelines on government advertising, and the extent of any non-compliance.

Recommendation 7

7.85 The Committee recommends that every six months the Auditor-General must table a report in the Parliament which details his or her assessment against the guidelines of the advertising campaigns that have been implemented during that six-month period.

Recommendation 8

7.86 The Committee recommends that if a department continues with a campaign that the Auditor-General has assessed as not complying with the guidelines, and has provided reasons for that course of action, the Auditor-General must include the departmental response in the tabled report. If a department has amended a campaign in the light of the Auditor-General's initial assessment, the Auditor-General will not table the initial report but only the final assessment made of the campaign.

Recommendation 9

7.90 The Committee recommends that the government comply with the Senate Order of 29 October 2003 relating to agency advertising and public information projects.

Recommendation 10

7.94 The Committee recommends that the Government Communications Unit in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet publish an annual report on government advertising, commencing in financial year 2005-06. The annual report should be modelled on the Annual Report on the Government of Canada's Advertising 2003-04. It should include:

- a total figure for government expenditure on advertising activities;
- total figures by agency for expenditure on advertising activities;
- figures for expenditure on media placement by type and media placement by month; and
- detailed information about major campaigns, including a statement of the objectives of the campaign, the target audience, a detailed breakdown of media placement, evaluation of the campaign including information about the methodology used and the measurable results, and a breakdown of the costs into 'production', 'media placement' and 'evaluative research'.

Recommendation 11

7.95 The Committee recommends that from financial year 2005-06 the annual reports of each government agency must include:

- a total figure for the agency's advertising expenditure; and
- a consolidated figure for the cost for each campaign managed by that agency.

Recommendation 12

7.96 The Committee recommends that from financial year 2005-06 the annual reports of each government agency must include:

- a total figure for departmental expenditure on public opinion research;
- a breakdown of the type of research, including the expenditure on research for advertising as a percentage of total research costs;
- highlights of key research projects; and
- a listing of research firms used by business volume.

Recommendation 13

7.97 The Committee recommends that public opinion and market research commissioned by government departments be made available by departments to the public through the National Library of Australia and the Parliamentary Library.