



Stronger role recommended for the Parliamentary Budget Office

The inaugural Parliamentary Budget Officer, Phil Bowen PSM FCPA, has been praised for his leadership, especially during the early stages of setting up the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO).

The Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit today tabled its report of the review of the operations of the PBO, which was established in 2012.

Committee Chair Dr Andrew Southcott said that the PBO had already made a significant contribution to transparency and accountability in the nation's finances.

To build on the success, the Committee has made eight recommendations intended to strengthen the PBO's access to information and expand the functions of the Parliamentary Budget Officer to include medium term projections.

The Committee has recommended that the Parliamentary Budget Officer's right to timely and free access to information be specified in the *Parliamentary Service Act 1999*.

"A legal guarantee of access to information will support the cooperation that already exists under a Memorandum of Understanding and will bring the Commonwealth model into line with international best practice," Dr Southcott said.

The Committee also recommended the release of details of the Contingency Reserve and the removal of other barriers, caused by outsourcing or legislative provisions that prevent disclosure to the PBO.

"Full and timely disclosure to the PBO is important to ensure the reliability of its analysis. The PBO operates in a secure environment and Commonwealth bodies can feel confident that sensitive government information is protected," Dr Southcott said.

The Committee recommended that in future, the PBO produce detailed annual medium term projections and that the same 10 year timeframe be applied to the election commitments of the main parties.

"This will bring a more detailed and longer term view of government spending into the public arena. It will also apply the same rigour to the main parliamentary parties at election time," he said.

More information about the inquiry, including the full report, can be found on the Committee's website <http://www.aph.gov.au/jcpaa>.

For media comment: please contact Committee Chair, Dr Andrew Southcott MP, on 0402579674 (Matthew Hee).

For information about the inquiry and public hearing: please contact the Committee Secretariat on (02) 6277 4615, email jcpaa@aph.gov.au, or visit the Committee website <http://www.aph.gov.au/jcpaa>.