

Session 5

Sounding Off and Rounding Off

Ms Cornwell Thank you both, Senator Baume and Senator Bishop, for your most interesting presentations. There have been a number of provocative comments made. Would anybody like to follow through on some of those issues?

Ms Turner I would like to make a comment in relation to the topic that we have here on the politics of auditing and the way we regard that Aboriginal Affairs has been treated in Senate estimates in the last couple of years. Some of the interesting things have been the public pronouncements that have been made a big deal of in the media: allegations in relation to the black Mafia; nepotism; corruption and those types of allegations, which caused a great deal of pain, and which have been found to be totally unjustified. The use of a forum like the Senate estimates and the involvement of the media in that process, I guess, raises some questions in terms of confidence. We want to be able to demonstrate professionalism in relation to the Department's abilities to account properly for its activities but, on the other hand, we are very concerned about the estimates process being used for these types of *exposes*. The other point I would like to make is the number of questions that are actually put on notice. There have been, in Aboriginal Affairs, several hundreds of questions, all, I think, from the Opposition members of the Committee. Another observation concerns the very quiet role of the Government members in the process. It appears to be a forum where certain Opposition senators one more so than other get right into Aboriginal Affairs and try to get what appears to be something on the Minister, rather than the Department giving a proper account of its role and so on. Senator Baume, as a former Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, may like to comment. Even though I am not putting a direct question, it just appears that there may be different levels of performance by the various Senate estimates committees. Some seem to stick to the issues; others seem to use them as forums for other objectives.

Senator Peter Baume Last time I saw you, you were a class 11 officer, so congratulations, Madam Deputy Secretary. There has been some substance to concerns about that particular portfolio area, and some justification for questioning. But the point of your question is that you think that, in spite of that, there are legitimate complaints about what you might call rodomontade in the nature of some of the questions. I understand that. You referred to some concern that the action of certain senators is resource demanding, with hundreds of questions. I want to say to you that there could, in any department, be thousands of questions on notice. It is evidence of the restraint which senators show, that many areas are left alone. In fact, what has happened to Aboriginal Affairs is just an example of what could happen to any department of state if someone decided to look into every nook and cranny. The last comment I make is the one that really goes to your question. The estimates committees are essentially political committees. It is a political arena and a political process. If there is a political issue running and a political agenda to be satisfied, that will appear in the estimates committees. It then provides a rather uncomfortable experience for officers of the Public Service who have to become part of what is, essentially, a political process. That is tough; but that is how it is.

Ms Cornwell Any other questions? Does anyone else want to follow anything through?

Mr Kerr I would like to pick up a point that Senator Baume made earlier. We took the opportunity this year, as we did last year, to offer a briefing to, I guess, the most active Opposition senator in the Senate estimates committee before the committee met, after the explanatory notes and annual report had been made available. That was very favourably received and, in fact, remarked upon in the estimates hearing as being very useful in focusing some issues that were then asked about in the Committee itself. I am interested in the views of any of the panel on that process. Senator Baume spoke, I think, about a post-committee briefing; this was a pre-committee briefing.

Senator Bishop Briefings can be extremely useful, unless they are used as a device. Sometimes that is attempted if people want to give you in camera or in confidence briefings, which is basically designed to lock the area up. A similar thing happens if you are particularly keen to get your hands on the document, and it is given to you in confidence. You are then in a bind about how it may be used. If a briefing on a specific point is sought, yes, it can be most useful. I can give an example of the degree of helpful cooperation that can come, with the new statement that is being made about Commonwealth superannuation. It is a very difficult area, and I particularly wanted to be more accurate, rather than less accurate, in my understanding of the new scheme. I was very pleased, yesterday, to have a briefing from the Department of Finance on that question. Briefings can be most useful in having a better knowledge base shared by members of the Parliament on both sides, and members of the Public Service. As long as they are given in that genuine way, and not used as a trap, they are useful.

Senator McMullan I think that the briefing process is a positive, and while the Committee system operates as it should, it is something that people ought to consider using more. Even more, it is a very good example to support what I heard of John Coates's contribution. I unfortunately could not hear all of it, but that we ought to have a continuing process of interchange and scrutiny, rather than two three-week bursts of insane scrutiny with an informal process in between in which the interested people do develop some sort of dialogue. I know that happens, and that is good, but when you have informal processes like that growing up to make the formal structures work better, it means that there is something wrong with the formal structure. That is what we are having: we are having informal structures growing up around this formal structure, to make it work and to accommodate it. That is good, and those informal structures ought to be encouraged, but we ought also to say that it indicates there is probably a defect in the structure, and perhaps we ought to change that as well: not to lessen the scrutiny, but to make it work in a more rational and continuing way.

Mr Forrester As Senator Baume said, public servants can have the heat put on them in these situations, because the forums are political. The observation I want to make is that over the past few years I have been involved in an activity between the Parliament and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on quite a specific area. Robert Tickner knows all about it, and Senator Baume too. A very productive relationship has developed between the Department and the Parliament. That started off from a situation where the Department had a great many reservations and doubts about the activity; but it has developed, over the years, into a highly productive dialogue, of benefit to the members of the Parliament involved, of benefit to the Department, and also of benefit to that particular aspect of foreign policy. Therefore, I am very interested to hear this idea that there could be informal links between the Department and the relevant estimates committees. I think it would be a very positive development: it would enable a franker exchange between officials. However, I accept that come the day when we turn up in estimates committees, where the agenda is highly political, the heat will be put on us. I do not think that should deny the fact that these kinds of informal links can exist, and can be highly productive.

Dr Uhr I want to follow up one point that Senator Baume made, about the exercise being a political exercise. I would be very interested to get further comment upon this. In my introductory comments I used the term accountability trap, because I thought that, from the public official's point of view, one of the difficulties about it being in theory an accountability exercise, but in practise a political exercise, is that it is very hard to identify what measure of performance you are really being measured with. Once committees understand their task as political, it is very hard for public officials to work out which is the template of performance they have to try to measure up against. That is hard in questions; it is doubly hard once the committees split or publish reservations or dissenting reports. It is hard, then, to work out which is the voice of the committee.

Senator Bishop That is a simple one: the Government has the numbers. There are many instances when there has been material that has come out in the inquiry or the scrutiny that needs to be highlighted but, because it is not in the Government's interest to do so, the Government, having the numbers, publishes the report which it writes and it agrees to. Then, because Opposition senators do not agree, you write your own and then that gets published with it. That is the difference between the Public Accounts Committee, if I might say, and perhaps some others. As we have already pointed out, Mr Tickner and I come from opposite ends of the political spectrum and when we have a row it is a first class row it is a wonder you do not all hear it too. But there is a determination we have within that Committee that we do not publish dissenting reports and that in turn imposes a tremendous discipline on the Committee to find common ground that we can agree upon that is substantiated by the evidence that is given. That it may then be possible to go out and put different interpretations on sections of the report and remain true to what you believe is so, but it is a single report. Perhaps a good example of that, and there was much blood on the floor from time to time, was the Therapeutic Goods report, where we worked very, very hard to find something which, as a Committee, we could all agree with. Estimates committees are different from that.

The other committee that I serve on that also works in a bipartisan way is Regulations and Ordinances, where the Committee is looking at the scrutiny of delegated legislation in a bipartisan way. We have an agreement that if there is a political point to be made it is not made in the Committee, you get into the Chamber and do it. I think that the way those committees work to find that view needs to be distinguished from the work of the estimates committees which certainly do have a political nature. They must have a political nature, but are also genuinely seeking truth.

Mr Skehill Could I just comment on, rather than take issue with, the criticism that Mr Tickner made of our Department in relation to the Legal Regimes of External Territories inquiry. It is my belief that in that circumstance there was a deal of misunderstanding; whether our attempts to resolve that misunderstanding between the Committee and ourselves were successful can best be taken up in the Committee. We have found, over the last 12 months, that we have had a completely unprecedented level of involvement in departmental operations with committees of the Parliament, not just estimates committees but standing committees and joint select committees. I think if that is being felt in other departments they might, like us, have been caught a little off guard by that increase in the scrutiny process. What we are now seeking to do is to formalise internally a process whereby at the most senior level we monitor every committee with which we have some involvement. We try to meet with either the Chair or the Secretary of each committee with a view to getting a mutual understanding of what the committee expects of us and what we believe we can do to meet that expectation, although those do not always match. As I say, I think we have perhaps been caught off guard a little in that process because of that heightened scrutiny process over the last 12 months or so.

Mr Tickner Can I just respond to that. First of all, I thank you for that because the object of the exercise is to elevate the relationship between the Parliament and your Department and all other departments. That is what the agenda is, to elevate that relationship, and if greater interest has been taken in the higher levels of the Department in the work of parliamentary committees mission accomplished. But the pressure will be kept up to do that. I did not want to single anyone out; it was just an example. Secondly, I make the observation that people here, from the parliamentary perspective, despite very different politics and different personality approaches, are very much human beings. We see people around the corridors and at various functions, meetings and so on that have a very warm personal relationship with people who might have been the subject of vigorous questioning at committees. I think there is inevitably going to be that continuing tension. We are faced with the rather ironical situation in the Public Accounts Committee where if there is any department we have had a war with on various issues it has been the Department of Finance. We have been taking up issues in the public domain and elsewhere, yet the Department of Finance has seconded someone to work with our Committee. It is that level of professionalism by Dr Keating and others that I think is extremely important. As Geoff Forrester indicated, I am deeply indebted personally to Foreign Affairs for their outstanding record on human rights matters. They are matters which they would do well to highlight much more, I might say, in their annual report. But that did not stop the Public Accounts Committee from taking up the failure of Foreign Affairs to comply with the Prime Minister's guidelines for annual reporting. I just want to pour a bit of oil on the waters here in case you think the people up this end are all about inflicting pain and drawing blood, because that is not what we are about as people.

Senator Bishop I would like to ask a question about Attorney-Generals.

Mr Tickner Oh dear. Almost without exception!

Senator Bishop I will put it this way: I find some of the advice that comes from Attorney-General's variable in quality, shall we say. I wonder whether or not Attorney-General's suffers a problem in that many other departments seem to have set up their own legal advisers and their own legal expertise within their own departments, so that in a way they are competing with you for business. I wonder if that has had a morale effect, or whether or not it makes it difficult for recruitment. It seems to me there is a problem in there somewhere.

Mr Skehill That is probably one of the most fundamental questions you could ask about the Department at the moment. Going back 10 or 12 years ago there were virtually no in-house legal cells in other departments. For my sins, I set up one of the first in Business and Consumer Affairs and a number of other departments followed on. I think that that perhaps reflected a feeling in other departments that there was a less than fully responsive attitude taken by the Attorney-General's Department to the needs that other departments were perceiving at that time in what was a changing environment largely associated with the introduction of what is called the new administrative law. Over time a number of those cells have developed an impetus and growth of their own. Within the Department we have been seeking to strike a balance between what we can offer as a department to other departments, and the role that those individual cells can and should play.

The question of recruitment is a difficult one but I think not just for ourselves, but for those cells. There always has been a disparity in remuneration as between the public and the private sectors, which is more heightened now than it has hitherto been, and not just in legal areas but in other disciplines within the public sector. I think we are still working at striking that balance with those cells to ensure that appropriate legal advice is provided to government operatives, from the best source, at the right time, when it is needed, responsibly, and so on. They are goals that I guess we will always have and never fully achieve, and if we think we have achieved them we should give up and go home.

Mr O'Keeffe Could I warn you all that we have now resolved ourselves into Senate Estimates Committee G!

Dr Uhr I think that depends on who is setting the tone in a devolved administrative environment and where senators should then be directing their question or questions on administrative philosophy and standards. In a way the Auditor-General is moving, perhaps, under Mr Tickner's guidance, closer to Parliament so that Parliament can have the armoury, guidance, radar, or whatever the right metaphor is, to help it. In another way the public sector environment, presided over, I guess, by the Department of Finance, is trying to deregulate in order to bring a new sense of accountability and responsibility upon agencies, such that they would not need attorneys-general. They would each have their own flair and creative ability to determine the law according to their own policy environments. It must be very hard to be an attorney.

Senator Bishop Creative law?

Dr Uhr Mike, do you want to comment upon that at all?

Dr Keating Several gross exaggerations.

Senator Bishop When we get accrual accounting in all Government departments, we will have a few new disciplines that will be useful.

Mr Tickner I should hesitate to also add that Mr Taylor does not need guidance from me he is very directed and motivated. It just happens that our mutual views and those of the Public Accounts Committee coincide.

Dr Uhr We have time for a few more comments or questions, after which I will invite each of the panellists to summarise, perhaps drawing attention to what has not been said as much as to what has been said. Are there any further comments or questions while the panel is still here and in an attentive mood?

Mr Roche I feel I should respond to Senator Baume's comments on the national campaign against drug abuse. I think that discussion actually reflected another one of the roles of Senate estimates committees. We had, I think for some two hours probably, a very technical debate on performance indicators in that program, which is a very difficult one to measure. We talked about surrogate indicators, and so on. Suffice it to say that although we debated the issue with Senator Baume, we did not necessarily agree with his adjudication of that debate.

Dr Uhr If there are no further questions, I forgo my own turn to summarise and call upon Dr Keating to give his impressions.

Dr Keating It would be presumptuous to try to summarise, but I would just like to make a few observations on some things that have been said. First, I very much welcome Senator Bishop's generous offer to provide me with a cup of tea and cucumber sandwiches in future when the Committee members are taking theirs. I hasten to add, although it is not necessary, that I do not anticipate for a moment that that will modify the manner in which Senator Bishop asks her questions, let alone the actual content of them.

I would like to reinforce what I said earlier, namely, that progress is being made, I believe. I was very gratified to hear Senator Baume's comments that we are making progress in implementing performance budgeting. He said the Parliament is no longer asking questions about paperclips and that it is looking at programs, and I think that is true. Can I take this opportunity to say that I think we owe a special debt to Senator Baume in this respect.

Another issue that was raised was attendance of secretaries. I think the Committee that I have most to deal with is, in fact, the Public Accounts Committee and I have certainly become aware of the Committee's interest in having secretaries attend. I would still maintain there are occasions when the Committee itself is better served by getting people who are more knowledgeable about the particular issue than the Secretary, but I think we do need to recognise and certainly I have adjusted my thinking that the Committee is not going to be satisfied if it gets people who cannot take responsibility. They may be more knowledgeable, but if they are not finally responsible, that will not satisfy the Committee and, as has come through in this morning's discussion, we create problems for ourselves if we leave the Committee unsatisfied. It just means that it will come up again and so on. Without necessarily moving to the position in which a Secretary's attendance should be mandatory, I think our side needs to reassess it.

In relation to Senate estimates committees, I make a distinction about a department which is represented in the Senate by its Minister. I think the case for the Secretary attending a Senate estimates committee is much stronger when the Minister representing a department is not the real Minister, for want of a better phrase. As has been brought out this morning, assessment of performance is a political exercise and it should be a political exercise. If your full Minister is there, then it is entirely appropriate that the Minister handles those sorts of questions and the need for the Secretary is very considerably lessened, in my view.

Finally, I would like to make a couple of observations on Senator Bishop's comments that if I can paraphrase them, I think, accurately if the process is corrupted, so is its outcome. Put like that, I certainly would not disagree and no-one, I believe, should be defending a corrupted process.

Senator Bishop It is only proper, as well.

Dr Keating We do have an obligation to maintain probity. That is not at issue in my mind, or should not be at issue. What I think we have tried to do, however, is raise the question as to whether all the processes that we have been involved in are essential to maintaining probity on the one hand, and if they are essential to maintaining probity that ends the case. If they are not essential to maintaining probity but they could be reformed so that greater flexibility was allowed in order to achieve better outcomes, then I cannot see the case for not reforming them. Let me be a bit more specific with the example of accounts processing. In that case, the Government has decided to change the processes. There have been very considerable savings as a result of changing the processes but, at the end of the day, I do not think anybody has shown that there has been any greater risk indeed, we would argue less risk to probity, in the sense of minimising fraud, under the new processes compared with the old. That is essentially because the use of the credit card in particular does offer a better paper trail than we had under the old processes.

Mr Taylor I would like to make two comments. The first is that, quite clearly, a new equilibrium is being sought by both the players – the Parliament and the Government – in the relationship between them. The Public Service is unlikely to get either the treatment or the certainty that it might prefer until after, if ever, this settles down. I think there will be constant raiding parties, at least from the Parliament's side, seeking to extend the boundaries. I agree with Senator Baume that the glorious revolution is not over. But I believe there is only one solution in a democratic society. The second point I want to make is tied in a little to that. I should preface it by saying that I have never had any disagreement with anything that Michael Keating has said, but I do worry about some things that emanate from his Department or what some people from his Department say publicly at times. They may be running straw men or trying to change attitudes and, therefore, being a little extreme. But it seems to me there is a danger to sensible policies along the lines of allowing managers to manage risk management and treating probity in a proper way. Some of the presentations have resulted in great uncertainty out at the workplace, where often junior people have to take decisions about what to do. I think they are sometimes getting the wrong message and I think Parliament itself is quite uncertain. I should not speak for it, but my perception is that many in the Parliament are quite uncertain as well, I think unnecessarily so in some cases. I think there is some question in many people's minds as to whether the Reid committee recommendations for central coordinating authorities to be more forthcoming in advice have been effective in some areas. I realise that there is a question of balance, particularly when one is trying – as indeed I am trying within my own organisation – to force responsibility and accountability as far down the line as one possibly can. There is a balance somewhere there that one is seeking to reach; there will be mistakes made, but I do believe there is a perception that many people have been pushed off and told to swim without actually being given enough training. I want to repeat, though, that you should not take that as an indication that the Audit Office is not in favour of a more sensible approach to management. I am merely saying there are some things that are said publicly as expressions of how it should be done that I could not disagree with more and that I think do enormous damage to the cause.

Mr Tickner I want to recap a few things. First of all, I strongly believe there is a need for more of these forums. I am a little bit disappointed that more people have not commented. To those who have done so I would say that even though I may not always agree with you it is very important that we hear from you about how you perceive things. I have some real empathy for how Pat feels, from the Aboriginal Affairs perspective. I think that needs to be put on the record but conversely, as a parliamentarian, I find that Peter Baume's response cannot be argued with. I want now to say two things. First, I think natural tension between the Public Service and the Parliament is inevitable and really desirable. It is appropriate, if there is going to be public accountability, that we are not always sharing cucumber sandwiches – to use Senator Bishop's analogy. But I believe that, despite that natural tension, professional relationships will ultimately win the day. I believe also that there are times when we can be allies, as parliamentarians, in causes and policies that you are advancing within your department. I hope, to give the example I gave before, that the work of the Public Accounts Committee on therapeutic goods was very helpful in alerting the public to the need for national legislation and, one hopes, giving some added impetus to the Government's moves for reform: so we can work together on lots of things. My central view is that there need to be reforms in public accountability to keep pace with the reforms that have occurred in public sector management. For me this is the essence of what needs to be done. That is twofold: firstly, the reforms to the Auditor-General's Office and its relationship with the Parliament, and secondly, the reforms of the Parliament itself. That is our job as parliamentarians. The difficulty is that individual members of either House cannot do it on their own. It is very much up to the senior managers within the Department of the House of Representatives and the Senate to start to take some initiatives to have a comprehensive parliamentary response to scrutiny. The heat ought to be on them. The Speaker and the President, hopefully, can play some role in that process as well. Finally I would just like to say, to echo a theme best put forward today by Senator Baume, that we have an excellent system by world standards. We can make it a lot better and I think today's proceedings will contribute to that end.

Dr Uhr Thank you Robert. Senator Baume, on the tenth anniversary of your *Through a Glass, Darkly*, would you care to comment?

Senator Peter Baume First of all, it is impressive to see the amount of talent and experience and capacity gathered here today. It does the Parliament a great honour that so many senior people have attended this seminar. It does not go unnoticed. Secondly, John Uhr asked a question which was not completely answered. I think we have to agree that the estimates process is multipurpose and that some of the purposes would appear, at least, to be mutually antagonistic. If people find that a nuisance, that is just a problem, but there are different agendas operating. They will continue to operate and we have to

understand that that is so. Thirdly, Steven Skehill, before he left, referred to some failures of communication. Fair enough. They do occur, and when they do occur I suppose both senders and receivers have to worry about their contribution.

Finally, can I tell you a story: when I grew up, the road rule in New South Wales was to give way to the right. That has now been replaced by a new road rule where lines are drawn on the road. The essence of the difference was that the give-way-to-the-right rule had some effect on preventing crashes. But what it was really good at was apportioning blame afterwards. The drawing of lines on the road actually does a lot more towards preventing crashes. I do not want too closely to draw an analogy between the different roles which are played by the Audit Office and the estimates process, but it is not entirely unrelated to the analogy I have just mentioned.

Senator Bishop I would like to take the opportunity to look at future directions. Firstly, the estimates committees at present are only serviced almost immediately before they sit. In other words, it is not an ongoing committee which is able to deal with matters in a regular way, so it would be worth looking at the proposal to see whether a permanent secretariat for the estimates committees, and a continued assessment of the material as it comes through, could be worthwhile. We do tend to get all information for estimates committees in large lumps. Whenever you get information in large lumps some gets assimilated and some gets discarded or overlooked. So if we could have a more orderly receipt of documentation, both in terms of answers to questions taken on notice and on other published material, I think we might see a lessening of some of the bottlenecks that certainly do occur in estimates committees, such as sitting at three-thirty in the morning when I think it is fair to say that ones acumen is not exactly at its best. That would also allow permanent staff to be attached. With Estimates A, of which I am a member, it has seen a change of staff, and so you do not get continuity. I think they would be good things to look at.

I do not resile in any way from my comments on the artificiality of trying to separate process and outcomes. I do not apologise either for saying that it did seem to be an absolutely concerted effort to try to promote this concept. It certainly appeared in speeches that Dr Keating gave. It turned up again in a speech, with exactly the same phraseology, that Mr Morris gave. It turned up again in the statement brought into the Senate last week dealing with the new rules for procurement. There is a continuing deliberate phrase that turns up at every available opportunity in trying to hammer a point. I am going to be just as relentless and hammer it and say that I still think it is an artificial distinction. It was not only the corrupted aspect I was focusing on, but also the improper aspect. That is why, when Dr Keating accurately quoted me as saying 'A corrupted process does give a corrupted outcome', I mentioned I had also used the word 'improper'. Let me give another example, which some may think perhaps is of lesser importance, but which, in the political process, is very important. Let us take the advertisement for social security. You are all familiar with the one I mean: the child sitting on the bed; dirty sandshoe; broken shoelace; furniture all courtesy of *Freedom* furniture, it looks like to me; child weeping; terribly depressed. Next moment, a hand appears from nowhere; money in the hand. Next scene, child has clean shoes and nice fresh shoelaces. Tag line, 'See what Social Security can do for you'. Subliminal message, 'political advertising'. That is a political judgment that I am giving to you. It was a technique used in New South Wales by Barry Unsworth who spent \$8m doing it. It did not help in the end, but nevertheless public funds were used to do it. You could say, in terms of outcome, that that was a very successful ad. It did what it was meant to do. Yet, the processes which were gone through to achieve that ad, to me, were political processes which I call improper. They are the distinctions, or the points, that I would like to make in stressing that the attempt to break process and outcome is artificial.

I would like to say also, as has Peter Baume, that I think it is a mark of acknowledgment that the Parliament and the public sector are in a symbiotic relationship in many ways. If there were a realisation that the sharing of information was necessary to make the process work and if there were a respect between those of us who faced the public and those of you who were employed in the Public Service, then we would all be better served. I think the fact that you paid \$75 to come and do it is a further mark that needs to be noted.

Politicians do not enjoy very much of a reputation. They are kind of down the bottom of journalists. Yet, no matter what side of the political spectrum we come from, I believe we come here with a sense of altruism. We do have a contribution to make. We do have something to give that will make this country a better country or, at least, will be passed on to the next generation. I see that role as one of a trustee, in many ways. I cannot stress too much that there is a need for a willingness to part with information and a sense of importance in informing committees to exist. This way we will never again have a departmental

secretary appear before a parliamentary committee and say, 'I, me, myself, personally, have never been asked to come before. Why am I here at all?'. He will know that we are part of the same process; it is worth his while to come and it is worth our while to listen. Thank you.

Senator Coates I regret that Senator Bishop has raised a number of political points for which this is not the proper opportunity to respond. As far as her specific criticism of my conduct of Estimates Committee B last week, if I am still seething about it tomorrow, I might take advantage of another forum to respond, but I will not take up your time now. I just wish to indicate that I do not accept what she has said with the less than full information available to her. In relation to what Pat Turner said and Peter Baume's response to it, I guess it is always a matter of judgment and personal opinion as to when a valid political exercise turns into an unreasonable vendetta.

The second point I would like to make is in response to what Robert Tickner talked about: the way House of Representatives Committee activities compare to Senate activities. As most people would know, I am no Senate chauvinist, and I certainly would not want to limit the estimates function to the Senate only. The ideal would be joint committees as often as we can possibly have them, because the competition between the Houses is unnecessary and unproductive. And as far as that sort of aspect is concerned, in relation to the question of Ministers and Ministers representing others, I do not see any particular reason why House of Representatives Ministers should not appear before Senate committees and directly take responsibility for their departments. In some cases that might lead to some interesting results.

As someone else has said, it is regrettable that there was not the opportunity to get more feedback from this gathering, because I would have liked to have had more feedback about my suggestion, which Senator Bishop half agreed with, concerning a more continuing estimates procedure. I emphasise that I propose it be a combination of the committees rather than continuing as separate estimates committees, because I think it would be better done in an integrated way. It is a particular pity that we did not have inputs from secretaries of estimates committees, because they might have been in the position of giving a quite different perspective on the operation of their committees, and on the public servants before them. I think it would have been interesting to have heard their summation. They are listening and keeping their counsel, but it would have been interesting to have heard from them.

Dr Uhr Thank you, Senator Coates. I hand you over the Peter O'Keeffe, who is a noted secretary of estimates committees in times gone by, and supervisor of them in times about now.

Mr O'Keeffe Harry Evans has asked me to give concluding comments and thanks, because he is otherwise tied up. I am very grateful to you as participants, and to our speakers. We deliberately chose a half-day seminar, knowing that a function like this has an enormous opportunity-cost in terms of your time and other things that you can be doing. I want to leave you with one thought that has arisen obliquely from today's proceedings: everyone of us, every day, takes decisions to spend other people's money. It is a process which requires the finest form of scrutiny. We will better understand the parliamentary process and the process of the estimates committees if we put ourselves in the position of citizens, and feel the transformation that makes. Thank you again.

Workshop adjourned at 1.08pm.