

Introduction

- 1.1 Section 16 of the *Public Works Committee Act 1969* (the Act) requires that the Joint Committee on Public Works report to the Parliament annually on its proceedings. This is the Sixty-fourth General Report and covers the work of the Thirty-third Committee for the period 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2000.
- 1.2 This report has three chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the Committee – its role and functions. Chapter 2 provides a summary of the Reports tabled by the Committee in the year ended 31 December 2000, together with the Government’s responses to them. Highlights of the Committee’s activities and other issues are presented in Chapter 3.

Role

- 1.3 The Act sets out the duties of the Public Works Committee. Its major statutory requirement is to consider each public work that is referred to it and to report the Committee’s recommendations to both Houses of the Parliament.
- 1.4 The Act empowers the Committee to comment fully on each public work referred to it. In particular, the Committee comments on the ways and means that an agency proposes to undertake a public work. The Committee is also empowered under the Act to recommend any alterations to a given proposal, if in its opinion, that ensures a more cost-effective outcome.

Establishment

- 1.5 The Parliament appointed the Thirty-third Committee on 8 December 1998. Section 7 of the Act provides that the Committee comprise nine members, including a Chair and Vice-Chair.
- 1.6 The Committee is supported by a secretariat with staff employed by the Department of the House of Representatives. The secretariat also supports the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs. Staff who supported the work of the Public Works Committee during 2000 were:

Secretary	Mr Bjarne Nordin	(until January 2000)
	Mr Michael Fetter	(February – April 2000)
	Mr Trevor Rowe	(from May 2000)
Inquiry Secretary	Ms Marie Kawaja	(from August 2000)
	Mr Michael Ross	(until August 2000)
	Mr Ian Ireland	On secondment from the Department of the Parliamentary Library
Administrative Staff	Ms Shelley McInnis	(until April 2000)
	Ms Angela Nagy	(until November 2000)
	Ms Maria Pappas	(from November 2000)
	Ms Belinda Shepherd	(part-time)
	Ms Alime Smith	(part-time)

References to the Committee

- 1.7 The Committee receives its public works referrals by means of a motion moved in either House of the Parliament.¹ In addition, the Governor-General may, at any time when the Parliament is not in session or when the House of Representatives adjourned for a period exceeding one month or an indefinite period, refer a public work to the Committee.² During 2000 all references to the Committee were made in the House of Representatives on motions moved by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration.

1 *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, Section 18 (1)

2 *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, Section 18 (4).

- 1.8 A public work referred to the Committee under Section 18 of the Act cannot commence before a report of the Committee concerning the work has been presented to both Houses of the Parliament.³ The limit of cost for a public work referred to the Committee is currently set at \$6 million.^{4,5}

The Committee's Operations

Conduct of Inquiries

- 1.9 When a public work has been referred to the Committee, the proponent Commonwealth agency provides a statement of evidence (makes a submission) to the Committee, which provides full details of the proposed project.
- 1.10 The Committee advertises these referrals, as inquiries to be undertaken by the Committee, and seeks submissions from members of the public and persons with a specific interest in the particular public work.
- 1.11 Following receipt of submissions from relevant stakeholders, the Committee inspects the proposed public works site and holds a public hearing. The public hearing provides an opportunity for the proponent agency to elaborate on points made in its submission and to respond to any concerns raised by other stakeholders. The public hearing also gives those who have made written submissions, and who have been invited to give oral evidence, to expand on matters of concern.
- 1.12 The Committee presents its findings in the form of a report to Parliament and makes recommendations either to proceed or not to proceed with the project under investigation. The Committee's reports are available through:
- legal deposit libraries;
 - the Commonwealth Government Bookshop in all State and Territory capital cities;
 - the Committee's secretariat; and
 - the Committee's webpage: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/pwc
- 1.13 While the Government will consider recommendations made by the Committee as soon as reports are tabled, the Committee has adopted the

3 *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, Section 18 (5).

4 *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, Section 18 (8). The threshold was increased from \$atrr

5 The threshold was increased from \$2.0m in 1985.

practice of forwarding reports to those Ministers whose portfolios are responsible for the implementation of the Committee's recommendations. Reports are also forwarded to relevant Commonwealth agency heads for information and, where appropriate, response to recommendations.

- 1.14 Each report is forwarded to the Minister for Finance and Administration as the relevant portfolio Minister for public works.

Government responses

- 1.15 The Government normally responds to each report by way of moving an expediency motion in the Parliament. Current practice is for the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration to move the expediency motion in the House of Representatives and in doing so detail the Government's response to the Committee's recommendations. After the passing of an expediency motion, a public work may commence.