

JOINT COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND AUDIT
TABLING STATEMENT FOR:
REPORT 439: REVIEW OF AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORTS Nos. 11
to 31 (2012-13)

AND
OTHER MATTERS

MR ROBERT OAKESHOTT MP
MEMBER FOR LYNE
CHAIR

CANBERRA

27 June 2013

[after leave granted for statement, as per procedure]

In its review of this batch of audits, the Committee concentrated its scrutiny on two reports which covered:

- The Energy Efficiency Information Grants Program; and
- Key Performance Indicators.

These have been two of the areas I have focused on during my time as Chair.

It's important that we get the processes right when spending public money – and specifically in awarding government grants. Too often we see poor administration tarnish otherwise good programs. This needs to change.

There also needs to be a *cultural* change to how we measure and report performance. We should all *demand* clear performance indicators and quality performance assessments. The Committee's report makes two recommendations asking that this cultural change be prioritised.

Moving onto other matters — yesterday the Committee held its annual public hearing with the Commissioner of Taxation and its scrutiny bodies.

The Commissioner outlined his plans to restructure the ATO, execute a vision out to 2020, modernise the way the office communicates with the public, and to test business assertions to ensure the integrity of Australia's corporate tax base.

I strongly support many of these initiatives and have argued for similar action many times.

The Committee heard that the ATO's scrutineers were largely positive about the possibilities from the Commissioner's new initiatives.

But with tax, as with life, you need to put your money where your mouth is. The Committee has every confidence that the new Commissioner will do exactly that, and looks forward to seeing the progress of these big plans.

...

Yesterday, the Committee also held its inaugural public hearing with key whole-of-government scrutiny bodies: in attendance were the Auditor-General, Information Commissioner, FOI Commissioner and Commonwealth Ombudsman. We heard these bodies are all facing resourcing pressure — due to tightening budgets, along with increasing workloads and expanding roles. The hearing gave the Committee a valuable opportunity to reflect on the overall state of Commonwealth administration; and importantly it gave these scrutiny bodies a voice in parliament — to which I'll return to shortly.

...

But now I'd like to say some general words about the work of the Committee — after all, it's our 100 year anniversary!

With all the activity of this Committee, people have asked me "what's the legacy for this Parliament?". Well, I think we've pulled our weight.

1. We've catalysed changes to the Auditor General's Act – allowing them to 'follow the money' across jurisdictions and corporate borders; and making other important improvements.
2. We've helped establish the Parliamentary Budget Office – which has been an institutional evolution for all Members and one of this Parliament's greatest achievements for budget transparency.

3. And we've built international linkages – including with Indonesia. And I'd like to acknowledge Murtedjo, a secondee from the Indonesian Public Accounts Committee. I hope your visit will strengthen the already solid relationship between our committees.

There are many more examples I could go on with, but I'd rather suggest some priority action areas for the next committee — a 'love letter' of sorts.

First, continue to demand better performance assessments; better 'joined-up' government; and better plain English communication.

Second, continue in the tradition of past public accounts committees — driving greater budget transparency and long-term budget sustainability. This is an area ready for further scrutiny.

Third, make sure you've 'got the back' of the Auditor-General and the Parliamentary Budget Officer — indeed, this is your legislated duty. As highlighted at yesterday's public hearing, similar support should be given to other key scrutiny bodies. The 'fourth-arm' are critical and need adequate resources and parliamentary attention. I strongly encourage you to continue to hold regular public hearings.

Fourth, pay close attention to the reports of the Auditor General. These are sometimes long and detailed, but they tell critical stories about the state of Australia's public services and how the Government and the Parliament are serving the people. Reviewing the reports of the ANAO is core work for the Committee.

And last but not least, remember not to spread yourselves too thinly. Focus on the things that matter and ensure you follow through - checking up that people have heard your message, have taken action, and that things have actually improved!

Before signing off I'd like to make a plug for Australia's public service. Despite the critical nature of some of the Committee's reports, overall we should all be proud of the exceptional individuals and collective commitment of our public servants. The committee should keep this in mind, and praise good work where credit is due.

In closing, I'd like to thank another group who deserves much praise indeed - all Members of the Committee for their constructive and collaborative work over the life of this Parliament.

Thank you. - **Robert Oakeshott MP, Chair**