

**The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia**

**Senate  
Finance and Public Administration  
Legislation Committee**

**REPORT ON 1999-2000 ANNUAL REPORTS  
REPORT TWO**

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# REPORT ON 1999-2000 ANNUAL REPORTS

## REPORT TWO

### Background

1.1 In accordance with the amendment to Continuing Order of the Senate no.1 relating to the allocation of departments to Committees agreed to on 8 February 2001, the Finance and Public Administration Committee has responsibility for the oversight of the following:

- Parliament;
- Prime Minister and Cabinet;
- Finance and Administration; and
- Reconciliation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs.

1.2 Under Senate Standing Order 25(21) annual reports of departments and agencies stand referred to legislation committees in accordance with the above resolution. Each committee is required to:

- (a) examine each annual report referred to it and report to the Senate whether the report is apparently satisfactory;
- (b) consider in more detail, and report to the Senate on each annual report which is not apparently satisfactory, and on the other annual reports which it selects for more detailed consideration;
- (c) investigate and report to the Senate on any lateness in the presentation of annual reports;
- (d) in considering an annual report take into account any relevant remarks about the report made in debate in the Senate;
- (e) if the committee so determines, consider annual reports of departments and budget-related agencies in conjunction with examination of estimates;
- (f) report on annual reports tabled by 31 October each year by the tenth sitting day of the following year, and on annual reports tabled by 30 April each year by the tenth sitting day after 30 June of that year;
- (g) draw to the attention of the Senate any significant matters relating to the operations and performance of the bodies furnishing the annual reports; and
- (h) report to the Senate each year whether there are any bodies which do not present annual reports to the Senate and which should present such reports.

### Reports examined

1.3 On 7 March 2001 the Committee tabled its first report on the 1999-2000 annual reports. At this time all annual reports for departments and agencies for which the Committee has responsibility for oversight, except for the report of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, had been tabled and were examined by the Committee. In

this second report for 2001, the Committee is required, under standing orders, to report on those annual reports referred to it and which were tabled by 30 April 2001 by the tenth sitting day after 30 June, that is, 28 August 2001. On this occasion, the Committee elected to report on the 1999-2000 annual report for the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation which was tabled on 22 August 2001 in order to complete its examination of the 1999-2000 annual reports.

1.4 The Committee was concerned with the apparent delay in the tabling of the annual report. According to the Council's enabling legislation, it must, as soon as practicable after the end of each financial year, prepare and give to the Minister a report of its operations during that year. According to the Senate *Order of Business*<sup>1</sup>, it was submitted to and received by the Minister on 20 December 2000, approximately eight months before it was tabled.

### **Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Annual Report 1999-2000**

1.5 This is the Council's final annual report before ceasing operations on 31 December 2000, in accordance with its enabling legislation, *Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act 1991* (the Act). Accordingly, the report covers the extended period of 1 July 1999 to 30 December 2000 to include the final six months of the Council's work.

1.6 The Committee notes that the report, *Reconciliation - Australia's challenge*, which documents the outcomes of the whole life of the Council was tabled on 7 December 2000. The Council's 1999-2000 annual report was subsequently tabled on 22 August 2001.

1.7 Following the high standard set in previous years, the Council has produced again a thorough and useful document which the Committee considers is 'apparently satisfactory'.

1.8 The report highlights what the Council considered was a great period for reconciliation. In accordance with its enabling legislation the Council reported on significant progress towards reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the wider Australian community. Highlights for the period under review included the presentation of the Council's two reconciliation documents to national leaders and the Australian people at Corroboree 2000; and the nationwide bridge walks for reconciliation which the Council estimated approximately one million Australians took part in.

1.9 The report includes a brief chapter on Reconciliation Australia. A major project of the Council in its last 18 months of work was the facilitation of an independent foundation to provide a continuing national focus for reconciliation following the end of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in December 2000.

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1 Senate *Order of Business*, 22 August 2001, p. 6.



1.10 In accordance with paragraph 30(2)(b) of the Act, the Council is required to report on particulars of any directions given by the Minister under section 9. It was reported that no directions were given in the period under review.

1.11 The Committee was pleased to note that even though the Council has ceased operations, a website has been maintained as an archive of all the documents to provide a ten-year history of the Council for the period to December 2000. (<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/car>). The Committee looks forward to seeing the 1999-2000 annual report on this website in the near future.

**Senator Brett Mason**

**Chair**