



JOINT COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND AUDIT

Review of Auditor-General's Reports

# Hearing on Drought Assistance and Carers

Federal Parliament's Public Accounts and Audit Committee is holding a hearing to examine two Audit Reports: **Number 50, 2004-05, *Drought Assistance*** and **Number 58, 2004-05, *Helping Carers: the National Respite for Carers Program***.

The hearing is on **Monday, 13 February 2006**, from **10:00am – 1:00pm**, in **Committee Room 1R4, Parliament House**, Canberra.

The first report to be reviewed is **No. 50, 2004-05, *Drought Assistance***. The audit looked at the administration and implementation of the drought assistance measures provided by the Australian Government in response to the drought which began in 2002–03 and has been particularly rare and severe.

This audit focused on Exceptional Circumstances (EC) assistance provided, including *prima facie* EC, and key aspects of the additional drought assistance measures. The ANAO found that Australian Government delivery of assistance was, on the whole, accurate and timely. However the ANAO highlighted some areas for improvement such as including assessment of the effectiveness of promotional and information approaches; improved administrative interactions between Australian and State and Territory Government agencies; and clearer arrangements for a lead agency.

The second report to be examined is **No. 58, 2004-05, *Helping Carers: the National Respite for Carers Program***. The Australian Government delivers carer-focused respite, information and counselling services under the National Respite for Carers Program (NRCP). The ANAO audit assessed the effectiveness of the Department of Health's administration of NRCP and commented on a range of issues, including program design, planning on the basis of need, funding, coordination, performance monitoring, and compliance management.

The ANAO found that Health's administration of NRCP supported the delivery of respite, information and counselling services to carers. However, the ANAO identified opportunities for Health to improve the effectiveness of its administrative practices indicating that these had weakened as the program had grown. A more structured, integrated and planned approach to implementation and future expansion of NRCP was recommended. The Minister's publication in 2004 of *A New Strategy for Community Care—The Way Forward*, identified a number of areas where a more consistent and coordinated approach across all of Health's community care programs, including NRCP, was necessary. Health has already commenced the implementation of review initiatives and is well advanced with some.

The Committee will hold roundtable discussions with the agencies involved in the audits to follow-up on recommendations and changes made as a result of the audit findings.

**For more information:** please contact the secretariat on telephone (02) 6277 4615 or visit the Committee's website at [www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jpaa/](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jpaa/)