

Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

1.1 The Australian Civilian Corps Bill 2010 was introduced in the House of Representatives on 23 June 2010. The following day, the Senate referred the provisions of the bill to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee for inquiry and report by 24 August 2010. On 19 July 2010, the Governor-General prorogued the 42nd Parliament and dissolved the House of Representatives. On 24 August 2010, the committee tabled its report out of session informing the Senate that after due consideration, it had resolved not to continue its inquiry into the provisions of the bill. It noted that if the bill were reintroduced in the new parliament, the Senate may again refer it to the committee for inquiry.

1.2 On 30 September, the Minister for Foreign Affairs re-introduced the bill into the House of Representatives and on the same day the provisions of the bill were referred to the committee with a reporting date of 17 November 2010.

1.3 The committee notes that, when recommending the proposed legislation for inquiry and report, the Selection of Bills Committee identified the following principal issues for consideration:

- concerns relating to costs and logistics, and adequate protection for Australians working overseas under the program; and
- the potential for conflicts of interest arising from AusAID selecting civilian specialists who may be AusAID employees as they are not excluded from applying.¹

Purpose of the bill

1.4 The purpose of the bill is to establish the Australian Civilian Corps and to provide the legal framework for the employment and management of Australian Civilian Corps employees. The Corps is to consist of persons engaged as Australian civilian corps employees to perform duties overseas.

Conduct of the inquiry

1.5 During its first inquiry, the committee advertised the inquiry in the *Australian* on 30 June, 14 July and 11 August. It also wrote to relevant ministers and departments calling for written submissions and contacted a number of other organisations,

1 Selection of Bills Committee, *Report No. 11 of 2010*, 30 September 2010, Appendix 2.

commentators and academics inviting them to make submissions to the inquiry. The committee received one submission.

1.6 Once the bill was re-referred, the committee again advertised the inquiry in the *Australian* and wrote to many individuals and organisations, including the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), seeking written submissions.

Scrutiny of Bills Committee

1.7 The Senate Standing Committee for the Scrutiny of Bills considered the Bill and raised a number of concerns, which are discussed in chapter 3.

Submissions

1.8 The committee received three additional submissions. All submissions are listed at Appendix 1. The committee agreed that, based on the submissions, a public hearing was not required but wrote to AusAID seeking additional information or advice on a number of matters raised in the submissions and by the Scrutiny of Bills Committee. AusAID was unable to respond in time for its answers to be incorporated in the report.

Acknowledgement

1.9 The committee thanks all those who assisted with the inquiry.