Date Introduced: 8 November 1979
House: House of Representatives
Presented by: Hon. J.E. McLeay, Minister for Administrative Services

Short Digest of Bill

Purpose

To broaden the power of the Joint Parliamentary Committee of Public Accounts.

Background

The Joint Committee of Public Accounts which consists of 7 Members and 3 Senators was established under the Public Accounts Committee Act 1951. The Committee is charged with examining the accounts of receipts and expenditure of the Commonwealth and reporting on such matters to the Parliament. The Committee provides one of the methods by which Parliament is able to scrutinize the Executive.

This Bill proposes to extend the duties of the Committee in order to strengthen its role. According to the Second Reading Speech, the amendments are part of a continuing process in broadening parliamentary scrutiny of public expenditure and follow on from the establishment of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Expenditure in April 1976.

Provisions

At present the Committee's duties are limited in its examination of certain statutory authorities and governmental bodies to information contained in the Auditor-General's Annual Report. Clause 5 amends s.8 to enable the Committee to examine the financial affairs of all statutory and other Government bodies including the financial statements transmitted by these bodies to the Auditor-General. The Committee is also able to examine any special reports made to the Parliament by the Auditor-General. This will enable the Committee to study any efficiency audits carried out by the Auditor-General and reported to Parliament. New sub.s. 8(2) excludes examination of the financial affairs of the Northern Territory and the Administration of an External Territory. An inter-
governmental body constituted by agreement between the Commonwealth and the States may only be examined by the Committee on the consent of the parties (new sub.s. 8(4) and (5)).

The Bill also makes a number of amendments in order to improve the efficiency of operation of the Committee. The Committee's power to appoint Sectional Committees is extended by removing the prohibition that only two Sectional Committees shall be in existence at the same time (Clause 6 amends s.9). Clause 4 amends s.7 so that a quorum is to consist of 4 members rather than a majority of members (6).

Clause 3 inserts a new s.6A to clarify that the Committee may sit at such times and such places in Australia as it determines (but not outside Australia) and that it may meet notwithstanding the prorogation of Parliament.

12 November 1979

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