HOSPITALS AND HEALTH SERVICES COMMISSION (REPEAL) BILL 1978

Date Introduced: 6 June 1978
House: House of Representatives
Presented by: Hon. R.J.D. Hunt, M.P., Minister for Health

Short Digest of Bill

Purpose

The Bill proposes to abolish the Hospitals and Health Services Commission (HHSC) which was established as a statutory body by the Whitlam Government in 1973 to provide the Government with independent advice about the assessment of health matters.

In his Second Reading Speech the Minister for Health stated that the HHSC had achieved its purpose and its functions were now to be absorbed into a body - the Social Welfare Policy Committee and its supporting Committees - with wider terms of reference. Their functions are to integrate the development of plans and policies and to review existing policies and programs in the health & welfare field.

Background

The Labor Party included the establishment of the HHSC in its 1972 election campaign, and set its purposes as (broadly) the promotion of community health services and hospital services on a regional basis and in conjunction with the State Governments. An Interim Committee was appointed and first met in April 1973. It acted until April 1974 when the Governor General made appointments to the HHSC which was established under the HHSC Act 1973.

The HHSC has been concerned with a number of areas, notably community health services, hospitals development, pathology services, the family medicine program, rural health and ambulance services for example.

In 1977, the appointments of six part-time Commissioners of the HHSC expired, and the Government appointed offices of the Department of Health to fill their places "because of the close association which had developed between the Department and the Commission during the past three years", (Department of Health News Release No 38/77, 31 May 1977). This action was seen by
some critics as reducing the independence of the HHSC by placing it effectively under the control of the Department of Health.

Provisions

Proposed s3 repeals the HHSC Act 1973, while proposed s5 transfers all assets and liabilities of the HHSC to the Commonwealth Government. Proposed s6 and s7 make arrangements for the continuation and termination of grants, contracts etc made by the HHSC. Under proposed s8 the Minister for Health is empowered to dispose of HHSC documents as he sees fit.