PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
DEPARTMENT OF THE PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARY

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES (NATIONAL STANDARDS) AMENDMENT BILL 1978

Date Introduced: 21 September 1978
House: Senate
Presented by: Senator J.J. Webster, Minister for Science

Short Digest of Bill

Purpose

To revise the structure of the National Standards Commission, and make provisions to improve its administration and the procedures for its operation.

Background

The Weights and Measures (National Standards) Act 1960 established a National Standards Commission. The object of the Act is to provide for the establishment and use throughout Australia of uniform units of measurement, and uniform standards of measurement, of physical quantities.

The relationship between the Commission and CSIRO is expressed in the 1977 Report of the Independent Inquiry into CSIRO as follows:

"CSIRO is specified as the guardian of the Commonwealth's standards of measurement under the general direction of the National Standards Commission".

The unit within CSIRO which carries out this responsibility is the National Measurement Laboratory (NML).

In effect the Commission determines what are to become uniform units and standards of measurement; while practical technological and scientific work in connection with this function is carried out by NML.

The Bill does not alter the existing arrangements between the Commission and CSIRO.

Main Provisions

Clause 7 repeals section 17 of the Act which deals with the membership of the Commission. New section 17 makes provision for a Chairman and 4 other members, all of whom...
are to be appointed by the Governor-General as part-time members. The substituted section also requires:

- At least three members to have scientific or technical knowledge,
- CSIRO advice in the appointment of scientific members,
- Appointments not exceeding 5 years with eligibility for re-appointment.

Previously three members were nominated by CSIRO, and one with scientific knowledge by the other four members. All 5 members were appointed by the Minister, one of whom he might appoint as Chairman. Members held office during the Minister's pleasure, and on such terms and conditions as he determined.

Clause 8 inserts new sections 18AA, 18AB, 18AC, 18AD, 18AE and 18AF. These simply spell out administrative, disciplinary and procedural matters concerning members and the business of the Commission including:

- Remuneration of members to be determined by the Remuneration Tribunal (proposed s.18AA).
- Resignation by writing to the Governor-General (proposed s.18AB).
- Termination of appointment in the event of misbehaviour, incapacity, bankruptcy, absence without leave, or non-declaration of pecuniary interests (proposed s.18AC).
- Mandatory disclosure of pecuniary interest in a matter under consideration (proposed s.18AD).
- Procedure at meetings (proposed s.18AE).
- Authority of Commission to delegate any of its powers to an officer of the Commission, other than the power of delegation (proposed s.18AF).

Clause 9 inserts into the Act new "PART V - FINANCE". New sections 18B-18H deal in detail with such matters as:

- Payment to the Commission of moneys appropriated by the Parliament for the purposes of the Act (proposed s.18B).
- Bank accounts to be maintained by the Commission (proposed s.18C).
- Application of moneys only for outgoings for the purposes of the Act (proposed s.18D).
- Preparation, form and submission of estimates (proposed s.18E).
- Limitations on entering into contracts in amounts exceeding $50,000 (proposed s.18F).
The keeping of proper accounts, and the control of assets (proposed s.18G).

Inspection of accounts at least once per year by the Auditor-General, and the submission of his report to the Minister (proposed s.18H).

Clause 10 inserts new section 19AA which makes it clear that the Commission is not subject to taxation by the Commonwealth, a State or Territory.

Clause 11 amends section 19B. This section provided for a penalty of $200 for false representation in connection with the approval of a pattern by the Commission. This is increased to $2,000.

Clause 12 inserts new section 19C which requires submission of an annual report to the Minister for presentation to the Parliament. The new section lays down detailed procedures for prior submission of financial statements to the Auditor-General.

New sections 1, 2, 10, 11 and 13 come into operation on the day they receive Royal Assent and the other sections or a date to be fixed by Proclamation.

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Defence, Science & Technology Group
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