Aboriginal Education (Supplementary Assistance) Amendment Bill 1994
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Aboriginal Education (Supplementary Assistance) Amendment Bill 1994

Date Introduced: 29 June 1994
House: House of Representatives
Portfolio: Employment, Education and Training
Commencement: 1 January 1995

Purpose

The amendments proposed by this Bill relate to funding for the Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Program. This program provides funds to organisations and institutions to supplement the cost of delivering educational services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The proposed amendments will:

* increase the appropriation, for the funding period 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1996 from $83,919,000 to $84,131,000; and

* appropriate $256,000 for the period 1 January 1996 to 30 June 1997.

Background

The Government's National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP) commenced in 1990 and was developed on the basis of the recommendations of the Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force. The Task Force was established in April 1988 and reported in July of that year. It concluded that Aboriginals were largely disadvantaged in education opportunities. The AEP was developed following the Task Force Report in conjunction with the States and Territories and it was followed by the enactment of the Principal Act which provides funds to the AESIP.

The AEP has four long term objectives:

* increasing the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in educational decision making;

* ensuring equality of access to educational services;

* achieving equity of educational participation; and

* enabling equitable and appropriate education outcomes.
The AEP sets down 21 agreed goals for Aboriginal education covering all education sectors, to be pursued by all governments. State and Territory government responses to the education related recommendations of the Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody indicate that the AEP has continuing support from all governments.

The Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Program (AESIP), which underpins the AEP, provides funds to organisations and institutions to supplement the cost of delivering educational services to Aboriginal people. The program supports preschools, primary and secondary schools, and technical and further education. The funding is provided by the Commonwealth as a supplement to the normal provision of funds for education in the State and Territories and is committed on a forward triennial basis. The second triennium of the AEP covers the years 1993 to 1995 and the Commonwealth has committed $244 million for the triennium, a 13% increase on the funding for the first triennium, as follows:

* 1 January 1993 - 30 June 1994 $76.914 million
* 1 January 1994 - 30 June 1995 $82.966 million
* 1 January 1995 - 30 June 1996 $83.919 million

For the second triennium the Commonwealth has nominated three national priorities:

* responding to the relevant recommendations of the Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody;

* implementing the National Aboriginal Languages and Literacy Strategy, the AEP components of which are:

  - the Aboriginal Literacy Strategy which provides for an intensification of efforts to improve English literacy among Aboriginal and Torres Islander school children and adults with limited experience at school;

  - the Aboriginal Languages Education Strategy promotes and facilitates the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in school, develops bilingual education programs, and will move towards the teaching of aboriginal languages in TAFE and higher education;

* implementing the National Reconciliation and Schooling Strategy which provides for specific schooling strategies which promote the reconciliation process between Australia's indigenous and non-indigenous people.

Specific recommendations of the Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody which are addressed by funding under the Principal Act include increased employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workers from 1993 and an expansion of pre-school services from 1994.
The National Reconciliation Schooling Strategy provides for:

* sister schools to forge social and educational links between schools with varying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolment;

* the production of local history kits;

* the engagement of school speakers, who will be local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; and

* the production of videos presenting factual information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait history and culture, and a video and teaching notes examining good practice in teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and studies.

As well as AESIP, the other major Aboriginal education program funded by the Commonwealth is the Aboriginal Study Assistance Scheme (ABSTUDY) which provides income support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students aged 14 years or over undertaking primary education, students undertaking secondary education, and full and part-time tertiary students. ABSTUDY payments are estimated to total $114.6 million in 1994-95.4

Other programs include the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme, the Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Program and the Vocational and Educational Guidance for Aboriginals Scheme. Only the funding for AESIP is effected by this Bill.

Main Provisions

Clause 3 increases the appropriation for the funding period 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1996 from $83,919,000 to $84,131,000, and inserts a new subsection 13B(4) which appropriates $256,000 for the period 1 January 1996 to 30 June 1997.

Endnotes

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 50.

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