Aboriginal Education (Supplementary Assistance) Amendment Bill 1992

Date Introduced: 14 October 1992
House: House of Representatives
Portfolio: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Purpose
To appropriate funds for Aboriginal education programs for the period 1 January 1993 to 30 June 1996, and to allow Aboriginal education assistance funds to be used for evaluating the effectiveness of such programs.

Background
In 1991-92, Commonwealth outlays on Aborigines (to be read as including Torres Strait Islanders) totalled $1.161 billion. Commonwealth Aboriginal education assistance is provided under a number of schemes, the principal being, in terms of Commonwealth outlays, the Aboriginal Study Assistance Scheme (ABSTUDY) and the Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Program. ABSTUDY provides income support assistance to Aboriginal students undertaking full time secondary education, primary students aged 14 and over, and part and full time tertiary students. It is reported in 1992-93 Budget Related Paper No. 7 that the number of students receiving ABSTUDY benefits has increased from 11,124 in 1976 to just under 52,000 in 1991-92. Commonwealth outlays on ABSTUDY in 1991-92 totalled $104.5 million. The Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Program (AESIP) provides funds to organisations and institutions to supplement the cost of delivering educational services to Aboriginal people. The program supports pre-schools, primary and secondary schools, and technical and further education. Commonwealth outlays on AESIP in 1991-92 totalled $73.798 million.

In 1988, the Ministers for Employment, Education and Training and Aboriginal Affairs established an Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force to advise on all aspects of Aboriginal education. The Task Force reported in July 1988 and concluded that Aborigines were largely disadvantaged in education opportunities. The Task Force outlined a number of policy objectives, including that there be equity in the provision of education to Aboriginal persons by the year 2000, and that equity with the rest of Australia be achieved in retention rates. The Task Force Report, which was seen as stage one of the process, made a number of specific recommendations, many based on the need to improve coordination and concluded

"The Task Force recommends that a Commonwealth Aboriginal Education Policy document be finalised in stage two of the policy process, based upon this Report."

In October 1988, the Minister for Employment, Education and Training announced that a National Aboriginal Education Policy (NAEP) would be developed in conjunction with the States and Territories. The NAEP was developed over 1989 and was tabled in October 1989. The long term goals of the NAEP are outlined in that document and include:
* to increase the involvement of Aboriginal people in educational decision making;
* to ensure equality of access to educational services;
* to achieve equity of educational participation; and
* to enable equitable and appropriate educational outcomes.

These goals are divided into 21 specific national policy objectives. In each sector of education Commonwealth resources are combined with those provided by other education bodies in a concerted long-term plan agreed with Aboriginal community representatives to meet the goals and objectives of the NAEP. The NAEP commenced on 1 January 1990 and embraces a number of programs, including AESIP; ABSTUDY; the Aboriginal Education Direct Assistance Program; and the Aboriginal Education Assistance (National Reconciliation and Schooling Strategy).
The NAEP has been endorsed by Commonwealth, State and Territory governments and is underpinned by the Aboriginal Education (Supplementary Assistance) Act 1989 (the Principal Act).

The report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (the Commission) contains a discussion of a variety of programs and strategies, including ABSTUDY, which play a part in improving educational prospects for Aboriginal people (Volume 4, pages 299-358). In relation to Aboriginal education in general, the Commission's recommendations included:

• that governments, State Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups and local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups should pay greater attention to the fact that the scope of the NAEP extends to pre-schooling programs and that it should be recognised that to a considerable extent the success of the whole NAEP will turn on the success of the pre-schooling initiatives;

• that at every stage of the application of the NAEP the utmost respect be paid to the first long-term goal expressed in the policy, that is, 'To establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal parents and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery, and evaluation of pre-school, primary, and secondary education services for their children'; and

• that it be recognised that the aims of the NAEP are not only to achieve equity in education for Aboriginal people but also to achieve a strengthening of Aboriginal identity, decision making and self-determination.3

Main Provisions
Clause 3 will amend section 3 of the Principal Act to insert a definition of 'permitted payment'. This will include payments made under agreements, payments for evaluating the effectiveness of agreements and the operation of the Principal Act and payments to publicise the objects of the Principal Act.

Clause 5 will insert a number of new sections into the Principal Act dealing with the appropriation of funds. Proposed section 13A provides that if any of the amounts appropriated for 1992 remain unused, this amount will be appropriated for the period 1 January 1993 to 30 June 1993.

Proposed section 13B deals with the amounts appropriated for permitted payments for later years. The sums are:

1 January 1993 - 30 June 1994: $76.914 million

References

Bills Digest Service
Parliamentary Research Service

This Digest does not have any official legal status. Other sources should be consulted to determine the subsequent official status of the Bill.


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