Aboriginal Education (Supplementary Assistance) Amendment Bill 1995

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Aboriginal Education (Supplementary Assistance) Amendment Bill 1995

Date Introduced: 28 June 1995
House: House of Representatives
Portfolio: Employment, Education and Training
Commencement: Royal Assent

Purpose

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

• increase the appropriation for the funding period 1 January 1996 to 30 June 1997 from $0.256 million to $83.636 million.

Background

The Government's National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 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 in conjunction with the States and Territories and it was followed by the enactment of the Aboriginal Education (Supplementary Assistance) Act 1989 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;
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• 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.

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 pre-schools, 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 to the State and Territories and is committed on a forward triennial basis. The second triennium of the AEP covers the period 1993/94 to 1995/96 and the Commonwealth has committed $253.142 million for the triennium.¹

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 Strait 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; and

• implementing the National Reconciliation and Schooling Strategy.

Specific recommendations of the Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody, which discussed funding under the Aboriginal Education (Supplementary Assistance) Act 1989, included increased employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workers from 1993 and an expansion of pre-school services from 1994.
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The National Reconciliation Schooling Strategy provides for:

- the development of appropriate and consistent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander curriculum studies for all schools from preschool to year 12;
- the development of consistent teacher education courses;
- the establishment of a sister schools scheme; and
- a grass roots campaign to promote greater understanding by students of their local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and its history.³

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 education.

Only the funding for AESIP is effected by this Bill.

Main Provisions

Item 1 of the Schedule to the Bill decreases the amount appropriated for the funding period 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1996 from $84.131 million to $83.861 million (- $0.27 million). The rationale for the decrease given in the Explanatory Memorandum is as follows:

Funding available in respect of the 1995 calendar year would be adjusted to reflect a decision to transfer to the Department of Communications and the Arts, in the 1995-96 financial year, an amount of $0.54 million, from funds appropriated under the Act. The funds transferred to the Department of Communications and the Arts would be used to establish the National Institute for Indigenous Performing Arts Training.

As a consequence of the transfer of the $0.54 million to the Department of Communications and the Arts for the 1995-96 financial year, the appropriation under the Act for the 1995 calendar year will be reduced by $0.27 million to reflect the half yearly effect of the transfer of the funds from 1 July 1995.

Item 2 of the Schedule to the Bill increases the appropriation for the funding period 1 January 1996 to 30 June 1997 from $0.256 million to $83.636 million.

Endnotes

2. Paper Circulated by the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Social Justice for Indigenous Australians 1993-94, p. 49.
3. Paper Circulated by the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Social Justice for Indigenous Australians 1994-95, p. 104.