Aboriginal Education (Supplementary Assistance) Amendment Bill 1991

Date Introduced: 3 September 1991
House: House of Representatives
Portfolio: Employment, Education and Training

Purpose
To make a number of largely non-contentious amendments relating to education funding arrangements under the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy.

Background
Assistance to Aboriginal (to be read as including Torres Strait Islanders) education is provided under a number of schemes at Commonwealth, State and local levels. ABSTUDY provides income assistance to Aboriginal students undertaking full time secondary education, primary students aged 14 and over, and part and full time tertiary students. ABSTUDY beneficiaries totalled 48,721 in 1990-91. ABSTUDY outlays totalled $85.381 million in 1990-91 and are estimated to grow by 15.3% in 1991-92 to $98.5 million.1

In April 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 its report provides a number of statistics on retention etc., based on the 1986 Census. Having again concluded that Aboriginais 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 recommendation, 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.2"

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 education providers 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:
* the Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Program;
* the Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Program
* the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme; and
* the Vocational and Educational Guidance for Aboriginals Scheme.

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) which appropriated $236.3 million for the years 1990-1992.
In the Policy Information Paper on the Australian Language and Literacy Policy, released by the Minister for Employment, Education and Training in August 1991, the Minister stated that 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a particular need for more English language and literacy assistance. In the last census, more than five per cent of Aboriginal Australians reported having little or no competency in English. Most Aboriginal adults have had little access to post-school training opportunities. To improve literacy provision and results for Aboriginals the Minister announced that the Commonwealth will:

* target funds under the NAEP from 1993 to improve the spoken and written English skills of Aboriginal primary and secondary students, particularly those whose first language is not English, and to provide English literary courses for adults; and
* under the NAEP, a total of $2.63 million will be provided for Aboriginal literacy, English as a Second Language and language education in 1992-93, rising to $5.25 million in 1993-94 and 1994-95.

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 great 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.4

Main Provisions
Clause 3 will appropriate $75,929,500 for 1991. For 1992 the amount will be $65,288,900 adjusted for movements in the price deflator. The reduced amount reflects the transfer of certain Aboriginal education assistance program funding to the Appropriation Acts.

References