



Public Accounts Committee Annual Report Members' Statements 31 October 2006

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (12.36 p.m.)—As Deputy Chair of the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit I also commend our annual report to the House. I support the sentiments of the chair and thank him for his efforts on behalf of our committee. I think that democracy is strengthened by the work of this committee and I acknowledge and thank all my parliamentary colleagues who are members of that committee for their participation and their very thoughtful contributions.

I think it needs to be remembered that in the federal sphere there is no equivalent to ICAC. There is no federal public corruption body. Hopefully, we will never need one, but corruption can occur in the executive arm of government as well as the bureaucratic arm of government. If it does occur, democracy and the Australian people will be the greatest losers. But fortunately the Australian National Audit Office and the work of the JCPAA provide very close and ongoing scrutiny of all government departments and agencies. In that way they are a very powerful tool of accountability.

This annual report outlines the major inquiries that have been undertaken in this calendar year. They have been very important ones focusing on areas of government activity such as taxation, aviation security and defence expenditure. They have very direct relevance to most Australians. Those inquiries have been ambitious in their workload and their purpose, but they all offer the opportunity to bring about improvements in performance, fairness and security. I particularly look forward to the aviation security report being tabled before the end of this year. I acknowledge the hard work of the secretariat, because we have given them a particularly long and difficult year with several major inquiries happening concurrently.

One of the other areas of investigation by our committee is the regular oversight and review of all audit reports undertaken by the ANAO. We have released our reports 404 and 407, and in those we looked at financial performance and the performance outcomes in a wide range of fields. Centrelink always comes up for mention, and so does Defence. But areas like the regulation of Commonwealth radiation in nuclear activities have great

currency at the moment, as do some of our other projects such as those on therapeutic goods and defence.

There have been administrative issues that I think have been dealt with very well by the committee this year, but the one that always has greatest debate is the resourcing level of the Australian National Audit Office. I make the point that we felt this time that the resource level was sufficient, but there is an area of resourcing that has not been approved and certainly because of that the Audit Office cannot take on that role. We were in agreement that we support in the future some annual oversight by the ANAO of major Defence projects. I think an annual report would be useful to the government and certainly useful to the Department of Defence, and I look forward to that being accepted in the future so that ANAO can assist efficiency in Defence spending.

We also achieved a positive involvement in the appointment of the Independent Auditor, and it is one task the committee were intent on being involved in and exercising their duty in very properly. We made the point that a delay in having an Independent Auditor is not a good look for probity and I am pleased to see that covered in our annual report.

We also met this year with Dr Peter Shergold, the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and Lynelle Briggs, the Public Service Commissioner. I hope that such meeting will become an ongoing feature of our committee, because there are issues that arise over and over again and it seems that they must be of interest and they certainly are of concern to those particular people in their roles. They go to rather important areas of government activity, and I want to raise a better practice guide that has just been released by the Australian National Audit Office as something that I think shows that the committee has worked very well with the Audit Office towards overcoming some significant problem areas—areas that keep coming up like risk management, governance, procurement and contract management, monitoring and review. This manual 'Implementation of Program and Policy Initiatives—Making Implementation Better', comes with a pocket guide too, and I must say I have never seen such an excellent example of professional support and advice.

I have also enjoyed this year meeting with some Indonesian parliamentarians who were involved in governance and I think that the work that the audit committee do, particularly the chair and the secretariat, in working with governments from other countries wanting more help with governance is a great initiative. So I do congratulate all involved this year in the work of the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit and look forward to further success and ongoing achievements by this important committee.