



STANDING COMMITTEE ON URBAN SERVICES

REPORT NO.32

**REPORT ON ATTENDANCE OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE
FOR URBAN SERVICES AT THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF
PARLIAMENTARY PUBLIC WORKS AND ENVIRONMENT
COMMITTEES IN HOBART ON 13-15 SEPTEMBER 1999**

CONCLUSIONS

1. The committee concludes that, in response to cost pressures and/or pressure brought about by an unusually large number of inquiries, some parliamentary committees are re-thinking the way they conduct inquiries and the way they report to their parliament.

The Standing Committee on Urban Services—which has 16 current inquiries—has decided to utilise the style of reporting now being used by the Qld Public Works Committee, which sees the committee's conclusions and recommendations placed at the head of the report and only a brief analysis of the issues in the body of the report. The committee is interested in receiving feedback on the new style of reporting.

2. The committee concludes that there is an increasing trend for Public Works committees to examine all aspects of proposed capital works. This analysis is in addition to the traditional role of Public Works committees in examining the design, location and layout of capital works.
3. The committee concludes that parliamentary committees dealing with public works and the environment are inquiring into a large and diverse range of important issues. There is much to be gained by the Territory's parliament keeping itself informed of these inquiries and sharing the resultant information among members.

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The committee recommends that the government investigate the introduction of a land information system in the ACT similar to the Tasmanian Internet-based LIST system. The committee considers the investigation could be undertaken by a working party comprising representatives of PALM, the Registrar-General's Office, Environment ACT, and other interested bodies. It would be useful if the National Capital Authority was also represented on the working party, in view of that organisation's responsibility for the National Capital Plan.**

**THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
URBAN SERVICES**

The committee was established on 28/4/98 to inquire into and report on planning and lease management, road and transport services, housing and housing assistance, government purchasing and public utilities purchasing, electricity industry and regulation, construction industry policy, parks and forests, private sector employment inspectorate, building services, environment, heritage and municipal services and any other matter under the responsibility of the portfolio minister.

Committee members

Mr Harold Hird MLA (Chair)

Mr Dave Rugendyke MLA (Deputy chair)

Mr Simon Corbell MLA

Secretary – Mr Rod Power

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INTRODUCTION

1. On 13-15 September 1999 (inclusive) the Standing Committee on Urban Services attended the national conference of parliamentary Public Works and Environment committees in Parliament House, Hobart.
2. The conference is an annual event that brings together the members of all Public Works and Environment committees throughout Australia.¹ It provides an opportunity to share information about the activities of each committee and to discuss wider developments affecting public works and the environment.
3. The committee presents this report to the Territory's parliament as part of the need to be accountable and also to share the insights and lessons we obtained during the three days of the conference.

CONFERENCE OUTLINE

4. This year the first two days of the conference were set aside for public works issues, involving:
 - an informative and reflective opening address by the Hon Michael Field (Premier of Tasmania 1989-1992)
 - a session in which each parliamentary committee reported on its activity in the past year
 - a session on management of heritage building assets, and
 - inspections of the Centre for the Arts, Temple House, TAFE College of Aluminium Training, INCAT shipbuilding yard, and the Antarctic & Southern Ocean Centre.
5. The third day of the conference examined environment issues and comprised:
 - an opening address by the Hon David Llewellyn MHA (Minister for Primary Industries, Water & Environment) outlining Tasmania's approach to environment legislation
 - a session in which each committee reported on its activity in the past year
 - a session on rectifying past environmental damage at Mt Lyell
 - a session on the environmental applications of Tasmania's Land Information system, and
 - inspection of the Derwent Estuary Management Program, including the Aquatas aquaculture facility in North-West Bay and also information about controlling introduced marine pests.

¹ The only state or Territory not represented was Victoria. Members of that state's Environment Committee were caught up in the Victorian election campaign.

KEY ISSUES

1. Among the many issues raised at the conference, the Standing Committee on Urban Services brings four to the attention of the Legislative Assembly.
2. First, the committee was greatly impressed by the Tasmanian Internet-based land information system known as 'the LIST'. It provides subscribers with Internet access to the following products:
 - current Land Title information
 - property and valuation details
 - property sales information
 - electronic lodgement of priority notices
 - Registry of Deeds
 - dispatch enquiry
 - purchasers index.
3. 'The List' also provides an electronic version of the Tasmanian *Towns Street Atlas* at no cost, and a Map Display option to view or search for properties.
4. Subscribers to 'the LIST' hold an account with the Department of primary Industry, Water & Environment. They are required to provide a letter with information regarding the nature of the organisation's business and the purpose for which the information is wanted. Subscribers then receive a unique User ID and password, enabling them to access the nominated services. They are invoiced on a monthly basis.
5. *The committee is not aware that the ACT possesses such a comprehensive and easily accessed data base on the Territory's land.*
6. A system such as 'the LIST' would bring together, in the ACT, information presently held by PALM (block & section numbers, and property boundaries) and the Land Titles Office. It could extend to information held by Environment ACT on contaminated sites.
7. The operation of such an integrated system in the ACT would bring considerable benefits to all those who need information about the Territory's land holding, including homeowners, lawyers, valuers, real estate agents, government departments and individual members of the public.
8. The committee urges the government to speedily investigate the introduction of such a system to the ACT.
9. *This is the basis for the committee's recommendation at the head of this report.*

10. The second significant issue raised at the conference concerns the style of reporting by some committees and the way they publicise their inquiries.
 11. The Qld Public Works Committee told the conference that, in response to the need to cut its operating costs, it had introduced the following measures:
 - advertising in the print media was substantially reduced
 - increased reliance was placed on the Web for information about inquiries and to access committee reports
 - a smaller number of hard-copy reports was being produced, and
 - their format had been simplified.
 12. The Qld committee showed its most recent report in the new condensed style, namely, Report No.59 into the *Robina and Noosa Hospital Projects* (August 1999).
 13. *This committee was impressed by the Qld developments. In particular, the committee sees merit in producing a condensed report with recommendations at the front of the report and a brief analysis of the issues within the body of the report.*
 14. *Members of the ACT's Urban Services committee consider that this type of layout may enable the committee to cope with its unusually heavy workload, involving 16 current inquiries. Therefore, the committee instructed its single staffer (the secretary) to utilise the new layout—which is demonstrated in this report.*
 15. The committee notes that some other parliamentary committees are experiencing the type of inquiry pressure now on the Urban Services committee. In particular, WA's Standing Committee on Ecologically Sustainable Development and the SA Environment, Resources & Development Committee appear to be facing a similar need to prioritise inquiries and to re-think their style of reporting.
16. *It is against this background that the committee reached the first conclusion appearing at the head of this report.*
17. The third issue arising from the national conference relates to the fact that a number of Public Works committees are finding it necessary, when examining particular projects, to extend their examination beyond the traditional areas of inquiry.
 18. The traditional areas relate to the physical infrastructure of a proposed work, including its design, location and layout.
 19. In recent years, Public Works committees have increasingly considered the environmental aspects of building works. They have also been forced to consider the manner in which the works are financed and whether the various types of

delivery methods (such as BOOT schemes²) represent full value to the community.

20. The committee was interested to learn at the conference that the QLD Public Works committee is relying on financial analyses by the Queensland Treasury Corporation in order to determine whether particular capital works have achieved 'value for money'.³ While this has some merit, it does require that the body giving the financial advice is perceived by all parties as impartial and expert.
21. A different way of obtaining complete information about the worth of a project is advocated by the SA Public Works Committee, which is insisting upon full disclosure of information, not only about a project's physical infrastructure, but about the manner in which it is financed. This extends to disclosure of all assumptions underlying a project, including things like internal rate of return. The SA committee is finding it difficult to convince Ministers and departmental officials of the need for this data; yet the committee considers it cannot be convinced of the merit of any particular capital works unless this information is provided in full.

22. <i>This is the background to the committee's second conclusion.</i>

23. The fourth issue arising out of the conference which members wish to bring to the attention of the Territory's parliament is the great diversity of parliamentary inquiries affecting public works and the environment. A brief list of recent or current inquiries conducted by committees attending the conference illustrates this point:

- NSW Public Works committee: inquiry into infrastructure delivery & maintenance by government agencies, involving government policies on capital procurement—inquiry into sick building syndrome—inquiry into energy consumption targets
- Tasmanian Public Works committee: inquiry into maintenance of built heritage assets
- House of Representatives Environment committee: greenhouse gas emissions—water catchment management
- SA Environment, Resources & Development committee: fish stocks in the River Murray—rural roads strategy—rail links to the eastern states and to NT—Leigh Creek coal field—SA Environment Protection Agency—eco-tourism—disused petrol stations
- WA Ecologically Sustainable Development committee: Environmental Protection Amendment Bill—Regional Forestry Agreement—sustainability of current

² BOOT=build, own, operate (by private enterprise) and transfer (to the government after a specified number of years)

³ Qld Public Works Committee Report No.59, supplemented by discussions at the conference

logging practices—quality of Perth’s water supply—management of rock lobster fishery—salinity action plan.

24. There is obviously much to be learnt from sharing the information obtained from such a diverse range of parliamentary inquiries.

25. <i>This is the basis of the committee’s third conclusion.</i>

APPRECIATION

26. The committee thanks the Hon Michael Polley MHA (Speaker of the Tasmanian House of Assembly) for the hospitality extended by the Tasmanian parliament.
27. Also, the committee extends its appreciation to members of the Tasmanian Public Works committee for arranging an outstanding program of speeches and inspections. In particular, the committee wishes to thank the Hon. Don Wing MLC (Chairman), Mr Bryan Green MHA, Mr Rene Hidding MHA, Mr Steven Kons MHA and Mr Shane Donnelly (secretary).
28. Finally, the committee thanks the Governor of Tasmania—His Excellency Sir Guy Green, and Lady Green—for their kind hospitality to conference delegates in hosting a reception at Government House, Hobart.

Mr Hird MLA
Chair
8 October 1999