

TABLING STATEMENT

GOVERNMENT RESPONSES TO:

Standing Committee on Public Accounts: *Report No 3 – Report on Annual & Financial Reports 2001-2002*

Standing Committee on Health: *Report No 3 – Inquiry into the 2001-2002 Annual and Financial Reports*

Standing Committee on Planning and Environment: *Report No 12 – Inquiry into the Urban Services Portfolio 2001-2002 Annual and Financial Reports*

Standing Committee on Education: *Report No 2 – Inquiry into 2001-2002 Annual and Financial Reports*

Standing Committee on Legal Affairs: *Report No 5 – Report on Annual & Financial Reports 2001-2002*

Circulated by the authority of
Jon Stanhope MLA
Chief Minister
July 2003

I am pleased to present the Government's responses to five Standing Committee reports on the Annual and Financial Reports for 2001-02.

Specifically I am referring to the following Standing Committee reports:

1. Standing Committee on Public Accounts: *Report No 3 – Report on Annual & Financial Reports 2001-2002*
2. Standing Committee on Health: *Report No 3 – Inquiry into the 2001-2002 Annual and Financial Reports*
3. Standing Committee on Planning and Environment: *Report No 12 – Inquiry into the Urban Services Portfolio 2001-2002 Annual and Financial Reports*
4. Standing Committee on Education: *Report No 2 – Inquiry into 2001-2002 Annual and Financial Reports*
5. Standing Committee on Legal Affairs: *Report No 5 – Report on Annual & Financial Reports 2001-2002*

Mr Speaker, the Government has taken the slightly unusual step of having one Minister (in this case myself) table responses to a number of Standing Committee Reports covering all portfolios. The Government has taken this step for two reasons:

Firstly because (with only one exception) the Standing Committee Reports cover more than one Minister and more than one portfolio; and

Secondly, and more importantly, four Committees made recommendations that apply to all Departments and agencies.

For these reasons, Mr Speaker, the Government believes that the Assembly and the respective Standing Committees will be better informed by this whole-of-Government response.

As Members will be aware, annual and financial reports are prepared by agencies in accordance with the Chief Minister's Annual Report

Directions and in accordance with the Financial Management Act 1996. The Government seeks to ensure that the directions and the Act are continually updated to reflect best practice and full accountability in accordance with Government policy. In this respect this Government welcomes the recommendations of the Standing Committees and thanks the Committees for the effort they have made in preparing their reports.

I would also like to acknowledge the difficulties faced by the Standing Committees in reviewing the 2001-02 annual and financial reports. Firstly, as members will be aware, the annual and financial reports were, because of the intervening election, prepared by a Labor Government against directions and priorities set by a Liberal Government. For this reason, many of the comments from the Committees have necessarily focussed on the structure of reports rather than an analysis of the effectiveness of policies or programs. This is not a criticism, indeed it is an observation by several of the committees themselves. Again, I commend the Committees for their efforts in the face of this difficulty.

A second difficulty faced by the Standing Committees is the fact, as noted earlier, that the Standing Committees no longer mirror portfolio and Ministerial responsibilities. Standing Committees therefore may have no particular or specialised knowledge of a single portfolio. It is partly for this reason, I believe, that Committees did not feel restrained in making recommendations which would have application across all portfolios. The issue of the expertise of Standing Committees is a matter which received consideration in this place in September 2002. Members may recall that a Government motion to have a single Committee review annual and financial reports was defeated by the Assembly. The Government argued at the time that, because we no longer have a standing committee structure that mirrors portfolio responsibilities, a single committee would be a more effective way of scrutinising annual and financial reports.

The Government therefore agrees with Recommendation No. 2 of the Report of the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment, that the examination of annual and financial reports should in future be streamlined to provide a continuum with annual Budget Estimates processes by a select or standing committee whose terms of reference incorporate examination of estimates, budget and annual and financial reports. The Government will, in accordance with that recommendation, refer the matter to the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure, and will support a debate in the Assembly for the sustained examination of policies, programs and projects over the full life of the

Select or Standing Committee. The Government has maintained for some time that the committee that examines the prospective expenditure through the estimates process should be the committee that examines what has occurred over the past year. It is a logical extension of the Estimates Committee process and we will be supporting the Standing Committee's recommendation in that respect. In the Government's view, while recognising the efforts of the Standing Committees to come to terms with the 2001-02 reports, the frequent cross-agency nature of their comments also points to the need for a single committee.

A Standing Committee is more appropriate than a select committee because it recognises the reality that the committee would function throughout the year (estimates in May/June; annual reports in October/December; budget consultations in January/February).

The proposed committee should be an existing committee because it is difficult, if not impossible, for the two government backbenchers to serve on additional committees – and it is also difficult for minor parties to service additional committees.

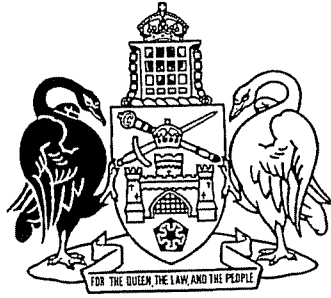
The terms of reference of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts specify that it is to examine the Territory's public accounts and enhancement of the committee's role in line with the Government's pre-election undertaking to "restore" the key role of the Public Accounts Committee (in the Code of Good Government).

Further to the recommendation of the Standing Committee on Planning and Environment on the issue of a single committee, I would observe that the Standing Committee on Public Accounts has noted that it is considering possible approaches to the examination of annual reports by Assembly Committees which will provide for more systematic and uniform scrutiny. I welcome this development and would observe that it would be consistent both with the overview of reports by a single committee and with the continuous improvement of the Annual Report Directions issued by me as Chief Minister. I look forward to hearing more of what the Standing Committee on Public Accounts has in mind.

Mr Speaker, the five reports of the Standing Committees made a total of 39 recommendations although several of those recommendations are multiple recommendations or contain a raft of other comments and suggestions. In broad terms the Government supports thirty of the major recommendations and we disagree with seven. The principal matters disagreed relate to revenue and expenditure reporting or to other non-

standard practices in presentation and format of annual reports. Overall, I am sure the Assembly will agree that the Government has responded in a way which entrenches and enhances our record of openness and accountability. I welcome the Committees' recommendations and again thank the Members of those Committees for their hard work and thoughtfulness in assessing the 2001-02 Annual and Financial Reports.

I commend the Government's responses to the Assembly.



Standing Committee on Education

Inquiry into the 2001-2002 Annual & Financial Reports

Report No. 2

ACT Government Response

July 2003

19 August 2003

**Standing Committee On Education: Report No 2
Inquiry into 2001-2002 Annual and Financial Reports**

Government Response

Introduction

The Annual Reports of all ACT Government agencies are referred to the Standing Committees of the ACT Legislative Assembly for examination and report.

The Standing Committee on Education was tasked with examining and reporting on the 2001-2002 annual and financial reports of the portfolio areas for which it is responsible including: early childhood education and care; primary, secondary, post secondary and tertiary education; non-government education; arts and culture; and sport and recreation. The committee made a decision to direct its attention primarily towards the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services and, in particular, the education component of the department.

The Committee conducted a public hearing on 13 December 2002 and tabled its report in the Legislative Assembly on 18 February 2003. The Government agrees with all seven of the Committee's recommendations. The Government's response to the Standing Committee's recommendations is provided below.

RECOMMENDATION 1

The Committee recommends that the Government devise appropriate qualitative and quantitative evaluation criteria for the Youth Connection program.

Response

Agreed. Following an external and independent review in 2001 Youth Connection was restructured and remodelled including the formulation of a comprehensive Case Management Framework and evaluation tools. This framework has been in place for 18 months.

RECOMMENDATION 2

The Committee recommends that the Government keep the Standing Committee on Education apprised of developments regarding the creation of a school board at Quamby as well as providing general information about the educational arrangements at the Centre as advancements and/or changes come about.

Response

Agreed. The first meeting of the Quamby School Board will be held on 31 July 2003. Roles of the board will be presented at the first meeting for consultation. Members of the board have been drawn from DEYFS and community organisations with a special interest and involvement with young people attending the centre.

RECOMMENDATION 3

The Committee recommends that the Government keep the Committee informed about the progress of the funding model pilot program for Special Education as it progresses and in particular, the information, views and advice generated by the reference group.

Response

Agreed.

- The draft instrument being developed over the past year for assessing the educational support needs of students with disabilities has undergone considerable and lengthy consultation with the community.
- In response to issues raised by the community during the consultation phase, the process has been divided into two discrete components – Access and Participation. The Access component refers to the adjustments and support a student needs in relation to issues such as mobility and personal hygiene. These needs will be assessed at key transition points. The Participation component refers to the assistance a student needs to access the education program. This component will be directly linked to the student's Individual Learning Plan and will be assessed on an annual basis.
- Parent and disability advocacy representatives on the Representative Reference Group have indicated a high level of satisfaction with this approach.
- It is anticipated that trialing of the draft assessment instrument and the process will commence in term 2, 2003, with full implementation in 2004.
- The Representative Reference Group has met regularly throughout the development of the draft model. The feedback and suggestions from the group have shaped the draft model and process. The group will continue to meet throughout the trialing and implementation phase.
- The Standing Committee on Education will be kept informed of progress through regular reports.

RECOMMENDATION 4

The Committee recommends that the Department of Education provides advice, guidance and support to individual schools regarding the insurance of school computers.

Response

Agreed. The department provides advice to schools on all insurance matters through the School Management Manual. All school insurance decisions are made by a school consistent with their approach to risk management. The department provides advice to schools regarding computer insurance and the decision is then made by the school. All schools were made aware of the opportunity to take out insurance on their Teacher PCs at the time they were deciding which computers they would select. The department will continue to provide support and advice to schools with respect to insurance for computers.

RECOMMENDATION 5

The Committee recommends that the Government make public any amendments to the Exposure Draft of the Education Bill with enough time for additional community consultation, prior to debate in the Assembly.

Response

Agreed:

- The Government has conducted very extensive consultation on the Bill and has accepted late submissions.
- Given the extensive community consultation that has occurred since the release of the Exposure draft in June last year and the current consultation on the Inquiry into Education Funding the Government's view is that the Bill should now be introduced into the Assembly.
- Further consultation will be undertaken with key stakeholders prior to debate in the Assembly.

RECOMMENDATION 6

The Committee recommends that the Government examine measures which increases the uptake of professional development among teachers.

Response

Agreed.

All teachers are required to undertake a minimum of five days professional development each year. Many undertake a great deal more professional development with an estimated \$8.7 million spent on professional development in 2001-02.

RECOMMENDATION 7

The Committee recommends that:

- a) all reviews and reports conducted by the Department be listed in the appropriate section/category of the annual report; and**
- b) this information is repeated in an appendix showing all departmental reviews and reports.**

Response

Agreed in part. Major reviews and reports should already be referenced in annual reports through reporting on performance during the year. The 2002-03 Chief Minister's Annual Report Directions will be amended to make sure major reviews and reports are listed.