

Age counts

Valuing our older workers



"The evidence that unemployment kills - particularly the middle-aged - now verges on the irrefutable. Losing a job after 20 or so years working is akin to losing a loved one or a limb. How would you feel if you lost your job because of your age?"

Chair of the House Employment, Education and Workplace Relations Committee, Dr Brendan Nelson (Member for Bradfield, New South Wales), reflected on this following the launch of the report, *Age counts: Issues specific to mature-age workers*, on 14 August 2000.

The House Employment Committee's inquiry grew out of its concern about the difficulties faced by mature-age people trying to re-enter the workforce or establish a business following unemployment. The inquiry began in March 1999 and focused on social, economic and industrial issues specific to workers over 45. The Committee believed these issues were not sufficiently recognised and dealt with in the policy arena.

During the inquiry, the House Employment Committee received more than 200 submissions, held public hearings in most capital

cities and some regional centres, and convened a round table to consider developing a code of conduct on how retrenched workers might be supported. This round table brought together representatives from key Commonwealth agencies and peak labour and social services associations.

"Throughout the inquiry, the Committee was grateful that so many people wanted to share their own personal and emotional experiences. They believed it was important that we were aware of the incredible difficulties that face many mature-age workers when unemployed," Dr Nelson explained. "Without these honest accounts we would not have such a valuable report."

Age counts contains 38 recommendations that were developed from the personal and professional experiences presented to the House Employment Committee.

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The Employment Committee examined a number of the barriers faced by older workers, including how workers are retrenched. The Committee found that some people are so devastated by the trauma, their job searching is severely affected.

"We heard of cases where people are literally frogmarched out of a building or people are just given their last pay and off they go," Dr Nelson said. "They are given a redundancy package and no advice at all about where to go or what to do with it.

"Many have been through a harrowing experience and this has affected their ability to find another job quickly. Others have been given a more humane parting."

Deputy Chair of the House Employment Committee, Rod Sawford (Member for Port Adelaide, South Australia), explained that through the evidence that was presented to the Committee, it was clear that cultural myths and stereotypes do exist about workers over 45. This naturally adds to the difficulties facing many older job seekers.

"Some are so discouraged when they go out looking for a job that they give up trying," Mr Sawford explained. "It is much more devastating for those in rural and regional communities where jobs are already scarce and some people are forced into relocating and uprooting the whole family just to find work."

One of the key recommendations in the report *Age counts* is the development of a code of conduct for employers, so that retrenched workers are supported and given relevant and appropriate advice. The Committee also recommends that older workers at high risk of becoming long-term unemployed should have immediate access to early intervention and intensive assistance when eligible for the Job Network program.

A number of recommendations highlight the financial impact unemployment has on mature-age people, especially those who have dependant children and aged parents. Some retrenched mature-age workers still have house mortgages and the Committee recommends that these people should be given the option of accessing their superannuation contributions for a maximum unemployment period of 26 weeks, so they can meet their house repayments.

Other recommendations focus on the need for more flexibility with support services and policy guidelines. Proposals include allowing a retrenched mature-age person, under certain circumstances, to retain personal savings and to also receive Government income support; and changing the eligibility requirements for the Government's New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS).

The House Employment Committee was concerned at the number of barriers that many mature-age people face when seeking re-employment. These include age discrimination, perceived inappropriate or out-of-date skills, and difficulties faced by those job seekers in remote/regional areas without ready access to transport.

Another major concern for the Committee was the number of retrenched people who decide to start their own businesses believing this will provide them with future security.

"We encourage small business and want to see growth in this area, but it is very important that people be informed about the risks involved in starting up a small business," Mr Sawford said. "It isn't an automatic meal ticket.



The House of Representatives Employment Committee has made 38 recommendations in its *Age counts* report into issues specific to mature-age workers.

"People who are keen to establish their own business should also be allowed access to training so that their business is supported in its first two years. Otherwise the failure of the business can have an even more devastating impact, especially if it happens a few years after being retrenched."

The Committee was enthusiastic about developing options to allow mature-age job seekers to re-skill and upgrade their training. One recommendation suggests the use of training credits, tied to a specific job offer, thereby increasing a mature-age person's chances when applying for a job. Once hired, the training required would be at no cost to the employer.

Dr Nelson emphasised that the mature-age workers inquiry highlighted to all Committee members how important it is to value the experience and knowledge of mature-age workers.

"It is essential for any organisation to have a mix of age groups as this creates a healthy and dynamic workplace. With mature-age workers, we can all benefit from their wealth of experience, whether they undertake a role as mentor, decide to remain in the workforce or if they choose to seek work following retrenchment.

"We need to create a society that doesn't see age as a barrier. People should have the opportunity to have choices in life – and we should encourage this, not prevent it."

The report, *Age counts: Issues specific to mature-age workers*, is available from the House Employment Committee's web site at: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/eewr/OWK/index.htm

Copies of the report are also available through Government Info Shops in all capital cities or by telephoning Ausinfo, free call 13 24 47.

Gene technology

legislation introduced



New legislation provides for a comprehensive, independent and accountable regulator of genetically modified organisms.

New legislation regulating gene technology was introduced into the House of Representatives on 22 June 2000 by the Minister for Health and Aged Care, Michael Wooldridge. The legislative package comprises three bills: the Gene Technology Bill 2000, the Gene Technology (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2000 and the Gene Technology (Licence Charges) Bill 2000.

Introducing the legislation, Dr Wooldridge noted that the proposed laws are the Commonwealth's component of a national regulatory system for genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

"With the passage of the gene technology bill and mirror legislation in all states," Dr Wooldridge said, "Australia will, for the first time, have a comprehensive, independent and accountable regulator of GMOs."

According to Dr Wooldridge, the regulator will have the sole purpose of protecting the health and safety of the community and protecting the Australian environment by identifying and managing risks posed by, or as a result of, genetically modified organisms.

"To secure such a regulatory system, we must be mindful of the fact that the states and territories must pass legislation that is consistent with the bill," Dr Wooldridge added.

When passed, the legislation will establish a statutory officer, to be known as the Gene Technology Regulator. It also will establish three key committees to provide scientific, ethical and policy advice to the Regulator and/or the Ministerial Council established under an Intergovernmental Agreement on Gene Technology.

The legislation will establish a scheme for the assessment of risks to human health and the environment associated with various dealings with GMOs. The scheme includes opportunities for extensive public input and provides for a centralised, publicly available database of all GMOs and GM products approved in Australia.

The Government has committed \$7.6 million over two years for the development of the gene technology legislation and the establishment of the Regulator. Once the Regulator is established, it is intended that the costs incurred by the Regulator will be recovered fully from the users of the regulatory regime. The fees and charges levied will be prescribed in regulations made under the new legislation.

For details

- The progress of bills can be checked from the Daily Bills List on the Internet at: www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo/billsnet/blist.pdf
- The text of bills and the explanatory notes are available on the Internet at: www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo/billsnet/bills.htm
- The debates on the legislation can be found on the Internet at: www.aph.gov.au/hansard

Let's talk

Parliament

"It is critical to engage the wider community in our defence decision making processes."

That's the view of David Hawker, Federal Member for Wannon (Victoria) and Chair of a parliamentary inquiry into the suitability of Australia's Army for peace, peacekeeping and war. Mr Hawker was speaking at the opening of a Defence Strategy Debate held in Canberra in June.

The debate, organised by Parliament's Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, attracted many of Australia's leading experts on defence strategy and international security. It was the first opportunity for a public discussion on defence strategy following the release of the Government's public discussion paper on Australia's defence policy.

According to David Hawker, declining recruitment and increased personnel wastage in the defence force suggest that Australians are uncertain about the role of the armed forces in our national life. "The message that we as a nation send to the world through our armed forces must be broadly owned," Mr Hawker said. "It must be a representative and unequivocal expression of the place Australians see themselves holding in the world."

Mr Hawker warned that without additional funding, a number of significant defence capabilities will have to be shelved or scaled back over the next decade. "Parliament, and all Australians, need to make informed choices on the fate of these capabilities," he argued.

One of the key messages coming out of the debate was that defence strategy requires long-term thinking. Hugh White, Deputy Secretary at the Department of Defence, suggested that decisions made in 2000 will only begin to have a real impact in 2005.

"If we make decisions for the next 20 years on the basis of what we think might happen in the next two, we have a very good chance of getting it wrong," Mr White said.

"One of the starting points for this major process of review – the task of looking at the strategic environment – has to be a lot more sophisticated than just saying, 'what happened last week, what will happen next week, what do we expect will happen next year'. You have to have a very disciplined, rigorous and long timeframe."

'Australia wants to be a nation that punches beyond its weight.'

A number of participants in the debate argued that defence policy cannot be considered in isolation from the broader vision that Australia has for itself as a nation. This includes the foreign policy and trade objectives that Australia wants to achieve.

General John Baker, former Chief of the Defence Force, put the view that Australia wants to be a nation that punches beyond



its weight in the international issues that are of concern to it. According to General Baker, this requires a coordinated policy approach that involves the defence forces.

"It is not a question only of defence," General Baker said. "It is a question of coordinating all of our national assets, our foreign and trade policy, our economic development, our Defence Force and our industry to produce a nation which can punch beyond its weight within the region, not just in defence matters but in all matters of global concern."

Others threw a note of caution into the debate, arguing that Australia must recognise the limits to its defence capabilities. Professor Paul Dibb, Head of Strategic and Defence Studies at the Australian National University, commented: "If anything were to be written in letters of gold in any Defence Minister's doorway, irrespective of which party they come from, it should be the following: *There are limits to Australia's defence capacity and influence.*"

The need to be sensitive to the views of regional neighbours was another important message coming out of the debate. Career diplomat Tony Kevin warned: "We will continue to make mistakes if we conduct this defence debate without a perception that there are people listening in our region who actually do think about what we say."

strategy

debates defence

"This is not a purely domestic debate," Mr Kevin added. "It is an international debate we are engaging in and there is a question which has to be asked: do we simply try to create security through deterrence, creating the appropriate force elements, or at the same time do we try to enhance our sense of mutual assured security with our neighbours through an effective diplomacy?"

While recognising the international implications of defence policy, many participants in the strategy debate stressed the need for greater domestic emphasis on defence policy through more community involvement in defence planning. It was argued that, in this context, community should not just be interpreted to mean defence community.

'There are limits to Australia's defence capacity and influence.'

Stephen Loosley, former Senator and now member of the Government's Community Consultation Team for the defence discussion paper, said that it is important to "acknowledge the contribution to public policy from people with a range of valid views well beyond Canberra and the traditional contributors to the defence debate". Mr Loosley warned that there is a danger in the debate becoming a little insular. "Opening up the process is very healthy," he said.

Debate participants were told that the defence discussion paper released by the Government had tapped into a "wellspring of community interest in defence policy". Within 36 hours of the paper's release there had been some 5,000 requests for the paper to be mailed out to people and some 100,000 hits on the discussion paper web site.

One issue raised by commentators when the discussion paper was first released was that the language in the discussion paper was too simple. In response, Peter Jennings from the White Paper Projects team at Defence argued that one of the important objectives of the exercise was to develop a language that is readily understood by the broader community, so that the community can make its contribution to defence policy.

"We routinely ask people to express a vote at a referendum about complex issues to do with constitutional law," Mr Jennings observed, "yet somehow the view amongst some members of the Australian community is that defence issues are simply too complex to ask Australians about, that even though they are in fact spending \$500 or \$600 a head per year somehow their views should not be asked."

While acknowledging the importance of community involvement, Shadow Defence Minister and Defence Sub-Committee member Stephen Martin warned against over-simplification of the language. He suggested that this may lead to an over-simplification of the concepts involved and may not assist in getting the in-depth and meaningful debate that is required.



The Defence Strategy Debate attracted experts on defence strategy and international security. Pictured left to right: Geoffrey Barker (Australian Financial Review), Hugh White (Department of Defence) and Andrew Johnson (Australian Industry Group).

On this point, Dr Martin said that when the options for future funding of defence are discussed, we should be careful that we do not get caught up in emotive language that over-simplifies the issues. He cautioned against using language which would suggest that there is a choice to be made between "saving lives at the cancer hospital or buying some new kit to defend Australia".

The broad-ranging nature of the debate meant that more issues were raised than resolved. According to Defence Sub-Committee Chair David Hawker, this was not a problem as the Defence Strategy Debate was the first opportunity to discuss defence strategy since the release of the Government's discussion paper. "We cannot expect to get a meaningful result if debate is channelled or constrained at the very start," Mr Hawker said.

As for the relevance of the Defence Strategy Debate for the current Army Inquiry by the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee, Mr Hawker commented: "We have been looking at these issues for a year now. This debate allowed members of the Committee to refine their views about the role of the Army in defence strategy."

The transcript of the Defence Strategy Debate can be obtained from the web site or the secretariat of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (details below). The report on the suitability of the Australian Army for peace, peacekeeping and war is due out in September.

For details

Visit: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jfadt
Call: (02) 6277 2313
Email: jscfadt@aph.gov.au



The House Procedure Committee wants to change the name of the Main Committee to Second Chamber.

Main Committee make-over

While other parliamentary committees keep an eye on geopolitical, technological and socioeconomic developments in Australia and the world at large, the House of Representatives Procedure Committee, by proposing improvements and innovations in parliamentary practice and procedure, ensures that the House does not neglect its own backyard.

As foreshadowed in the March/April issue of *About the House*, the House Procedure Committee has conducted a review of the Main Committee – a second forum of the House that operates as an extension of the main Chamber. The Main Committee allows two streams of business to be debated concurrently while the House is sitting. It meets in a committee room some distance away from the Chamber, deals with business referred to it from the Chamber and then reports back to the Chamber. The business it deals with includes bills, government papers and parliamentary committee reports.

The Main Committee was established in 1994 to ease the pressure of business in the House and to provide enough time for all Members to contribute to debates. Earlier this year, the Procedure Committee evaluated how well the Main Committee was meeting those objectives and examined ways to enhance the contribution it makes to the work of the House. Its report was presented to the House on 14 August 2000.

The Procedure Committee found that the Main Committee had continued to make a significant contribution to reducing legislative overload in the Chamber. One indication of this was how seldom the guillotine, a formal procedure for curtailing debate, had been used since 1994. A useful measure of the second chamber's workload is that about a third of the legislation introduced into the House is debated in the Main Committee. Further, Members gain additional time to raise issues of concern to their constituents by making statements and speeches in the Main Committee.

According to the Procedure Committee, the Main Committee had evolved since it was established. It had grown beyond its original role as a parallel stream for debating bills. It had demonstrated an ability to take on a larger workload, particularly in allowing backbenchers to participate more in chamber related activities. The Committee believed that it was time to build on its success.

The Procedure Committee recommended that a number of steps be taken to improve the Main Committee's recognition, fine tune its operation and extend the range of business it dealt with. The first recommendation is to change the name: the title 'Main Committee' is unsatisfactory, inadequate and misleading; 'Second Chamber' is a better title and one that is already being used informally as an alternative.

'A significant recommendation is to allow a freer style of debate.'

Another significant recommendation is to allow a freer style of debate in the second chamber modelled on the intervention procedure used in the UK House of Commons. Members would be able to give way briefly during their speeches to allow other Members to intervene with short questions to enable points to be clarified or objections to be addressed. The outcome should be fewer set piece speeches and more interaction between participants.

The third major proposal is to extend the range of business dealt with in the second chamber by allocating a period each Wednesday afternoon for private Members' business, in addition to the time spent similarly in the Chamber on Mondays. Other recommendations are to investigate relocating to a more accessible venue, introduce more flexibility in organising business and make minor adjustments to the second chamber's facilities.

The report awaits a government response and the House will have the final say on any of the Procedure Committee's proposals. The report, titled *The Second Chamber: Enhancing the Main Committee*, is available via the Procedure Committee's web page at www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/proc or in hard copy from:

The Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Call: (02) 6277 4685 Fax: (02) 6277 4627
Email: Procedure.Committee.Reps@aph.gov.au

Perhaps it's something in the blood

When the Member for Charlton, Kelly Hoare, needs a sounding board, someone to run an idea past, she often turns to the one person in the world she knows she can trust: her dad, the former Member for Charlton, Bob Brown.

"Bob says that as a politician, you can't change the world, but you can help change some people's lives for the better," says Hoare. "He also says you shouldn't consider it a failure if you don't achieve your ideal. It's something you tried to do and that's the most important thing: You tried. And you must enjoy yourself while trying."

Kelly Hoare is one of nine members of the House of Representatives whose fathers were also Members.

They include some of the nation's most senior politicians, including the Member for Mayo, Foreign Minister Alexander Downer, whose grandfather, Sir John Downer, was a Senator in the first Australian Parliament. Mr Downer's father, Alexander Russell Downer, was the Member for the South Australian seat of Angas, and served as Minister for Immigration in two Menzies' Ministries.

The Member for Richmond, Community Services Minister, Larry Anthony, is the third member of his family to hold the seat. His grandfather, Hubert Lawrence Anthony, and father, Doug Anthony, also represented Richmond.

Labor's leadership duo in the House, Opposition Leader and Member for Brand, Kim Beazley, and Deputy Leader, Shadow Treasurer and Member for Hotham, Simon Crean, both followed their fathers into the Parliament.

Kim Beazley Snr was the Member for Fremantle and Minister for Education in the Whitlam Government, and Frank Crean was the Member for Melbourne Ports and Whitlam's Treasurer.

Interestingly, Shadow Attorney-General Robert McClelland's father, former Senate President Douglas McClelland, tried to discourage his son from a life in politics. "He wanted me to focus on the law," says Robert McClelland. "He pointed to the remuneration, the demands on your time and the pressures of the lifestyle. He also reflected on what it had cost his family for him to be a politician."

All to no avail. Perhaps it's something in the blood – McClelland's grandfather was an organiser with the Australian Workers' Union and a Labor Member of the New South Wales Parliament.

Perhaps it was the talk around the McClelland dinner table about ALP principles and the work of party heroes such as John Curtin and Ben Chifley.

Whatever the cause, young Robert was infused with the Party's culture and traditions from an early age, joined the Party young and held various offices within the New South Wales branch before being preselected as ALP candidate for the seat of Barton, which he successfully contested in the 1996 election.



Robert McClelland says his father encouraged him to talk to people openly. Portrait: Senator the Hon Douglas McClelland (1985) by Reginald Campbell (1923 -), Historic Memorials Collection, Canberra – courtesy of the Parliament House Art Collection, Joint House Department, Canberra ACT.

Says McClelland: "My father instilled two very important things in me: Always talk to people openly – he encouraged me to express my views. And he taught me that Australians hate fanatics. To win an argument you must have a balanced position."

Doug McClelland, who spent 25 years in the Senate, also told young Robert that regardless of which party was in power, a great number of Australians will do well but there will always be many who are underprivileged. "He said the key objective of the Labor Party was to try to even up the score for those people," says McClelland.

McClelland says that one of the major differences between his father's experience of politics and his own is the fact that, at least early in his father's career, you could be successful in the party simply by force of your personality. "These days, much more is expected," says McClelland. "If you want a position of leadership, you must have expertise in scrutinising legislation and policy, and that means some sort of formal training, preferably at a tertiary level."

McClelland points to another difference between his father's time in politics and his own: his father often invited people from opposing political parties to his room for a social drink. "He represented New South Wales, so more often than not he'd invite in a Country Party person from his State," says McClelland. "He got on very well with those people. That sort of thing doesn't happen these days."

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Perhaps it's some

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Bob Katter says he entered the House to help restore the fortunes of North Queensland.

One of the non-Labor politicians who may have socialised with Senate President McClelland back in the 1980s was the then Member for Kennedy, Bob Katter Snr.

Interestingly, the Katter family links with Labor go back to the 1890s when Katter's great uncle Richard Arida helped fund the setting up of the fledgling Labor movement in Queensland. Later, from the 1930s through to the early 1950s, Carl Katter was ALP Branch President in Cloncurry.

The Labor Party split in the early 1950s saw many of the Party's North Queensland branches go over to the Democratic Labor Party and eventually end up in the Country Party.

'One of the reasons I entered the Federal House was to help restore the fortunes of our region.'

Bob Katter, Member for Kennedy

Bob Katter Snr held the seat of Kennedy for the Country Party, and then National Country Party, and finally the National Party of Australia, for 24 years between 1966 and 1990. The current member for Kennedy, Bob Katter Jnr, says his relationship with his father was never close. "We were ships crossing in the night," says Katter. "I knew my grandfather better than I knew my father. I was very sad not to enjoy a close relationship with my father and I've always tried with my son. I've attended nearly all the rugby league games he's played. I regard it as a sacred duty. My father only ever saw me play twice.

"It's sad and it's cruel, but the alternative is that no family men go into politics and that would skew the Parliament in a bad direction."

Bob Katter says the Katter family has always felt a strong sense of duty. "We are who we are," he says. "And it's our duty to go out and fight the good fight. If we don't do it, no one will. It's what's been expected of us always. It was expected of my grand dad, and my dad. Most certainly it was expected of me."

Bob Katter Jnr was a National Party Member in the Queensland State Parliament before entering the federal sphere to win his father's old seat in 1993.

Part of his motivation for moving to federal politics was what he saw as the destruction of many of the things that had been achieved for the people of North Queensland.

"In his maiden speech, my father said he wanted to see a great dam built at Emerald, coal mines open up in central Queensland, the wool industry return to prosperity, and Mount Isa become a great city," says Katter. "He saw all those dreams realised, but in the years since his death every one of them has been torn to pieces.

"There's been no new dams in Queensland for 20 years, the minimum price scheme for wool is gone and the wool industry shattered. Mount Isa's population has fallen dramatically in recent years. One of the reasons I entered the Federal House was to help restore the fortunes of our region."

The career of the Member for Scullin, Harry Jenkins, seems almost to mirror that of his father, Dr Harry Jenkins, who was also the Member for Scullin and Speaker of the House before he retired in 1985.

Dr Jenkins was the Deputy Speaker in the dying days of the Whitlam Government, and with the election of the Hawke Government in 1983, he was elected Speaker.

Harry Jnr had no particular interest in the Speaker's role when he entered Parliament in 1986 but was appointed to the Speaker's Panel and was Deputy Speaker by the time Labor lost the 1996 election. He is now second Deputy Speaker.

Mr Jenkins says that while there are similarities between his career and that of his father, in other ways they couldn't be more different. "Dad spent most of his political life in Opposition," he says. "My experience has been the reverse. With 10 of my 14 years as a Member in government, I'm part of a generation of Labor parliamentarians who've been able to translate some of our ideas into practice."

As for changes in political outlook between the generations, Harry Jenkins says that when his father was first elected to the House of Representatives in 1969, multinationals were considered by many in the Labor Party to be one of the main enemies of working people.

"With globalisation," says Jenkins, "we now have an understanding that those sorts of institutions are very important to ensuring that the working class people I represent have opportunities."

One of the trials for those who have followed in their fathers' political footsteps is that they must sometimes endure claims that they are the beneficiaries of nepotism.

Harry Jenkins strongly rejects the claim: "When those sorts of things are thrown at me as barbs, I think to myself 'If only it'd been that way.' But party political life is not like that," he says. "In fact, in some ways, within the machinations of the party, it counts against you if your father was a member. On the other hand, within the electorate, most of the people who mention my father do so with great affection and it's always been a big advantage for me in my representative role to have followed on from him."

One of the key lessons Jenkins learnt from his father was the idea of political cycles. "He said always keep an eye open to opportunities that the future will present," says Jenkins. "Political life is about putting yourself in the best position you can to take advantage of opportunities. He also taught me to be very careful of those you trust in political life."

Member for Charlton, Kelly Hoare, says parliamentarians are more wary of their party colleagues than they were when her father Bob Brown was first elected to the seat in 1980.

'You can't change the world, but you can help change some people's lives for the better.'

Kelly Hoare, Member for Charlton

"And there doesn't seem to be the great friendships developing between Members of Parliament these days," says Hoare. "Maybe it was the style of the Old Parliament House that allowed friendships to flourish. Maybe it's our workload. Also, there are fewer opportunities to relax out of hours these days, so you don't get much opportunity to know people socially."

Bob Brown was Minister for Land Transport and Shipping Support, with responsibilities for Australia Post in the Hawke Government. He retired at the 1998 election. Kelly Hoare won her father's old seat at that election.

The Member for Hunter, Joel Fitzgibbon, started his political work for the Labor Party at a very young age. "I did letterbox drops as a seven-year-old and got a milkshake at the end of the day as a reward," he says. "I've grown up with politics. I lived with it at the dinner table and I've got a strong memory of being much more politically aware than my peers at school."

'Politics is not something you learn at university. It's something you learn in the university of experience.'

Joel Fitzgibbon, Member for Hunter

Eric Fitzgibbon was the Member for Hunter between 1984 and the 1996 election, when Joel Fitzgibbon successfully contested the seat. "My father has not influenced my direction in politics," says Joel Fitzgibbon. "He stays out of my way and gives advice only if it's asked for."

Having been raised the son of a Member of the House of Representatives, Joel Fitzgibbon says he entered Parliament with no illusions about his status. "I went to Canberra fully conscious of my irrelevance," he says. "Some who enter Parliament think they've secured a hold on power and influence. They soon learn they're a small fish in a very big sea. I knew only too well how competitive the place was and how difficult it would be to make a mark."

One advantage for Fitzgibbon in taking over his father's old seat was that he knew the electorate well. "I knew which functions to go to," he says, "and how to manage my time given the enormous commitments the job entails."

Says Fitzgibbon: "Politics is not something you learn at university. It's something you learn in the university of experience. Having grown up with it and been exposed to it every day, it's not surprising that the children of politicians seek to follow their fathers into the 'industry'."

Article by Peter Cotton, a freelance journalist from Canberra.

Having grown up with politics, it's not surprising that the children of politicians follow their fathers into 'the industry'. Pictured left to right: Joel Fitzgibbon, Harry Jenkins and Kelly Hoare.





As the national capital prepares for its annual floral festival, Floriade (September 16 to October 15), Parliament House gets ready to join in with the Spring celebrations. Tours of the Parliament House gardens will be available during Floriade. For bookings, call (02) 6277 5101.

ur House



Top: The foundations for Australia's House of Representatives were laid when the British Parliament passed the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act of 1900 on 9 July 1900, enabling the formation of the Commonwealth of Australia. Commemorating the centenary of this event at the House of Lords, London on 9 July 2000 are (left to right): Speaker of the House of Representatives, Neil Andrew; the Lord Chancellor, the Rt Hon Lord Irvine of Lairg QC; President of the Senate, Margaret Reid; and the Speaker of the House of Commons, Betty Boothroyd.



Bottom: The House of Representatives Employment Committee released its *Age counts* report on issues specific to mature-age workers on 14 August 2000. Pictured left to right: Committee members Kim Wilkie, Teresa Gambaro, Brendan Nelson (Chair), Rod Sawford (Deputy Chair) and Phillip Barresi. See article on page 1 for details.

Step by step for workplace legislation



Workplace Relations Minister Peter Reith said that the Government would deal with the workplace relations legislation on an issue by issue basis.

The Federal Government has introduced four new pieces of workplace relations legislation into the House of Representatives in the wake of opposition from the ALP and the Australian Democrats to the earlier Workplace Relations Legislation Amendment (More Jobs, Better Pay) Bill 1999.

Commenting on the change of tack, Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business, Peter Reith, noted that the Democrats have publicly indicated that they prefer to deal with the content of the earlier bill on an issue by issue basis, not as an omnibus piece of legislation.

"The Government has sought to accommodate the preferences of the Australian Democrats by proceeding, other than on technical issues, with an issue by issue consideration of policy matters arising from the More Jobs, Better Pay Bill 1999," Mr Reith said.

The four separate pieces of legislation introduced into the House in the final week of the Winter sittings were:

- the Workplace Relations Amendment (Termination of Employment) Bill 2000, which proposes a number of amendments to the termination of employment provisions of the *Workplace Relations Act 1996*;
- the Workplace Relations Amendment (Australian Workplace Agreements Procedures) Bill 2000, involving procedural and technical amendments to the approval process for Australian Workplace Agreements;
- the Workplace Relations Amendment (Secret Ballots for Protected Action) Bill 2000, which proposes that secret ballots, overseen by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission, be held prior to the taking of protected industrial action; and

- the Workplace Relations Amendment (Tallies and Picnic Days) Bill 2000, which provides for further simplification of federal awards in the areas of union picnic days and tallies.

Shadow Minister for Industrial Relations, Arch Bevis (pictured right),

was critical of this approach, commenting: "This is just the latest slice of last year's rejected second wave legislation that [the Minister] is serving up.

The Minister can't seem to get over the massive public rejection of his failed second wave and seems set to return to the scene of the crime again and again."

The bills are expected to be debated during the Spring sittings of Parliament.

For details

The progress of bills can be checked from the Daily Bills List on the Internet at: www.apf.gov.au/parlinfo/billsnet/blist.pdf

The text of bills and the explanatory notes are available on the Internet at: www.apf.gov.au/parlinfo/billsnet/bills.htm

The debates on the legislation can be found on the Internet at: www.apf.gov.au/hansard



Migration changes debated

Proposed changes to migration laws affecting the migration of parents were criticised by the Opposition during recent debate in the House of Representatives.

The Migration Legislation Amendment (Parents and Other Measures) Bill 2000 and the Migration (Visa Application) Charge Amendment Bill 2000 implement changes to entry arrangements for parents and also affect the entitlement of certain non-citizens to Medicare. Under the new legislation, existing entry options for parents will be replaced with new visa classes and subclasses. The assurance of support bond will increase and applicants for the new classes will be required to arrange suitable and approved private health insurance cover for 10 years or pay a once off \$25,000 health services charge per person.

Shadow Minister for Immigration, Con Sciacca, condemned the legislation as "unfair and un-Australian". He argued that the Government was essentially legislating in favour of queue jumping.

According to Mr Sciacca, the Opposition is not against the principle of mutual obligation and is not opposed to ensuring that newly arrived aged parents and aged dependant relatives provide substantial contributions to their own health care. "These contributions, however, must be fair and they must be achievable, especially by those people whose means are limited," Mr Sciacca said.

The Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Philip Ruddock, indicated that the bills were intended to maximise the number of parents who can migrate to Australia. A contingency reserve of 4,000 visa places for the new parent category has been allocated over the next two years of the immigration program.

The bills were passed by the House on 26 June 2000 and proceeded to the Senate for debate.

Projects worth \$102 million under review

Commonwealth projects worth \$102 million are currently being reviewed by Parliament's Joint Committee on Public Works. The projects include the RAAF base redevelopment at Edinburgh (South Australia), a residential development for the Defence Housing Authority at Stirling (Australian Capital Territory), a CSIRO Energy Centre in Newcastle (New South Wales) and the fit-out of premises for the Australian Bureau of Statistics at Belconnen (Australian Capital Territory).

By law Commonwealth public works valued at more than \$6 million must be reviewed by the Joint Committee of Public Works before they can proceed. This includes construction, alteration, refurbishment or demolition of buildings, as well as earthworks and landscaping.

Each project proposal submitted to the Public Works Committee includes a statement of evidence with the details of the particular project. The statement outlines the reasons for the project, site information, environmental considerations and expected costs. It is available to the public to enable interested or affected people to comment to the Public Works Committee.

"This is one of the benefits of the public works review process," said Public Works Committee Chair, Judi Moylan (Member for Pearce, Western Australia). "It allows the community in which the work is being undertaken to have a say on the project."

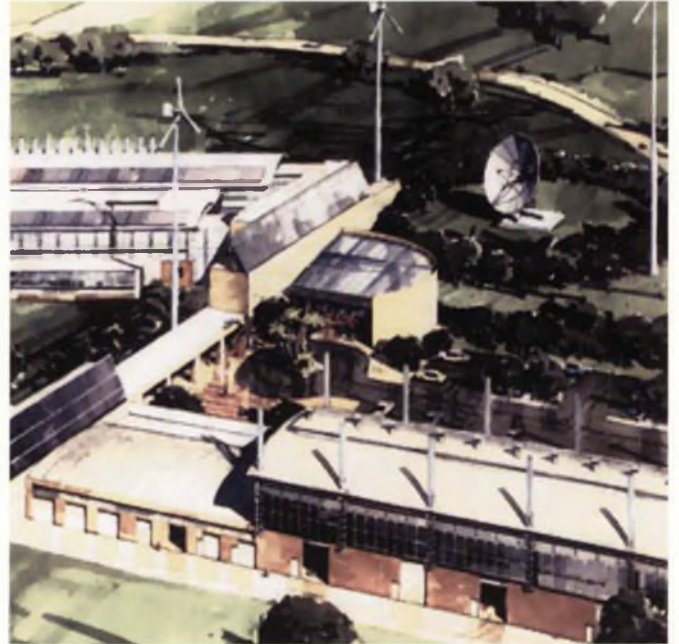
According to Ms Moylan, the Public Works Committee is there to ensure that "we get value for taxpayers' money" from public works. "But the Committee also takes into account the likely impact that the proposed works will have on local communities," Ms Moylan added.

One project generating much interest in the local community is the Defence Housing Authority's residential development proposal for Stirling (Australian Capital Territory). The proposal is for a 50 dwelling residential development to house Defence personnel and their families.

The Defence Housing Authority argues that the project has a number of benefits for the local community: "The ACT economy will benefit generally from the project and it will assist in renewal in the Weston Creek area. Local schools and retailers will be advantaged. The project should assist longer-term values in the local housing market."

While the local community council believes that most residents would support this development, other local residents are not convinced, including those living opposite the proposed development. A petition with 462 signatures protesting the development was forwarded to the Public Works Committee.

Residents have raised a number of concerns about the location of the development. They argue that 50 townhouses are too many for the selected location and that the development will cause unsafe traffic conditions in a street that is already busy. Some residents feel that existing infrastructure in the area, including the local shopping centre, is inadequate to support the population, although the community council argues that local traders support the development.



The Public Works Committee is reviewing the proposed CSIRO Energy Centre in Newcastle.

"It appears that the local community is not against a Defence Housing project being located in Weston Creek, the current proposal is simply not the right location," said petition organisers on behalf of a local action group.

A public hearing held on 18 August provided people affected by the development with the opportunity to talk to the Committee before it delivers its verdict on the proposal.

Less of a problem for the Committee is the proposal for a CSIRO Energy Centre in Newcastle. The proposal is supported by the Newcastle City Council, which argues that the local community will benefit substantially from the project.

"The proposed development will boost the economy of Newcastle and the Hunter significantly," says the Council. "The proposed development will sustain 120 jobs during the construction phase and 110 full time jobs when completed. The expected spending multiplier of the facility and its employees is \$23 million per annum."

But the Council has asked for some modifications to the design of the project to ensure that it is consistent with the urban design concept for the location. The modifications proposed by the City Council involve the removal of a landscaped buffer between the proposed building and a planned pedestrian plaza.

A public hearing held on 11 August enabled the Public Works Committee to discuss the project and the proposed modifications with representatives of the Newcastle community.

A report on each of the projects under review, with recommendations from the Public Works Committee, will be presented to Parliament during the Spring sittings.

For more information
Call: (02) 6277 4636
Email: jcpw@aph.gov.au

Did you know?

Three months and your time is up

Three months is the agreed time for the Government to respond to reports from parliamentary committees. But statistics show that governments rarely meet this timeframe, leading to calls for stricter rules governing responses to parliamentary committee reports.

Government responses are statements made to the House by the relevant Minister detailing the Government's view on the recommendations made by a parliamentary committee. The government response generally outlines those recommendations that the Government has agreed to and the action that it has taken or intends to take to implement those recommendations. The response also includes a statement about the recommendations that are not supported and the reasons why.

A government response to a committee report closes the cycle of a committee inquiry. It enables all those who contributed to the inquiry, and who are affected by the committee's recommendations, to see the final outcome of their efforts.

Since 1990 only eight per cent of reports presented by House of Representatives and joint parliamentary committees have been responded to in the agreed three month timeframe. The average time is around 12 months. Eighteen per cent of committee reports presented have yet to receive a response.

'The House Procedure Committee wants a better response rate to committee reports.'

The Fraser Government in 1978 introduced the practice of governments responding to parliamentary committee reports by way of a statement to the House. The agreed timeframe for a response then was six months. In 1983 the Hawke Government changed that to three months, stating that the change was needed "to make the reports of committees as relevant as possible to any considerations which the Government may have to make in respect of policy matters".

Now the House of Representatives Procedure Committee wants a better government response rate to parliamentary committee reports. It has recommended that the rules of the House

(the Standing Orders) be changed so that the Government is required to present a response to a parliamentary committee report no later than four months after the release of the report.

By formalising the Government response requirement and making it a rule of the House, rather than just something the Government has agreed to in practice, the Procedure Committee hopes to ensure that the response timeframe is taken more seriously by the Government and the Commonwealth Departments that usually prepare the responses.

The Procedure Committee commented: "Regardless of whether the Government decides to implement a committee's recommendations in whole or in part, committees and the people who contribute to their inquiries expect that the report will be read and considered seriously by the Government. The presentation of a detailed response to the House is evidence that this has taken place."

One of the benefits flowing from the presentation of government responses to parliamentary committee reports is that it provides an opportunity for Members to debate the outcomes of committee inquiries and the actions that have been taken by the Government to address issues raised by the relevant inquiry. Recently, the Government's response to the rail report by the House Transport Committee (*Tracking Australia, An inquiry into the role of rail in the national transport network*) resulted in a vigorous debate about the future directions for rail in Australia.

During that debate, Transport Committee members welcomed the positive response that the Government had made to their recommendations, but also took the opportunity to widen the debate and place pressure on the Government to take more action on the rail network. Transport Committee Chair, Paul Neville, commented that while some aspects of the response heartened him, he was disappointed by other items.

"I continue to call on the Government for a greater national vision for the Australian rail system," Mr Neville said. "I commend our original report which we will follow up in the future."

Without a government response to a committee report, there is far less opportunity for the House to follow up on issues raised in that report.



Votes are transported from a polling station to a counting centre during Zimbabwe's election. Photo: Kim Wilkie.

Federal parliamentarians watch Zimbabwe vote

Nine Australians, including five Federal parliamentarians, were among 302 international observers accredited to the Zimbabwe election held in June. The election, which was won by President Robert Mugabe's ruling ZANU-PF party, was held against a backdrop of civil unrest. This included widespread violence and intimidation, particularly in rural areas, as well as the occupation of commercial farms by war veterans from Zimbabwe's war of independence.

In its post-election statement, the election observers from the Australian Parliament, led by Senator Alan Ferguson (South Australia), highlighted the important role that international observers had played in the Zimbabwe election. "While our role was simply to observe the conduct of the elections," the Australian delegation said, "we were told by virtually all the people we visited that the presence of international observers was welcome, and contributed to an improved environment in the days immediately before and during the weekend poll."

The Australian delegation also concluded "the violence and intimidation which so badly compromised the pre-election campaigning and voter education must have influenced the result in some constituencies".

The Australian observers spent almost a week in the field, visiting major population centres as well as more remote areas, where the worst violence was experienced. Australia's parliamentarians spoke with a wide range of people, including those who had been subjected to violence.

"We met with many opposition party candidates and workers who had been threatened and forced into hiding before the election," said Kim Wilkie (Member for Swan, Western Australia).

"I personally spoke to a party agent who had been physically assaulted two days before the start of voting. Our delegation heard harrowing first-hand accounts of violence and intimidation directed at farmers and their workers, including attempts to force farm workers to vote at particular polling stations where war veterans would be present."

Continued on page 16

Continued from page 15



An opposition party agent who had been physically assaulted two days before the start of voting. Photo: Kim Wilkie.

According to Julie Bishop (Member for Curtin, Western Australia), Commonwealth observers had similar concerns about the nature, duration and scale of politically motivated violence and intimidation. "I certainly observed examples of this in varying degrees," Ms Bishop said. "One can only conclude that the incidents of violence did have an impact, as did the intimidation, which prevented open campaigning in some areas, notably by opposition parties."

'We were impressed by the determination of the people of Zimbabwe to have their say.'

The Australian delegation expressed concern about police inaction in preventing violence in the lead up to the election. The delegation indicated that this was in marked contrast to the visible police presence at polling stations, which generally helped to keep the peace during the polling and counting days.

In addition to its concerns over the pre-election violence, the Australian observers concluded that:

- non-government candidates had minimal access to both broadcast time and favourable reporting on Zimbabwe's (government-controlled) electronic media;
- the accuracy and availability of the electoral rolls were inadequate;
- the proportion of electors turned away at polling stations visited by the delegation was disturbingly high, ranging from 10 to 16 per cent; and
- the conduct of the voting was hampered by inconsistent procedures and the last-minute nature of many important election preparations. In particular, late accreditation meant that domestic election monitors and non-government party agents were absent from a number of polling stations visited by the delegation.

"Notwithstanding these problems," said Kim Wilkie, "we were impressed by the determination of the people of Zimbabwe to have their say and to create a functioning democracy." According to Mr Wilkie, the visit reinforced "the value of aspects of our political system which we sometimes take for granted".

With the main opposition party, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), securing 57 of the 120 parliamentary seats up for election, the Australian delegation expressed hope that the creation of a substantial parliamentary opposition in Zimbabwe would give the country a base on which to build a democratic future.

The Australian delegation's report will be presented to the Australian Parliament in the Spring sittings. For copies of the statement released by the delegation on 29 June and the transcript of the delegation's press conference, call Russell Chafer on (02) 6277 4588 or email: russell.chafer.reps@aph.gov.au

An advance copy of the Commonwealth Observer Group's report is available through the Commonwealth's web site at: www.thecommonwealth.org/htm/info/zimbabwe.doc

Australia's election observers to Zimbabwe

Delegation from the Australian Parliament

Senator Alan Ferguson (South Australia)
 Senator Andrew Murray (Western Australia)
 Mr Kim Wilkie MP (Member for Swan, Western Australia)

Accompanied by:

Mr Russell Chafer (Department of the House of Representatives)
 Mr Bala Chettur (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade)
 Mr Ross Mackay (Australian Electoral Commission)

Australian members of the Commonwealth Observer Group

Ms Julie Bishop MP (Member for Curtin, Western Australia)
 Senator Sandy Macdonald (New South Wales)
 Dr David MacGibbon (former Senator)

What do we want ...

“the right to protest”

It took only a matter of seconds for a peaceful, well-organised rally to turn into the worst political violence seen at the new Parliament House. Peaceful protesters had been singing, chanting and strolling around the lawns of Parliament House when a general move to the front doors set off a rush of people and emotions. Two violent hours later the foyer of Parliament House was spattered with blood and paint, smashed glass crunched underfoot and discarded banners littered the forecourt. (The Australian, 20 August 1996)

In the aftermath of the August 1996 demonstration at Parliament House, people wanted answers: “How could things get so out of hand?” “Who was to blame?” “What must be done to prevent this happening again?”

At the time, a parliamentary committee reviewing protests in the national capital resisted calls for more stringent laws to regulate protests. Instead, Parliament’s National Capital Committee, in its report *A right to protest* (May 1997), recommended a cooperative approach to the management of protests, with better liaison between protest organisers and relevant authorities.

The production of a public information booklet on protesting in the national capital was one of the key recommendations from the National Capital Committee. That recommendation has now been implemented with the release of a booklet from the National Capital Authority entitled *The Right to Protest, A guide*.

‘People do not require formal approval to conduct a protest or demonstration in the national capital.’

The protest guide outlines the legal requirements that apply to protests in the national capital. It also provides protest organisers with details of people to contact when planning a demonstration in the national capital.

According to the National Capital Authority, people do not require formal approval to conduct a protest or demonstration in the national capital. However, the erection of structures associated with a protest do require approval. The protest guide outlines the procedures that people must follow if they are intending to build any structure in association with a protest. It includes an application form for approval of protest structures.

The protest guide also outlines the special guidelines that cover the conduct of protests around Parliament House. Those guidelines restrict protests to an authorised area at the front of Parliament House.



The protest guide encourages protest organisers to contact the following people when planning a protest:

National Capital Authority, call (02) 6271 2888 or email: natcap@natcap.gov.au

Australian Federal Police Demonstration Liaison Team, call (02) 6275 7126 or after hours to Police Communications, call (02) 6256 7777

Security Controller, Parliament House, call (02) 6277 4700 or after hours call (02) 6277 5999

For copies of the protest guide or for more information contact:

National Capital Authority
GPO Box 373
Canberra ACT 2601
Visit: www.nationalcapital.gov.au

Call: (02) 6271 2888
Email: natcap@natcap.gov.au
Fax: (02) 6273 4427



Trading with our South American neighbours

"South America is an untapped region that Australian companies should be forging greater trade links with," Geoff Prosser, Chair of Parliament's Trade Sub-Committee, explained.

"There are some smart businesses in Australia that have already taken up opportunities in South America, but there is so much potential and enormous capabilities for growth."

For the past 14 months, Mr Prosser has chaired a parliamentary inquiry into Australia's trade and investment relationship with South America. During this time, the Trade Sub-Committee has discussed the positive and negative issues on establishing trading partnerships with South America. It has reviewed close to 40 submissions from Australian organisations, held a number of public hearings across Australia, and visited eight South American countries to obtain first hand experience and knowledge. Members of the Trade Sub-Committee visited Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela.

The inquiry was referred to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade in 1999 by the then Minister for Trade, Tim Fischer.

The South American trade and investment market can be compared in size to many of the Asian markets. There are more than 338 million people, a growing middle class and a very wealthy upper class.

South America is geographically a diverse region and therefore has a broad range of industries that Australian companies can tap into. These include oil and gas, mining, agriculture, information technology and telecommunications, marine and fisheries, infrastructure and transport, urban planning, construction technology, consumer goods, service industries, automotive after-market, and education.

"The potential of the region is enormous," Mr Prosser said. "Australia is well placed to take advantage of the opportunities in South America and we are also capable of linking into the niche markets."

"The South American landscape and lifestyle is not dissimilar to Australia – the cities are cosmopolitan and sophisticated and there are large expanses of rural areas."

"When the Committee recently visited South America we found that the local businesses, industry and governments were very receptive to Australia and to us developing closer ties. I am proud to say that we have an excellent reputation and are seen as honest and reliable."

The Trade Sub-Committee is currently completing its inquiry into South America and will table its findings in the Spring session of Parliament.

For copies of the submissions and report once it is tabled contact the Inquiry Secretary on (02) 6277 2313 or visit the Trade Sub-Committee web site:
www.apf.gov.au/house/committee/jfadt/index.htm

Photo above: Members of Parliament's Trade Sub-Committee inspecting BHP's hot briquetted iron plant being constructed at Puerto Ordaz, Venezuela in March 2000. The plant is a significant joint venture investment by BHP. The first briquette rolled off the production line on 29 May 2000.

Our next celebration



For the Centenary of Federation, students at Renmark Primary are researching the life of the first Speaker of the House of Representatives. Portrait: Sir Frederick William Holder (1916) by George Webb (1861 - 1943), Historic Memorials Collection, Canberra - courtesy of the Parliament House Art Collection, Joint House Department, Canberra ACT.

When the last fireworks from the Olympic and Paralympic Games fade over Sydney, attention will turn to Australia's next big celebration - the Centenary of Federation on 1 January 2001. Planning is well advanced for major national celebrations that will be complemented by activities and projects at the community level.

The Parliamentary Education Office (PEO) is using the Centenary as an opportunity to help young Australians understand the origins of our federal system of government and to generate interest in learning about parliament. Already the PEO is facilitating a range of federation projects both within Parliament House and at the local community level.

A major initiative is the *First Parliament Project*, which involves students throughout Australia in researching the lives and careers of the first Members and Senators of the Australian Parliament. Working in class groups, students from 80 schools have been searching their local communities for information that will bring to life stories about their first Federal parliamentarians. Already there is an interesting yarn or two to tell.

In Queensland, students from Mt Gravatt School came across the former home of the first Federal Member for Oxley, Richard Edwards, when they were undertaking research on his life. When visiting the house for a photograph to include in

their project, the students were surprised to meet up with Mr Edwards's grandson, whose stories about his grandfather will now feature in their project.

Family connections have also helped students at Renmark Primary School in South Australia, who are researching the life of the first Speaker of the House of Representatives, Sir Frederick William Holder. The students have spoken with Sir Frederick's granddaughter and will use her insights to help build their story about their first Federal Member.

Students are being encouraged to use their projects locally, with presentations to other local schools, articles for their local newspapers and displays at local councils and libraries. The aim is to help give the Centenary of Federation a local connection and, therefore, make it more meaningful for individual communities.

The *First Parliament* projects will be launched on the PEO's web site (www.peo.gov.au) in November this year. The end product will be a rich tapestry of stories woven by young Australians nationwide.

The PEO is also conducting a series of role-play debates in Bendigo, Victoria, site of the 1898 conference of the Australian Natives Association and the birthplace of Sir John Quick. The conference, with Quick's influence, is believed to have helped tip the debate in Victoria towards support for federation. At the Corowa Convention in 1893, Sir John Quick introduced the concept of opening the federation debate to the people.

The PEO role-play debates are part of the Bendigo Federation Celebrations, funded by the Victorian Federation grants scheme, and will be held from 16 to 20 October 2000. Year 9 students will debate the historic Immigration Bill (No 17) 1901 in the Federation Room of the Shamrock Hotel, the very place where Deakin and Quick excited the Australian Natives Association and the people of Bendigo in 1898 to vote YES in the June 1898 referendum. The students will be acting as Members of the first Federal Parliament. Local actors will help to set the scene with a play about Sir John Quick and Bendigo's involvement in the federation movement. Meanwhile Year 6 students will be enacting a Bendigo Council meeting in the Old Town Hall, the very place that the Council met in the years around 1898. These students, acting as local councillors, will be debating a motion that the Council support the YES vote in the referendum of June 1898.

"Our Centenary of Federation projects are all about helping young Australians appreciate the events of 100 years ago and understand why they are still relevant today," says Brenton Holmes, Director of the Parliamentary Education Office. "Importantly, they are projects that focus on local communities and the role that those communities played in bringing about a united Australian nation."

"The message we are delivering with our projects is that through involvement in their local communities young Australians can have a say in shaping the future of our nation."

For further information on the Centenary of Federation projects being conducted by the Parliamentary Education Office

Visit: www.peo.gov.au
Call: 1800 808 533 (toll free)
Email: info@peo.gov.au

Question Time

What's being investigated?

Question

In the July/August 2000 issue of *About the House*, there was a picture of the rosewood despatch boxes on the Chamber Table. The photo also showed a row of books on the Table behind the boxes. What are the books and are they ever used?



Answer

The row of books along the centre of the Table are leather bound volumes of the House of Representatives Hansards covering approximately the past three years (Hansard is the official record of debates for the House). Earlier Hansards are available outside the Chamber.

Members refer to the Hansards from time to time if they want to check on something which may have been said in an earlier debate.

As well as the Hansards, a number of books sit on the table in front of the Clerk and the Deputy Clerk. The books, which the Speaker, Members and the Clerks may use as reference tools, include:

- House of Representatives Practice (a comprehensive and authoritative text on the procedure and practice of the House of Representatives);
- Standing and Sessional Orders (the Standing Orders are the continuing rules of procedure adopted by the House; the Sessional Orders are temporary rules which, in most cases, expire at the end of a session – usually when the House is dissolved for a general election);
- the Constitution;
- Votes and Proceedings (the official record of decisions of the House); and
- a dictionary.

Send in your questions

If you have a question that you would like to have answered about the House of Representatives, write to, email, phone or fax:

Liaison and Projects Office
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Email: liaison.reps@aph.gov.au
Phone: (02) 6277 2122
Fax: (02) 6277 8521

Review of relationship with World Trade Organisation

The Joint Standing Committee on Treaties is investigating the nature and scope of Australia's relationship with the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The Treaties Committee is examining:

- opportunities for community involvement in developing Australia's negotiating positions on matters with the WTO;
- the transparency and accountability of WTO operations and decision making;
- the effectiveness of the WTO's dispute settlement procedures and the ease of access to these procedures;
- Australia's capacity to undertake WTO advocacy;
- the involvement of peak bodies, industry groups and external lawyers in conducting WTO disputes;
- the relationship between the WTO and regional economic arrangements;
- the relationship between WTO agreements and other multilateral agreements, including those on trade and related matters, and on environmental, human rights and labour standards; and
- the extent to which social, cultural and environmental considerations influence WTO priorities and decision making.

Comments to the Committee were due by 25 August 2000, but those people still wanting to have their say on these matters can mail or email their comments to:

The Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Email: jsct@aph.gov.au
Call: (02) 6277 4002
Fax: (02) 6277 4827
Visit: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jsct

Kyoto Protocol also under review

The Joint Standing Committee on Treaties also is investigating whether ratification of the Kyoto Protocol on climate change is in Australia's national interest. The Treaties Committee is looking at the implications for Australia of proceeding or not proceeding to ratify the Kyoto Protocol and meeting its target emissions levels by 2008.

An important issue for the Committee is the veracity of conflicting current scientific theories on global warming and any solutions proposed for it. The Committee also wants to know what definitions and criteria Australia should develop and actively pursue in its national interest with regard to matters such as carbon credits, revegetation and land management.

The full terms of reference for the inquiry can be obtained from the Committee's web site or the Committee secretariat (see contact details above). Comments were due by 25 August 2000, but if you have anything to say on the Kyoto Protocol then you can still mail or email your comments to the Treaties Committee.

If you want to join an email alert list for updates on the above inquiries, email: jsct@aph.gov.au

Watch this space



Army report due in September

A report on the suitability of the Australian Army for peace, peacekeeping and war is due to be released in September. The report follows a 12 month investigation by the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, culminating in a Defence Strategy Debate in June this year (see article pages 4 and 5). For details on the release of the report and how to get copies, call (02) 6277 2313 or email: jscfadt@aph.gov.au

Employee share ownership

For details on the inquiry into employee share ownership and the report of that inquiry, call the House of Representatives Employment, Education and Workplace Relations Committee on (02) 6277 4573, email: eewr.reps@aph.gov.au or visit: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/eewr

The House meets

The House of Representatives will be meeting on the following dates:

- October 3 to 5, 9 to 12, 30 and 31
- November 1 and 2, 6 to 9, 27 to 30
- December 4 to 7

Keep up to date

On the first Wednesday of each month (except January), the House of Representatives publishes an information advertisement on page 2 of *The Australian*. In our 'What's happening at your House?' ad, we inform you about new committee inquiries, upcoming public hearings, new committee reports, House sitting dates and other matters of interest on the work of the House.

Public hearings & Public meetings

As part of their investigations, parliamentary committees hold public hearings and public meetings throughout Australia, talking to people about the issues under investigation. Generally, transcripts from those hearings are available from the relevant committee's web site a few days after the hearing or by contacting the committee secretariat.

Substance abuse hearings commence

On 14 August the House of Representatives Family and Community Affairs Committee held the first public hearing of its new inquiry into substance abuse and the costs to the community. Organisations appearing at the Canberra hearing included the Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia, various Commonwealth agencies, the ACT Family and Friends for Drug Law Reform and the ACT Government.

Further hearings on the substance abuse inquiry are planned for Perth from 11 to 13 September, Adelaide on 13 and 14 November, Melbourne on 15 and 16 November, Hobart on 17 November, Brisbane on 20 November and Sydney on 21 and 22 November.

For more information

Visit: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/fca
 Call: (02) 6277 4566
 Email: fca.reps@aph.gov.au
 Fax: (02) 6277 4844

Public good conservation hearings continue

The House of Representatives Environment and Heritage Committee has been conducting a round of public hearings on its inquiry into public good conservation, focusing on the impact of environmental measures imposed on landholders. Hearings were held in Melbourne on 22 August and Canberra on 4 September. Further hearings and inspections are scheduled for Queensland from 11 to 13 September, Canberra on 9 October and New South Wales from 20 to 22 November.

For more information

Visit: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/environ
 Call: (02) 6277 4580
 Email: Environment.Reps@aph.gov.au
 Fax: (02) 6277 4424


**ABOUT
THE HOUSE**

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Finding out about the House is very rewarding

Award entry designed by BAM+SSB

