



Public  
Accounts and  
Estimates  
Committee

10 May 2007

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Dear Mr Purdey

At the request of the Committee I am writing in regard to the staffing arrangements for the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee secretariat, and in doing so refer to the correspondence from the Speaker dated 22 March 2007, whereby she states I am to direct further correspondence on this matter to you. I also refer to your recent email on this matter which was tabled at the Committee's meeting.

You will be aware that the government is publicly committed to a strong parliamentary democracy, together with a robust committee system. In relation to the PAEC, the committee notes the Premier recognises the intensive workload of the PAEC and the crucial role it plays in terms of accountability to the Parliament. He reinforced this view in his testimony at the Estimates hearings where he announced additional funding of \$360,000 a year for PAEC. He also noted:

*...PAEC has a different role and function to other joint parliamentary committees. It is a different function. It ranges over the whole of government. It has an estimates hearing in which ministers make submissions, and it can call in government departments for those submissions as well. (Transcript, 3 May 2007, p.34)*

The Leader of the House in the Legislative Assembly has also acknowledged that the committee (along with SARC) is 'the most important, highest profile and most strategic of the parliamentary committees'. Legislation has recently passed that raises the status of Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

The Committee supports the view of the Premier that PAEC has responsibilities that both differ from and substantially exceed those of other Committees. It is unique among the Parliamentary Committees in that it has a special role to play in regard to the Auditor General and the VAGO work program. It conducts open hearings on the estimates with the Premier and every Minister. It is also able to initiate inquiries into any matter reported to Parliament. In addition to its unique role and function, its workload far exceeds that of any other committee.

In considering the role the Committee undertakes on behalf of the Parliament, a number of matters are pertinent to the urgent appointment of staff to the PAEC secretariat, including:

- the committee's specific immediate responsibilities in relation to the office of the Auditor-General including
  - the review of the draft annual plan and budget;
  - the triennial performance audit of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office
  - the annual financial audit of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office
- the management of the inquiry into the 2007-08 budget estimates — with a state budget of over \$27 billion;
- the management of the inquiry into the options for the next phase of strengthening government and parliamentary accountability in Victoria;
- the management of the inquiry into trustee arrangements for governing the parliamentary contributory superannuation fund;
- the management of an inquiry into the Auditor-General's reports between July 2006 and February 2007;
- the annual review of accounts and outcomes;
- possible additional inquiries from the Committee; and
- the supervision of staff and contractors.

As a consequence, and in consideration of the above, the Committee unanimously agreed that I write to you, requesting:

- an officer be immediately assigned to the role of Executive Officer, Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, as an interim measure until the current recruitment and selection process is completed (including your reconsideration of the level of the position);
- two of the Research Officer positions recently advertised be immediately allocated to Public Accounts and Estimates Committee;
- some part-time research officer positions be created.

The Committee also remains of the view that the Executive Officer for PAEC should be classified at a higher level than what you have proposed. While I believe that the role merits an EO3 position and that this would be supported by Treasury and Finance, the Committee has recommended to you that an appointment at the VPS6-2 level with a gratuity might be sufficient to ensure an appropriately suitable appointment. The Committee would appreciate your reconsideration of this matter and as Chair I would be happy to assist in developing a case for the reclassification of the position.

I also note the announcement of the Premier at the estimates hearings that PAEC has been allocated an additional \$360,000 a year in recognition of its role and to provide for higher level and additional staff.

I would appreciate your prompt response.

Yours sincerely



Mr Bob Stensholt, MP  
Chair