

CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION

This report of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee is presented to Parliament on the initial component of the Committee's round of 2008-09 Budget Estimates hearings.

The report, which follows on from the new style of presentation introduced for last year's estimates, covers the first 16 budget estimates hearings held up to 16 May 2008. The Committee intends to present a second report to Parliament on the remaining 25 hearings soon after their completion. A final report on the estimates will be presented to Parliament in the early part of 2008-09.

In addition to transcripts of proceedings for each of the 16 hearings, the report summarises on a portfolio basis:

- the key matters raised at the hearings in the form of the Committee's questions and responses from ministers (266 in total); and
- documents presented by ministers to the Committee at hearings.

The report also reproduces the responses received from departments to the Committee's 2008-09 Budget Estimates questionnaire (see Appendix 3). These responses address a range of issues associated with the impact of the budget on departmental operations and future directions.

The conduct of budget estimates hearings enables the Committee to pursue with the government questions surrounding operating revenue of around \$37.8 billion and operating expenditure of \$37.0 billion. On the capital side, substantial infrastructure investment is forecast to continue with a projected net investment of \$4.0 billion in 2008-09.

With these large financial estimates, the issues canvassed at the estimates hearings become central to an awareness and understanding of the key strategic directions and initiatives underway within each portfolio flowing from the budget. Those issues also provide an insight into the thinking of the Committee on matters relating to productivity, performance and accountability in portfolios and across government.

The main purpose of the Committee providing early reports to Parliament is to assist in the consideration of the 2008-09 appropriation bills before Parliament. These bills, when passed, provide authority for the government to deliver planned services and commence new asset investment programs. The aim of the Committee is to enhance the information available to members on the budget and, in turn, to enrich the Parliament's debate on the bills.

I wish to thank Ministers, Presiding Officers and their accompanying staff for their time and quality input into the deliberations at each hearing. I also thank the members of the Committee for their commitment and cooperation at hearings. Finally, my particular thanks, on behalf of the Committee, go to members of the Committee's secretariat for their efforts in ensuring the competent and timely preparation of material for this report.

I commend the report to all Members of Parliament and encourage them to draw on the report's contents as they assess the merits of the 2008-09 appropriation bills.



Bob Stensholt, MP

Chair