

2021

(No. 26)



PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

Members of the Public Accounts Committee

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Hon Ivan Dean MLC (Chair to 26 March 2021)

Hon Ruth Forrest MLC (Chair from 23 June 2021)

Hon Meg Webb MLC (from 22 June 2021)

Hon Josh Willie MLC

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

Mr David O'Byrne MP (to 26 March 2021)

Mrs Joan Rylah MP (to 27 July 2020)

Mr Nic Street MP (from 26 August 2020)

Mr John Tucker MP (to 26 March 2021)

Ms Madeleine Ogilvie MP (from 22 June 2021)

Ms Rebecca White MP (from 22 June 2021)

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THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

A. Background

The Public Accounts Committee (the Committee) is a Joint Standing Committee of the Tasmanian Parliament constituted under the *Public Accounts Committee Act 1970*.

The Committee comprises six Members of Parliament, three Members drawn from the Legislative Council and three Members from the House of Assembly.

Under section 6 of the *Public Accounts Committee Act 1970* the Committee:

- must inquire into, consider and report to the Parliament on any matter referred to the Committee by either House relating to the management, administration or use of public sector finances; or the accounts of any public authority or other organisation controlled by the State or in which the State has an interest; and
- may inquire into, consider and report to the Parliament on any matter arising in connection with public sector finances that the Committee considers appropriate; and any matter referred to the Committee by the Auditor-General.

The Committee also has oversight responsibilities regarding the independence of the Auditor-General, which are derived from the *Audit Act 2008*.

An important area of focus for the Committee is following up Auditor-General's reports to Parliament under Section 6.2(b) of the Act.

In scrutinising the work of the Auditor-General, the Committee believes it can provide greater awareness within the Parliament and the community, leading to increased information and greater transparency.

B. Responsibility of the Committee

The Committee has responsibility in key areas encompassing Public Accounts and Auditor-General independence oversight.

(i) Public Accounts

The Committee has key roles in this area including undertaking general inquiries into some aspects of administration or public sector management, including inquiries into the accounts of any public authority or other organisation controlled by the State or in which the State has an interest (these inquiries can be resulting from a referral from either House or can be self-initiated); and following up matters referred by the Auditor-General to the Committee.

An important area of focus for the Committee is following up Auditor-General's reports to Parliament in accordance with section 6.2(b) of the Act. The Committee is pleased to report that it has continued its series of rolling reviews of Auditor-General's reports in 2018-19.

The Committee and the Auditor-General share a common mission "to enhance public sector accountability and performance" which is reinforced in their 2012 Memorandum of Understanding. While the work of both parties is complementary, the Memorandum of Understanding reinforces the independence of each party in the carrying out of duties under their respective legislation.

(ii) Auditor-General Independence Oversight

The Committee has a statutory responsibility under the *Audit Act 2008* to:

- Section 9 - consult with the Treasurer regarding the appointment of the Auditor-General;
- Section 11 - review the Auditor-General's draft annual plan, and provide comments on it to the Auditor-General prior to its finalisation and tabling in Parliament; and
- Section 44 - review the findings of the periodic review of the efficiency, effectiveness and economy of the Tasmanian Audit Office operations.

C. Committee Activities

The Committee activities include a mix of self-initiated inquiries and referred inquiries. The Committee receives submissions and conducts briefings and hearings on such matters as required.

Results of inquiries are presented in reports that are tabled in both the House of Assembly and the Legislative Council. Those reports are available to the public and are posted on the Committee website:

<https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/ctee/joint/PAC/New%20PAC.html>

The website provides background information on the Committee's roles and functions, and provides details of Members, administration, current inquiries, meeting dates, recent reports and past inquiries.

The Committee also has an email address: pac@parliament.tas.gov.au, which is used for external correspondence.

The Committee receives administrative and other support from its Secretariat and from the Parliamentary Research Service.

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YEAR IN REVIEW – 2020-21

Some of the Committee's planned work was deferred due to the prorogation of Parliament between 26 March and 22 June 2021 for the Tasmanian State election, as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Committee prioritised its Inquiry into the Government's economic and health expenditure response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A. Completed Inquiries

The Committee tabled the following report:

A self-initiated inquiry to review the *Tasmanian Government Fiscal Sustainability Report 2016* with the following Terms of Reference:

- to assess how Tasmania was performing against the projections in the Report;
- whether the Report took a broad enough approach; and
- whether the Report conveyed information effectively as required under Section 14(a) of the *Charter of Budget Responsibility Act 2007*.

B. Work in Progress

1. The Committee self-initiated an inquiry to review selected 2015 Public Works Committee Reports No. 27 Midland Highway, Mangalore to Bagdad Stage 1 and Midland Highway, Kempton to Melton Mowbray Stage 1 and No. 28 of 2015, Midland Highway, Perth to Breadalbane Duplication.

The Inquiry is still in progress.

2. The Committee self-initiated an inquiry into the Government's economic response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with particular reference to:
 - the timeliness and efficacy of the Government's economic response including stimulus funding and targeted financial support programs/payments;

- health expenditure with specific reference to preparation and response to the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- the impact, progress and outcome of the Government's economic recovery plan for Tasmania; and
- any other matters incidental thereto.

The Inquiry is still in progress.

3. The Committee self-initiated a review of the *Tasmanian Government Fiscal Sustainability Report 2021* as a follow-up to an inquiry it had conducted in 2020 into the *Tasmanian Government Fiscal Sustainability Report 2016*.

The review is still in progress.

4. The Committee resolved to conduct follow-up reviews of the following Auditor-General reports:
 - No. 1 of 2016-17: Ambulance Emergency Services;
 - No. 4 of 2016-17: Event Funding;
 - No. 8 of 2018-19: Student Attendance and Engagement: Years 7 to 10; and
 - No. 11 of 2018-19: Performance of Tasmania's four major hospitals in the delivery of Emergency Department services.

The reviews are still in progress.

C. Briefings

The Committee received a number of briefings throughout the year to assist it in its work including from:

- The Auditor-General, Mr Rod Whitehead regarding the Tasmanian Audit Office 2019-20 and 2021-21 Annual Plans of Work; and
- The Secretary of the Department of Treasury and Finance, Mr Tony Ferrall to provide an economic fiscal update report.

AUSTRALASIAN COUNCIL OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEES

A. Background

The Australasian Council of Public Accounts Committees (ACPAC) was established in 1989. ACPAC is an 'umbrella' organisation of Public Accounts Committees with membership open to all Australasian Parliamentary Public Accounts Committees. The aims of ACPAC include the following: to facilitate the exchange of information and opinion relating to Public Accounts Committees, to discuss matters of mutual concern and to improve the quality and performance of Public Accounts Committees in Australasia.

An ACPAC conference is held every two years, and in the intervening year a mid-term meeting is held to develop an agenda for the next ACPAC conference, as well as to discuss other issues of mutual concern around Public Accounts Committee-related themes. The Tasmanian Parliamentary Standing Committee of Public Accounts is a full member of ACPAC and as such, is committed to support its role and function.

B. ACPAC Activities 2020-21

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Committee resolved to cancel the mid-term ACPAC meeting to have been hosted by the Parliament of Tasmania.

ADMINISTRATION

A. Meetings conducted

Committee meetings and hearings were scheduled and conducted throughout the year, with the exception of the period from 26 March to 22 June 2021 whilst Parliament was prorogued due to the Tasmanian State election.

A list of full committee meetings conducted over the period 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021 is provided below:

2020	2021
27 July 2020	3 February 2021
6 August 2020	5 March 2021
14 August 2020	24 March 2021
26 August 2020	Prorogation of Parliament
28 August 2020	23 June 2021
10 September 2020	
16 September 2020	
18 September 2020	
23 September 2020	
29 September 2020	
14 October 2020	
26 October 2020	
4 November 2020	
18 November 2020	
20 November 2020	

B. Committee Secretariat

The Committee was assisted by the following secretariat:

Acting Secretary	Ms Natasha Exel
Executive Assistant	Ms Allison Waddington
Parliamentary Research Office	Dr Bryan Stait and staff



**Hon Ruth Forrest MLC
Chair**

29 October 2021

