



PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20

Members of the Public Accounts Committee

Legislative Council

Hon Ivan Dean MLC (Chair)

Hon Ruth Forrest MLC

Hon Josh Willie MLC

House of Assembly

Mr Scott Bacon MP (to 22 August 2019)

Mr David O'Byrne MP (from 24 September 2019)

Mrs Joan Rylah MP

Mr John Tucker MP

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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 briefing officer-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:

<http://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/ctee/Joint/pacc.htm>.

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 timely and valuable research assistance from the Parliamentary Research Service.

YEAR IN REVIEW – 2019-20

A. Completed Inquiries

1. The Committee tabled the following reports:
 - i. A self-initiated an inquiry into the Office of the Ombudsman to inquire into and report upon the Office of the Ombudsman and Health Complaints Commissioner with particular reference to the:
 - functions of the Office;
 - resourcing of the Office;
 - performance of the Office; and
 - any other matters incidental thereto.
 - ii. A follow-up review of Auditor-General Reports:
 - No. 11 of 2013-14: Compliance with the Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Plan 2008-13;
 - No. 1 of 2013-14: Fraud control in local government;
 - No. 12 of 2013-14: Quality of Metro Services; and
 - No. 3 of 2014-15: Motor vehicle fleet management in government departments.
 - iii. A follow-up review of a number of Public Works Committee approved project works including:
 - Colebrook Main Road, Richmond – Heavy Vehicle Link Road;
 - Construction of Dunalley Primary School; and
 - George Town Hub.
 - iv. A follow-up review of Auditor-General Reports:
 - No. 8 of 2015-16: Provision of Social Housing; and
 - No. 11 of 2015-16: Compliance with legislation.

B. Work in Progress

1. The Committee self-initiated an inquiry to review the Tasmanian Government Fiscal Sustainability Report 2016.

A draft report is under consideration by the Committee.

2. 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.

3. 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 currently receiving evidence.

C. Briefings

1. 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 Treasurer and Secretary of the Department of Treasury and Finance, Mr Tony Ferrall to provide an economic fiscal update report.

AUSTRALASIAN COUNCIL OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

A. Background

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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 2019-20

1. The ACPAC biennial conference was conducted 6-8 November 2019 in Parliament House, Canberra. The PAC Chair Mr Dean, Mr O'Byrne and the Secretary attended and submitted a jurisdiction report to the conference.
2. The Committee resolved to cancel the mid-term ACPAC meeting to have been hosted by the Parliament of Tasmania due to COVID-19.

ADMINISTRATION

A. Members' Attendance

1. Committee Meetings and Hearings were scheduled and conducted throughout the year.
2. Attendance by Committee members at full committee meetings over the period 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020 is recorded below:

Member	Full Committee Meetings	
	Eligible to Attend	Attended
Ivan Dean MLC (Chair)	19	19
Scott Bacon MP	3	3
Ruth Forrest MLC	19	18
David O'Byrne MP	15	13
Joan Rylah MP	19	18
John Tucker MP	19	19
Josh Willie MLC	19	19

B. Committee Secretariat

The Committee was assisted by the following secretariat:

Secretary	Ms Gabrielle Woods (to 2 March 2020) Mr Stuart Wright (25 March – 26 May 2020) Ms Natasha Exel (from 27 May 2020)
Executive Assistant	Ms Allison Waddington
Parliamentary Research Office	Dr Bryan Stait and staff



Hon Ivan Dean MLC
Chair

18 September 2020