



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**COMMITTEES**

**Education and Employment Committee**

**Report**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 16 August 2011**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Tuesday, 16 August 2011  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Ms RISHWORTH

**Source** House  
**Proof** Yes  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

(Kingston) (NaN.NaN pm)

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (16:50): On behalf of the Standing Committee on Education and Employment, I seek leave to make a statement on the Schools Assistance Amendment Bill 2011 in discharge of the committee's requirement to provide an advisory report on the bill and to present a copy of my statement.

Leave granted.

Ms RISHWORTH: The committee has considered the content of this statement and unanimously endorses it. On 23 June 2011 the Schools Assistance Amendment Bill was referred to the standing committee for inquiry and report. The bill proposes a mechanical change to the Schools Assistance Act to align the act with more flexible arrangements for the implementation of the national curriculum. This greater flexibility was agreed in December 2010 by the Australian Governments' Standing Council for School Education and Early Childhood, formerly known as the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs. Without the amendment, forward funding for non-government schools is uncertain. In the interests of due process and to ensure full consideration of the bill the committee called for submissions. We received six submissions, all of which supported the bill. Notwithstanding the unanimous support for the bill from stakeholders, the Independent Schools Council of Australia noted:

... it is proposed that regulations to prescribe the curriculum implementation timelines be authorised by the Standing Council.

The independent schools pointed out:

The non-government school sector does not have specific representation on the Standing Council or on its advisory officials' committee ...

And thus sought assurances that non-government schools will be adequately and appropriately consulted regarding the implementation time frames prior to the development of these regulations.

In a similar vein, the National Catholic Education Commission noted:

... neither national nongovernment school peak body has any representation on MCEECDYA—

the national council—

the body that governs the work of ACARA and thus the work on the Australian Curriculum. NCEC therefore calls on Australia's Ministers of Education assembled at MCEECDYA to be always mindful of their responsibilities as Ministers of Education for all students in their jurisdiction, rather than act simply as heads of major state department school systems, when making decisions about the Australian Curriculum.

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations stated:

The Australian Government recognises and respects the role of the non-government sector as equal and active partners in the process to develop the Australian Curriculum ... Through its representation on the ACARA Board and its participation in consultation processes, the non-government sector will continue to play a critical role in the development of the Australian Curriculum.

The committee supports and encourages ongoing consultation and engagement with the non-government sector in relation to all processes related to the development and implementation of the national curriculum.

After consideration of the evidence, the committee has agreed not to further inquire into this bill and recommends that the House pass the bill. As part of this report, the committee has authorised me to comment on the procedure by which this and other bills are referred to general purpose standing committees. The committee supports the bill referral powers of the Selection Committee, which was one of the reforms foreshadowed in the agreement for a better parliament, and it supports the referral of bills as an effective mechanism for increasing transparency and public consultation. This is the third occasion that a bill has been referred to us for inquiry in this parliament. However, it was unclear to the committee why this specific proposal was referred for inquiry considering it had been unanimously supported by stakeholders. The referral of an uncontroversial bill can significantly interrupt the work program of a standing committee for

little or no gain. Worse still, an unnecessary referral may unsettle stakeholders, who could form a view that the referred bill may not be proceeded with or may be delayed because of the referral. This sentiment was given voice during this current inquiry by the Australian Parents Council, which stated:

Further delay in the passing of the Schools Assistance Amendment (Financial Assistance) Bill 2011 can only increase the current feelings of uncertainty.

The education and employment committee concurs with the Procedure Committee's recent recommendation that reasons be provided for referral. The committee and I am sure that those stakeholders who made submissions would have found an explanation as to why the current proposal was referred most useful.

(Kingston) (NaN.NaN pm)