

Business tax

bills come before the House

Legislation of far reaching importance will be on the House's agenda for the November-December sittings. Coming before the House will be various bills of social significance, but much of the focus will again be on the country's taxation system.

Ralph reforms

High on the agenda will be a major package of legislation to implement certain recommendations of the review of business taxation chaired by John Ralph. The first stage of the Government's response was unveiled by the Treasurer, the Hon Peter Costello MP, on 21 October. Mr Costello told the House:

"The new business tax system will give Australia internationally competitive business tax arrangements including... lower company tax rates... reforms to indirect and personal income tax [and will] create the environment for higher economic growth and more investment. This in turn means more jobs and improved saving".

'internationally competitive business tax arrangements'

The taxation bills will be a feature of debates in the House during November and December. The Hon Simon Crean MP, Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Treasurer has said:

"We will be looking closely at this legislation to see if it passes the test that not only Labor but also the government has set. Labor has said the full response to the business tax package must pay for itself. It must be revenue neutral. As the government's response stands at the moment, it does not pay for itself ... If the government does all of these things [biting the bullet on the hard decisions needed in stage 2] the package could pay for itself and, if it pays for itself, Labor can support it."

Tradex Scheme

Another package of legislation to be considered in the House will be the bills that implement the Investing for Growth industry statement. The bills seek to make Australia's customs scheme more competitive by streamlining arrangements for exporters who import goods for further processing. When introducing the bills, Parliamentary Secretary, the Hon Warren Entsch MP told the House that the Tradex initiative follows a review of the existing Texco and Duty Drawback schemes. The review showed that excessive access and compliance costs are denying businesses the chance to recover unnecessary duty and sales tax and are impacting on their international competitiveness.

Family Law reforms

The Family Law Amendment Bill implements agreed recommendations of the joint committee which reviewed the operation of the Family Law Act. One set of recommendations deals with what is known as "parenting orders" – court orders concerning custody arrangements. The second aspect of the bill seeks to give separating couples greater choice in relation to property settlements and to achieve more efficient and less costly means of dispute resolution.

Where can I get the details ?

- The progress of bills can be checked from the Daily Bills List on the Internet at www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo/billsnet.
- The text of bills and the explanatory memoranda which explain them are available on the Internet at www.aph.gov.au/parlinfo/billsnet/bills.htm.
- The debates on the legislation can be found on the Internet at www.aph.gov.au/hansard.

(Turn to page 11 for a step by step guide to following the legislative process on-line.)