

---

## *Public Accounts Committee Activity*

---

The Twelfth Annual Meeting of the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees was held in St. John's, Newfoundland from July 8 through July 11, 1990. Hosted by **Loyola Hearn**, MHA, Chairman of the Newfoundland Standing Committee on Public Accounts and President of the Council for 1989-90, the meetings were attended by 67 members and associates from the federal, provincial and territorial parliaments in Canada and from the state of New South Wales in Australia.

As a spoke in the wheel of the financial cycle of government, public accounts committees attempt to ensure that the money granted by the legislature is spent as authorized by the House.

These conferences enable the participants to exchange information related to their respective committees, develop principles upon which their committees function in relation to the terms of reference bestowed upon them by the House and, discuss with legislative auditors, who hold concurrent and separate meetings, issues confronting their respective roles.

The continuing theme for this year's meeting revolved around the *Guidelines for Public Accounts Committees in Canada*. The document is the culmination of work performed by a subcommittee of the Council over the past two years involving each public accounts committee in the country. It was intended that the guidelines be made available to each public accounts committee to implement insofar as their terms of reference

and established practice would allow. At the conclusion of this year's meeting most delegates thought the *Guidelines* would be useful, applied in whole or in part, in improving the effectiveness of public accounts committees.

Each jurisdiction presented a brief synopsis of events as they unfolded throughout the past year. The Yukon presented a review of financial operations of Hyland Forest Products contained in the committee's 1990 Report to the Legislative Assembly. Along with the Report the Chairperson, **Joyce Hayden**, MLA presented a paper entitled *A Burning issue: Hyland Forest Products*. **Barry Pashak**, MLA Chairperson of the Alberta Public Accounts Committee distributed copies of Bill 215, *Public Accounts Committee Act* along with excerpts from Hansard related to the raising of procedural matters of the committee in the House under Oral Question Period and excerpts, again from Hansard, related to second reading of Bill 215. A review of the applicability of the *Guidelines* to the Alberta public accounts committee was presented as well. Ontario, led by **Ed Philip**, MPP, Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee presented a paper entitled, *Discussion paper on the Guidelines for Public Accounts Committees in Canada*. The 29 page document reveals the extent to which the role of the Ontario Public Accounts Committee has evolved over the years and the expectations the committee has in relation to its ability to do its job.

A delegation from the New South Wales Public Accounts Committee

reviewed their procedural and administrative mechanics. They indicated that they were much more successful in holding government accountable due to legislation, passed in the early 1980s, establishing parameters around which they work. Copies of *Public Finance and Audit Act 1983, no. 152* governing their authority were distributed.

Most delegates to the conference contended that if public accounts committees in Canada are to become more successful and meaningful, specific legislation similar to that involving New South Wales, may be required. A more detailed study of the Australian approach might result in dramatic improvements in the operation of public accounts committees in Canada, ultimately ensuring a greater degree of accountability and the effective, efficient and economical use of public money.

The Council Executive for 1990-91 include the Chairman of the Manitoba Public Accounts Committee as President; the First Vice-President is **Camille Theriault**, MLA of the New Brunswick Public Accounts Committee; the Second Vice-President is the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee in Ontario and; the Executive Secretary is the Clerk of Committees and Second Clerk Assistant in the British Columbia Legislative Assembly.

**Craig James**

Clerk of Committees and Second  
Clerk Assistant  
British Columbia