

Devolution of act of grace powers to agencies

Previous issues of Admin Review (17:63) have referred to arrangements for a limited trial devolution of the Minister of Finance's act of grace powers to agencies. The Minister has now signed the necessary instrument delegating his powers under the Audit Act. The powers are to be exercised in accordance with working arrangements which agencies will be expected to observe. These include a requirement that draft recommendations by the Ombudsman are to be referred to the Department of Finance for comment before being forwarded to the agency concerned. The trial period is to be for two years.

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New Social Security appeals system

The Social Security (Review of Decisions) Act 1988 came into force on 1 November. As reported in Admin Review (18:89), the Act gives effect to the Council's Report No.21 by providing a legislative base and determinative powers to the Social Security Appeals Tribunal. The Act also formally establishes the position of Department of Social Security review officers.

Veterans' Entitlements Act Monitoring Committee recommendations

The Veterans' Affairs Legislation Amendment Bill 1988 has been agreed to by the Senate (13 December 1988). The Bill gives effect to certain recommendations of the Veterans' Entitlements Act Monitoring Committee by providing for:

- the introduction of an extreme disablement adjustment;
- a reduction, to 70% of the general rate, in the degree of incapacity required for entitlement for the intermediate or special rate pension;
- an amendment to the 'application day' provisions to enable a veteran to qualify where he or she meets all the criteria at a date between the date of lodgment of the claim or application and the date of the decision of the Commission or any review body.

Privacy legislation

The Privacy Act 1988 came into operation on 1 January 1989. The Act establishes a Privacy Commissioner and provides privacy protection for individuals in relation to records of personal information held by Commonwealth agencies and in relation to tax file numbers information.

The Act imposes new obligations on Commonwealth agencies when collecting and handling records of personal information. The legislation requires agencies to comply with statutory rules (the Information Privacy Principles) for the collection, storage, access to, correction of, use and disclosure of records of personal information. The principles dealing with access and correction of agencies' records are subject to other