The Study Tour allowed the delegation to reflect on broad issues of governance, to observe the workings of Australian political institutions and to inspect major resource projects.

The delegation was able to meet a number of prominent participants in Australian public life including the The Hon Alexander Downer, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Gary Humphries, Deputy Chief Minister of the ACT and Mr Andrew Southcott, Federal Member for Boothby and member of the CDI Consultative Group. The delegation also observed Question Time in both the House of Representatives and the Senate and observed the robust nature of Australian politics and the tribal character of the major political parties when confronting each other over policy debate. Mr Humphries dealt with the issue of constituency responsibilities and Mr Southcott discussed the Committee system in the Federal Parliament. Mr Thongsing and Mr Downer held a broad ranging discussion on matters of current interest in the region.

There were two seminars devoted to economics and foreign policy. The former was led by Professor Peter Warr who spoke about the differing effects of the 1997 economic crisis on the various countries of the region. He compared the stability of prices but the severe loss of production in Thailand with the continuing growth of output but the high inflationary spiral in Laos. Drawing on recent IMF economic indicators, one of the factors requiring close examination in such a situation was growth of money supply. Professor Warr also looked at government revenue and the various options open to the government of Laos to increase revenue to help meet spending responsibilities. Mr Rich dealt with the development dividend inherent in good governance as demonstrated by recent World Bank studies (World Bank Policy Research Working Papers 2195 and 2196, "Governance Matters"). The studies show that improvements in such areas as rule of law, anti-corruption, cutting red tape and political accountability bring direct and measurable development dividends.

Professor Mark Turner led discussion on Foreign Policy issues and in particular the question of whether Laos was obtaining the expected benefits from membership of ASEAN. It was noted that the organisation was changing with the increase in the size of its membership and that there had been recent calls for greater engagement of ASEAN.
members in problems affecting some of its member states. The Lao delegation argued that ASEAN was strongest if it maintained its traditional view of not commenting on the internal affairs of its fellow members. There followed a discussion on the shrinking nature of sovereignty in the modern world. What may be considered as strictly internal affairs nevertheless had significant impact on investors, donors and tourists. All governments had to accept that any of its decisions was subject to foreign comment and reporting in foreign media. Professor Turner raised as an example the article in a recent Far Eastern Economic Review edition pointing to a split in the leadership of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party. The Lao side said there was no truth to the report in this article. The delegation went on to elaborate the broad consultative process undertaken before important policy decisions were taken.

The delegation received a detailed briefing from the Public Service and Merit Protection Commission. The briefing dealt with recent reforms in the Australian public service as well as codes of conduct for public servants. There was also a discussion of leadership requirements of senior officials and methodologies on how to improve leadership standards. One of the interesting aspects of the ensuing discussion was the Lao delegation's view that the moral underpinnings of the Lao public service need not necessarily be spelled out in a new document because the moral basis of Lao society was rooted in Buddhism.

One of the most interesting sessions in the course of the Study Tour was the call by the delegation on Mr Russ Taylor, Principal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Studies. Mr Taylor provided a broad overview of the history of the indigenous people noting that the concentration on the last 200 years was understandable but that this should not blind us to the reality of indigenous settlement for 50 thousand years before that time. Of particular interest to the Lao delegation were the structures for self-management in the form of ATSIC and the Land Councils. The concept of res nullius was explained as was the Mabo decision and the impact it has had on indigenous issues. The delegation asked about whether Australian Aborigines enjoyed equal rights and Mr Taylor explained that equal rights had not diminished the many areas of disadvantage suffered by indigenous people. Mr Taylor then showed a language map of indigenous Australia describing the 250 different language groups in the country and explaining how all indigenous people continued to associate with a language group and with the land from which that language group is inseparable in terms of both physical and spiritual sustenance. Some delegation members had visited the Sami Parliament in Norway and pointed to some comparisons.

A full day visit to Cooma, Jindabayne and Perisher allowed the delegation to inspect the Snowy scheme and look at a ski resort. The detailed briefing was provided by Dr Clive Perrett, a former Managing Director of the scheme. The Snowy scheme has the capacity to produce some 3,850 mw of electricity from its seven power stations and the Lao delegation took a close interest in the politics and economics of the scheme. A number of important issues were discussed. One was the borderless nature of electricity supply in Australia with a single national electricity market. There had once been limitations on the system caused by state borders but this had been found to be inefficient. A similar
result may one day apply to South East Asia. Another critical issue was the different politics associated with electricity and water. One had to find a balance between the various stakeholders even though some groups held conflicting objectives. The Lao delegation observed that fifty years ago when the Snowy Scheme was launched there were no environmental groups to deal with. Another important issue was sustainability. The investment in the Snowy was so big that thirty years after its completion, a debt remained to be paid. This was partly due to subsidising the cost of electricity to the state electrical authorities but the fact remained that large projects create large debts. Given the essentiality of sustainability, a lot of investment was put into maintenance and repairs. Finally, the delegation was struck by how few people there were to operate the scheme. Three or four people in the control room in Cooma operated all the water management and electricity production equipment in the scheme while monitoring 10,000 different points by computer. They controlled water flow around the various storage areas and electricity production as well as concluding sales of electricity in the national market.

On the final day of the Tour, the delegation was provided a briefing by Ms Narelle Hargreaves of the ACT Department of Education and Community Services. The delegation then visited Hughes Primary School, which is one of three schools in the ACT providing Intensive English Classes for newly arrived pupils. The school's welcoming committee comprised seven Lao-speaking pupils who gave the visitors a very hearty 'sabaidee'. The delegation visited several classes and the pupils seemed to enjoy the visit as much as the visitors.

The delegation then observed a visiting class from a Sydney school learning about democracy in Australia at the Australian Electoral Commission's Electoral Education Centre. This complemented the classes of school children visiting Parliament House and attending Question Time. The delegation noted that civics education in Australia was provided at the Primary level and was done very competently.

In the course of the visit the delegation also enjoyed a number of social functions organised by the Embassy of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

The aim of the Study Tour was to provide the delegation with the opportunity to reflect on issues of importance to Laos as well as to look at some Australian ways of doing things. There may not be many instances where the Australian method will be directly applicable to the Lao situation but by bringing Lao leaders to Australia, they will be in the best position to determine whether any of the new ideas are applicable to Laos and, if so, how this could be done. By looking at so many different aspects of Australian life including politics, economics, indigenous affairs, resource management, public service and education, the delegation is able to return to Laos and draw from a wide array of experiences.

Delegation
Mr Thongsing Thammavong, Chairman of the Central Committee of Organisation and Personnel, Chairman of the Leading Committee for Public Administration Reform and Chairman of the Leading Committee for Human
Resource Development (leader of the delegation)
Mr Khamsay Moungmixay, Vice-Governor of Oudomxay Province
Mr Onekeo Phommakone, Director of Department of Government Machinery, CCOP
Mr Langsy Siboungueuang, Director of Department of Public Administration and Deputy NPD of LAO/97/009

Program

Sunday 13 August
Arrive in Australia
To be met at Canberra Airport by Mr Roland Rich, Director, Centre for Democratic Institutions and H.E Soutsakhone, Lao Ambassador to Australia and accompanied to University House

Monday 14 August
9.30am–12noon “Economics and Globalisation: Implications for Laos”
Discussion lead by Professor Peter Warr, Australian National University and Mr Roland Rich, CDI. Also present Mr Jeff Roach, DFAT and Dr Sharon Bessell, CDI.
Stanner Room, University House, The Australian National University

12.15pm
Welcome Lunch: Boffins Restaurant, University House

2.15pm
Depart University House for AIATSIS

2.30–4.30pm
Meeting with Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)
MacIntosh Room, AIATSIS, Acton House, Marcus Clarke Street
AIATSIS is an independent Commonwealth Government statutory authority devoted to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies. It is Australia's premier institution for information about the cultures and lifestyles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
Discussion to be led by Mr Russ Taylor

Evening
Programme organised by Lao Embassy

Tuesday 15 August
9.30am–12noon “Laos’ Place in the World’
Discussion lead by Dr Mark Turner, University of Canberra and Mr Roland Rich, CDI. Also present Mr Jeff Roach, DFAT and Dr Sharon Bessell, CDI.
Stanner Room, University House, The Australian National University
12noon Lunch: Members and Guests Dining Room Parliament House: Hosted by the Hon. Dr Andrew Southcott MP

2.30–5.00pm Visit to the Public Service and Merit Protection Commission:
2.30pm Welcome: Ms Jenny Harrison, Team Leader, Values, Conduct and Diversity Team, PSMPC

2.35–3.30 pm Australian Public Service Values and Code of Conduct
Ms Jenny Harrison, Team Leader, Values, Conduct and Diversity Team, PSMPC

3.45–4.45pm Leadership
Ms Kerri Russ, People and Organisation Development Team, PSMPC

Wednesday 16 August
10am Depart University House for ACT Legislative Assembly

10.15–10.45am Meet with Mr Gary Humphries, MLA
Focus of Discussion: Role and Responsibilities of the Territory Government and Dealing with constituency issues and public grievances

10.45–11.15am Tour of ACT Legislative Assembly

11.30am–1.15pm Free time

1.20pm Depart for Parliament House

2pm Australian Federal Parliament
Attend Question Time: House of Representatives
Attend Question Time: Senate
Discussion of Question Time

4.00pm Meet with the Hon. Mr Alexander Downer MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs

Thursday 17 August
Full Day Tour of Snowy Mountain Authority Hydro Electricity Facilities:
Cooma and Jindabyne
Expert Guide: Dr Clive Perrett
**Friday 18 August**

9.00–9.45am Meeting with Ms Narelle Hargreaves, Director (Schools), Northern District and International Education, ACT Department of Education and Community Services
Terrace Room, University House, The Australian National University

10–11.15am Visit to ACT Primary School

12noon Visit to Australian Electoral Commission Electoral Education Centre
Observe the activities of the Electoral Education Centre in teaching school children about the processes and principles of Australian democracy.

2.00pm Programme Concludes