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The Clerk (foreground) and Deputy Clerk on duty at the Table in the House of Representatives Chamber.

*Photo: David Foote
AUSPIC/DPS.*

Clerk's review

The 2014–15 reporting period spans the second year of the Forty-fourth Parliament. The mid-point of the three-year parliamentary cycle is traditionally a time of consolidation and hard work, during which the business of the House and its committees takes priority in the absence of the additional pressures associated with an election period. While the overall level of activity in the department did not quite reach the peak experienced in the years of minority government during the Forty-third Parliament, 2014–15 was still a busy year.

In 2014–15, as in previous years, the department's Committee Office provided invaluable support to the work of House and joint committees, which included several high-profile and sensitive inquiries. The Table Office and Chamber Research Office played pivotal roles in managing the legislative and deliberative functions of the House of Representatives and the Federation Chamber. The Office of the Serjeant-at-Arms provided essential services to members and staff and, significantly during 2014–15, worked closely with colleagues inside and outside Parliament House on security matters. The International and Parliamentary Relations Office and the Parliamentary Skills Centre, newly created in this reporting year, managed the parliament's busy schedule of incoming and outgoing delegations and capacity-building activities.

While accustomed to working in the public eye, it is notable that, in 2014–15, the department supported several high-profile events that attracted more than the usual level of publicity. In July 2014, the department was proud to support the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives on the occasion of an address by the Prime Minister of Japan, His Excellency Mr Shinzo Abe. In November 2014, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, the Rt Hon David Cameron; the President of the People's Republic of China, His Excellency Mr Xi Jinping; and the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, Mr Narendra Modi, addressed the House. In June 2015, Parliament House hosted a number of events connected with the 800th anniversary of the signing of Magna Carta, many of which were widely reported in the media. These events were a great success and I commend the departmental staff involved for their highly professional support to the House.

The department also played a role in the review and subsequent upgrading of security arrangements at Parliament House, including the process by which the Australian Federal Police assumed lead responsibility for the physical security of the building. The Executive and staff of the department noted with great sadness the events of 22 October 2014 at the Canadian Parliament in Ottawa, and echo the statements of condolence and support made in the House the following day by the Speaker, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. Such events remind us of the vulnerability of our institutions to security threats and that we share this vulnerability with other parliaments throughout the world.

The department's work during the reporting period was guided by its 2013–16 corporate plan. The plan sets out four priority areas: capability, leadership, skills and knowledge-sharing, and relationships and collaboration.

Capability

The department aims to be flexible and responsive in supporting the work of the parliament and its committees. In 2014–15, the need to embrace changing technology was an important capability challenge for the department. Major new ICT business systems were introduced in a number of areas of the department, including:

- the Table Offices Production System, which assists in creating, managing and publishing chamber documents both electronically and in hard copy
- the Venue Management System, which provides an online booking function for committee rooms in Parliament House and for visiting school groups taking part in parliamentary education activities
- the Shared Committee Information Database, which enables online lodgment of submissions to committee inquiries and assists in managing and publishing inquiry information.

Such systems have brought efficiencies and productivity gains in the past, and the new systems will too. We are also endeavouring to respond to the call for much greater electronic delivery of our products and services and that, inevitably, changes the way we work.

It is important that the department develop and maintain the capacity to meet the changing needs and expectations of members and other stakeholders. In last year's annual report, I noted that significant resources had been devoted to introducing the large number of new members to the work of the House and its committees. This is to some extent a continuing task in the middle year of a parliamentary term. There also are increasing expectations on the part of the media and the general community for information about and involvement in the work of the House. We have to look at how we can meet these increasing expectations within restricted resources.

I foreshadowed in the 2013–14 annual report that the areas of the department responsible for supporting the parliament's international program were to be restructured. In July 2014, the International and Parliamentary Relations Office assumed responsibility for managing the parliament's incoming and outgoing delegation programs, membership of inter-parliamentary organisations, and the international interests and travel of members and senators. The Parliamentary Skills Centre assumed responsibility for delivering all parliamentary strengthening and capacity-building initiatives, and the Community Outreach Unit was integrated into the Parliamentary and Business Information Services Office. The early indications are that the restructure has been a success, and I thank the staff who have managed and been involved in the process for their resilience, flexibility and professionalism.

Leadership

During 2014–15, the department continued to invest in strengthening and developing its leadership capabilities. The department worked with an external provider to develop a program of intensive leadership training that involves a mix of offsite training activities, coaching and longer-term projects and reviews. A number of staff members have participated in the program to date. Feedback from the participants and their managers and staff has been positive, and the benefits of the program will continue to accrue to the department beyond this reporting year.

Skills and knowledge-sharing

Developing and maintaining a capable and experienced workforce was a key priority during 2014–15. The department's workforce comprises, in substantial part, long-serving and highly experienced officers with considerable expertise in supporting the work of the House and its committees. That workforce is a resource of immense value; however, a significant challenge for the department arises with the departure over time of its most senior and experienced staff. The department's strategy for meeting this challenge centres on targeted recruitment and a comprehensive training and development program. For longstanding officers and new staff alike, training activities focus on core parliamentary service skills as well as the specialist knowledge of parliamentary administration and procedure required to advise and assist the Speaker, members, ministers, members of the Opposition executive, and their staff.

Relationships and collaboration

In the highly dynamic parliamentary environment, it is essential that the department build and maintain effective working relationships with its stakeholders and take a collaborative approach to its work. In 2014–15, a particular focus was to promote collaboration with the three other parliamentary departments—the Department of the Senate, the Department of Parliamentary Services and the Parliamentary Budget Office.

Throughout the reporting year, officers of the department were actively involved in a range of cross-parliament forums and committees dealing with issues such as security, corporate matters, building works and maintenance, and ICT. The establishment of the Parliamentary Skills Centre has brought renewed focus and coordination to the parliament's capacity-building work, especially in the Asia–Pacific region. Members of the House and their staff, senators and all those who work in and visit Parliament House benefit from this joined-up approach to the work of the parliamentary service.

Outlook

The year ahead holds challenges and opportunities for the department as it continues its important work in supporting the House of Representatives, and the parliament as a whole, in carrying out their representative and legislative functions. Guided by the experience of previous parliaments, I expect the department's workload to be high in the remaining months of 2015 as the government pursues its legislative program, committee inquiries are progressed and reports tabled, and the department continues its routine support to members and its involvement in matters of high priority such as the physical security of Parliament House. From the beginning of 2016, thoughts will turn to the timing of a general election, which would introduce the additional challenges and complexities of transitioning from one parliament to another.

In the year ahead, the department will continue its focus on maintaining the quality of its workforce as its key resource. Leadership development programs focusing on staff at the Executive Band 1 and 2 levels will continue, and the department will continue to work hard to develop staff capabilities while capturing the skills and corporate knowledge of senior officers. The department's enterprise agreement will expire on 30 September 2015, which means that, early in the next reporting year, we will embark on the process of negotiating and settling a new agreement.

The commencement of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* provides an opportunity to refresh the department's corporate plan and its approach to performance management and reporting. I look forward to reporting on the outcome of these processes, which were already well underway by 30 June 2014, at the end of the next reporting year.

The department's financial position was sound at the end of 2014–15, and my expectation is that this will continue to be the case in the next reporting year. Agencies in the parliamentary service and the Australian public service are continually being challenged to work more efficiently and deliver the best value for money for government and the Australian community, and this department is no exception. However, I am confident that the department is well placed to continue providing the highest quality advice and services to members of the House and their staff.

Departmental overview

Purpose

The department's purpose, as set out in its corporate plan, is:

To support the House of Representatives, and the wider Parliament, in the role of a representative and legislative body by providing advice and services of a high standard.

Role and functions

The *Parliamentary Service Act 1999* provides the legal framework for a non-partisan parliamentary service to serve the Australian Parliament. The Department of the House of Representatives is established by and operates under the Act, together with three other parliamentary departments—the Department of the Senate, the Department of Parliamentary Services and the Parliamentary Budget Office. The Act provides for the management, leadership and responsibilities of parliamentary service employees and the functions of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, Parliamentary Librarian, Parliamentary Service Commissioner and Parliamentary Service Merit Protection Commissioner. The other parliamentary departments report separately to the parliament.

During 2014–15, the department continued in its role as a service department for the parliament, supporting the work of the House of Representatives, including its members in their parliamentary work, its committees and some joint committees comprising members of both the House and the Senate. The department also maintained its focus on providing assistance to the House and the parliament in their relationships within Australia and internationally.

Organisational structure

The department is managed by its Executive, comprising the Clerk, Deputy Clerk, Clerk Assistant (Table), Clerk Assistant (Committees) and Serjeant-at-Arms. Their work is carried out through eight offices.

Several changes were made to the department's organisational structure during the year. The International and Community Relations Office was disbanded and the International and Parliamentary Relations Office was established in July 2014. The new office is responsible for managing the parliament's incoming and outgoing delegation programs, membership of inter-parliamentary organisations, and the international interests and travel of members and senators. The Parliamentary Skills Centre assumed responsibility for parliamentary strengthening and capacity-building initiatives. In June 2015, the Knowledge Management and Publishing Office was renamed the Parliamentary and Business Information Services Office.

Figure 1 shows the department's organisational structure at 30 June 2015.

Outcome and program structure

The department's outcome and program structure for the reporting year is set out in its 2014–15 Portfolio Budget Statements.

The department has one outcome:

Advisory and administrative services support the House of Representatives to fulfil its representative and legislative role.

The department has two programs:

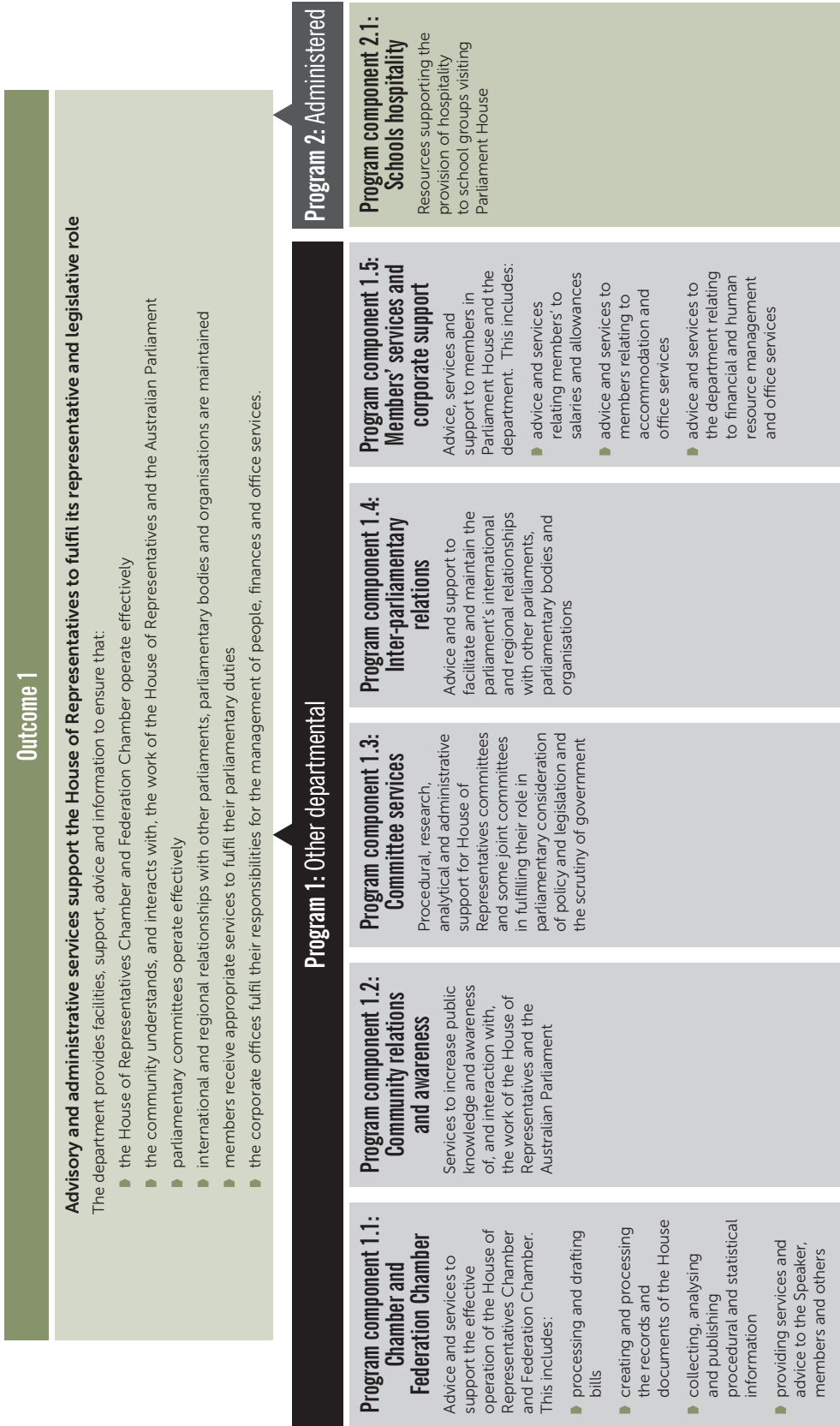
- Program 1: Other departmental, which has five components
- Program 2: Administered, which supports one activity.

Figure 2 shows the department's outcome and program structure and the activities under each program component.

Figure 1 Organisational structure at 30 June 2015



Figure 2 Outcome and program structure at 30 June 2015



Financial performance

The department ended the 2014–15 financial year reporting a deficit attributable to the Australian Government of \$0.530 million. This result reflects the pattern of expenditure that normally occurs during the middle period of the parliamentary cycle. All areas of the department were fully staffed throughout the reporting period.

Through the 2015–16 federal budget, the department was able to secure supplementary funding to support the work of committees during 2014–15.

While this additional funding alleviated the immediate need to find further efficiencies and savings, wages and salaries expense trends have remained static. The reduction in the department's own-source income is attributable to the conclusion of some funding agreements under the Pacific Parliamentary Partnerships program.

The department's statement of financial position continues to remain healthy with adequate cash reserves available to fund planned asset replacement. Phase one of the furniture replacement project is nearing completion. This project will come in under budget and has utilised a combination of departmental capital budget funding and cash reserves.

The outlook for the coming financial years remains very tight and sees a decline of appropriation in real terms. Expenditure restraint will be required to enable us to deliver effective services which can be reasonably expected of us and remain within budget. We will continue to innovate and keep pace with technological change to sustain the quality of our service delivery.

Figure 3 Financial performance, 2010–11 to 2014–15

