



Parliamentary
Budget Office

Insights into the Parliamentary Budget Office

Senate Occasional Lecture Series
November 2021

Stein Helgeby

www.pbo.gov.au

Today I am going to talk a bit about the background to the PBO, what we do, what stakeholders think of us, and where we might go in the future.



It is now a little over nine years since the Parliamentary Budget Office was established.

Next year, our tenth anniversary, it would be fitting to try to organise some sort of conference to mark the occasion. There are after all many ways to contribute to the overall goal of improving transparency and accountability particularly in fiscal matters.



What the PBO does

Parliamentary Budget Office | 3

I am one of many people who first got to understand the PBO and what it does when I came to work in it.

Around two thirds of all the work of the PBO is conducted on a confidential basis and so it is quite 'invisible'. In fact it's most likely to see the light of day when a requestor chooses to release a costing that we've done for them on a confidential basis.

That happens intermittently but is by no means common and the costings we publicly release don't always convey the breadth and depth of the costings we do for Parliamentarians.

Purpose of the PBO



To provide a **more level playing field for all parliamentarians**; particularly non-government parties and independent parliamentarians



To improve the **accuracy of election commitment costings**



To **improve transparency**, particularly around budget information and budget-related issues

The PBO exists to support the democratic process, particularly in relation to the often technical and dense world of government financial analysis.

All financial analysis is hard, but the size and complexity of government also has a significant effect on its financial information. These issues are magnified for stakeholders who do not themselves have significant time or resources to invest in understanding them.

We try to bridge those gaps. We don't and can't eliminate them, because they arise out of the structure of government itself. But we do try to enable the debate to shift from discussions about what are the 'right numbers' towards policy analysis and discussion.

Functions of the PBO



Policy costings & budget analysis

Prepare high quality policy costings and budget analyses at the request of parliamentarians in a timely manner.

Develop and maintain our costing and projection models and databases.



Research

Publish research papers that promote a better public understanding of the budget and fiscal policy settings, with a particular focus on the sustainability of the budget over the medium term.



Election commitments report

Prepare and publish a report analysing the budget impact of the election commitments of parliamentary parties after the next general election.

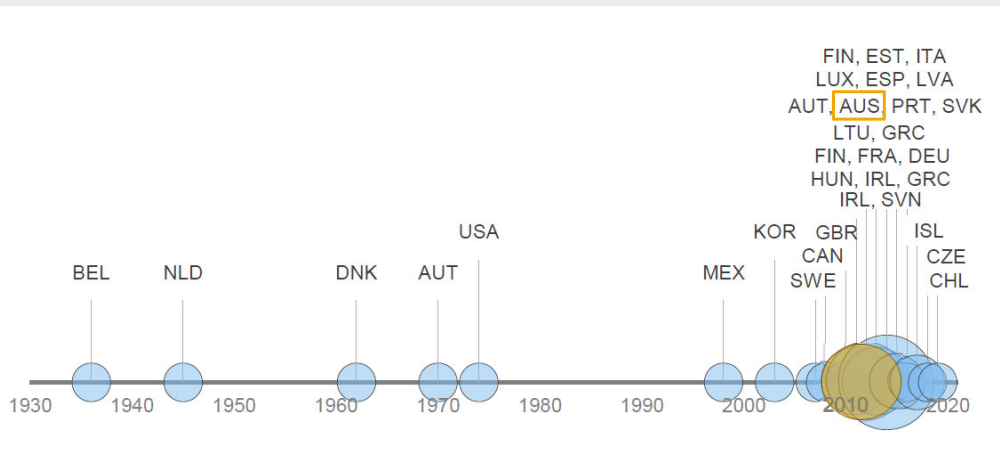
The three key functions we undertake are set out in this slide – we undertake costings and budget analysis, publish research or information material under our own power and have a formal role in presenting an authoritative record of the costed policies for each major party (and self-nominated independents) after each election.

This last product is a document of record that comes after election day, and is not an independent analysis released during the campaign.

These functions seem fairly self-explanatory now, but there has always been a debate about what the PBO should do.

I am going to talk a bit more about the history of those debates and the issues that are at stake a bit later in this talk.

International comparisons



Source: OECD Independent Fiscal Institutions database

Parliamentary Budget Office | 6

The PBO is one of a number of what the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the OECD, calls independent fiscal institutions or IFIs.

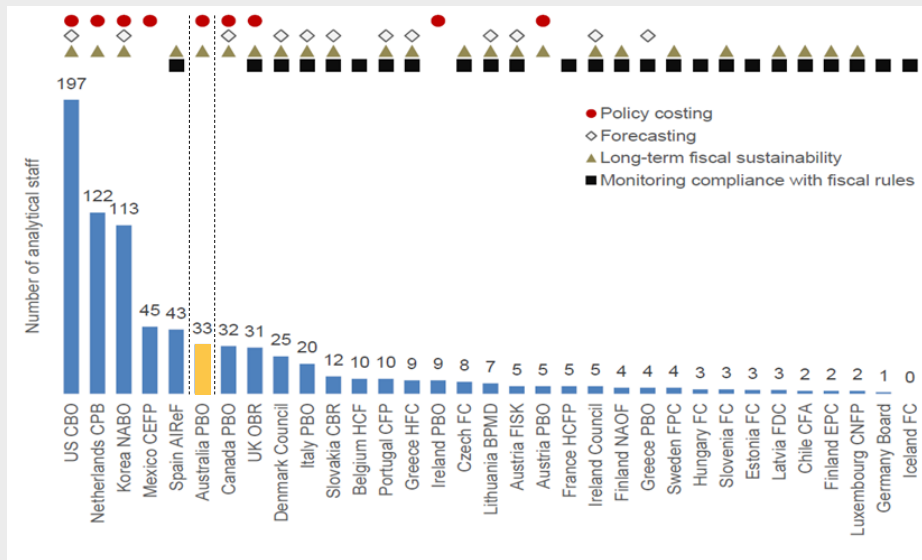
The first of these institutions, in Belgium, dates from 1936 and the second was created in the Netherlands shortly after the war and has a very strong reputation.

While some countries have had IFIs for many decades, they have really boomed recently, as you can see at the right of the slide.

This growth has been driven by:

- the European Union establishing a requirement, following the Global Financial Crisis, that member states establish such independent bodies; and
- the OECD and the International Monetary Fund increasingly advocating the establishment of independent authorities as part of good-practice fiscal frameworks.

International comparisons (cont.)



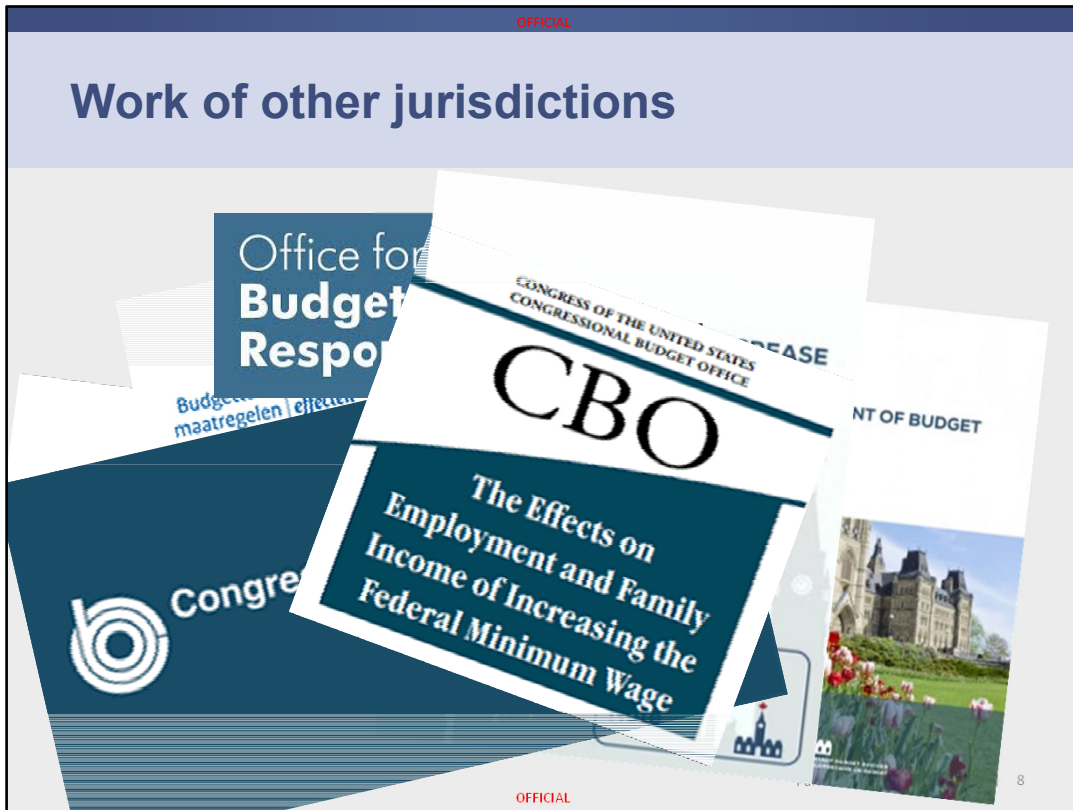
Source: OECD Independent Fiscal Institutions database, September 2021

This graph shows how the OECD characterises independent fiscal institutions, and their relative size.

The biggest and best known of these institutions is the Congressional Budget Office or CBO established in the 1970s in the US. It has significantly greater resources and a much broader remit than we do. For example, the CBO costs each piece of legislation that passes through Congress.

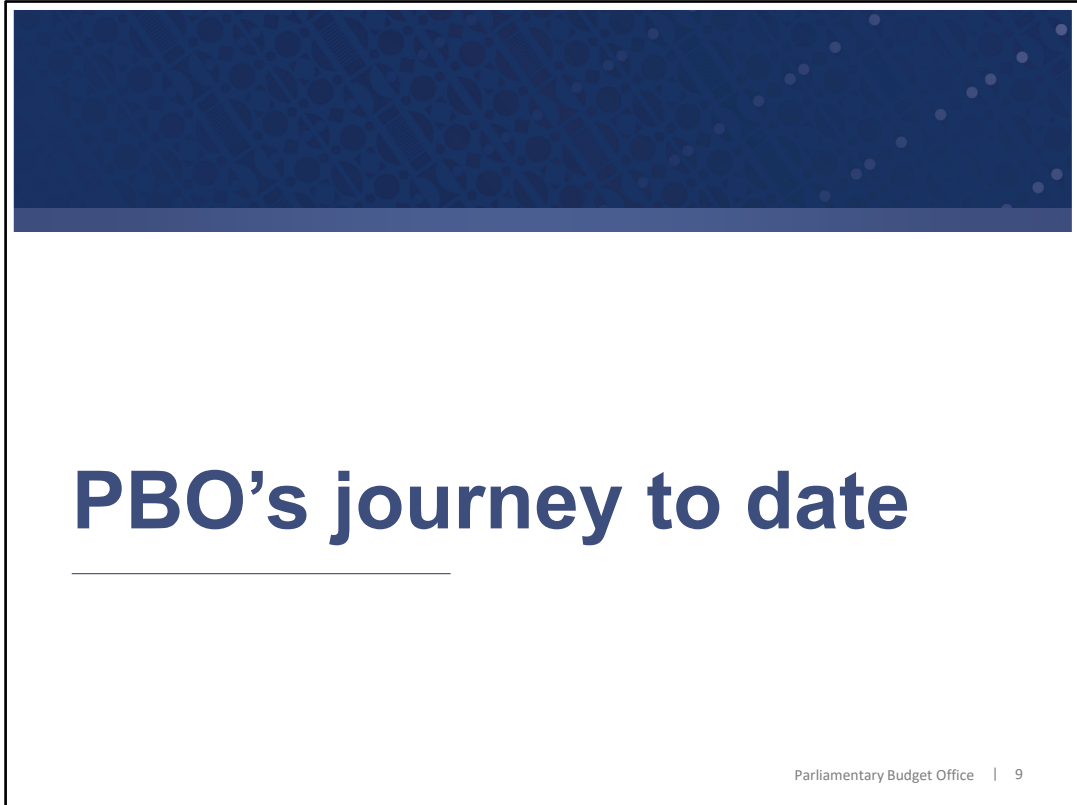
Australia is the orange bar in the graph.

The graph makes clear that there are things that similar institutions do that we do not – make or assess forecasts, and monitor compliance with fiscal rules.

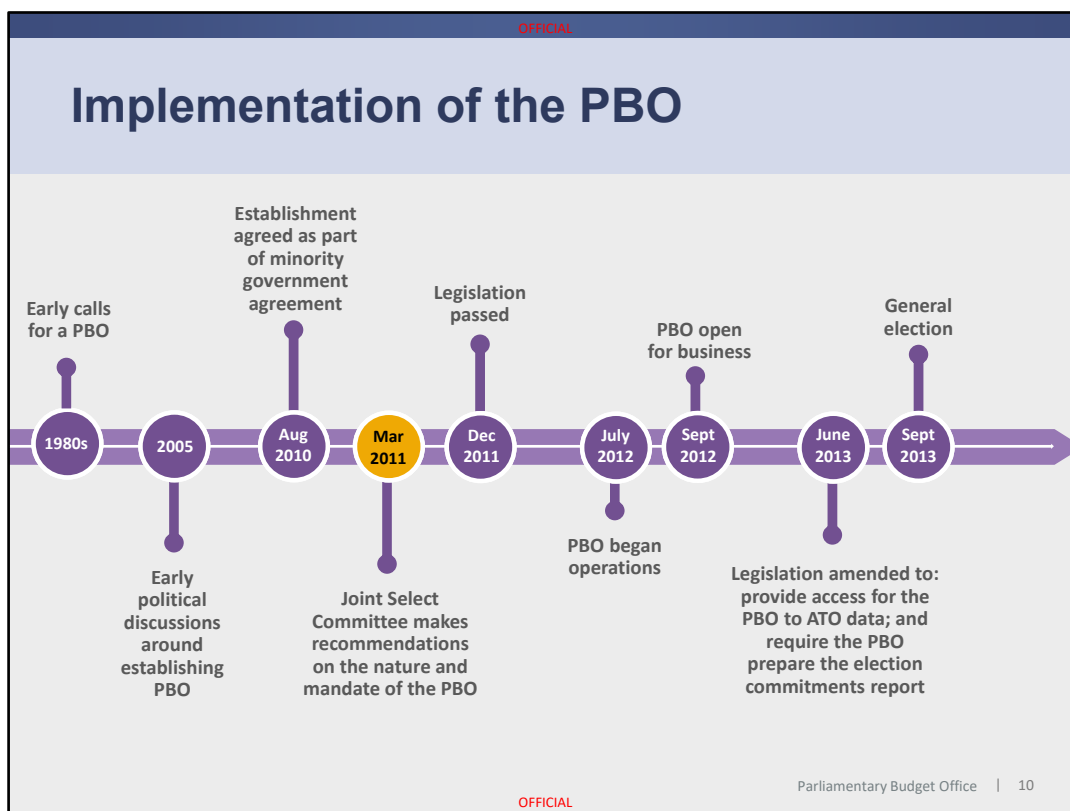


This gives a flavour of what other jurisdictions produce.

For example, The Netherlands produces an election report in advance of their election and the UK produces the official economic and fiscal forecasts which must be used by the Treasury. Canada has a strong focus on costings and the CBO has a wide-ranging publication series.



How did we get here?



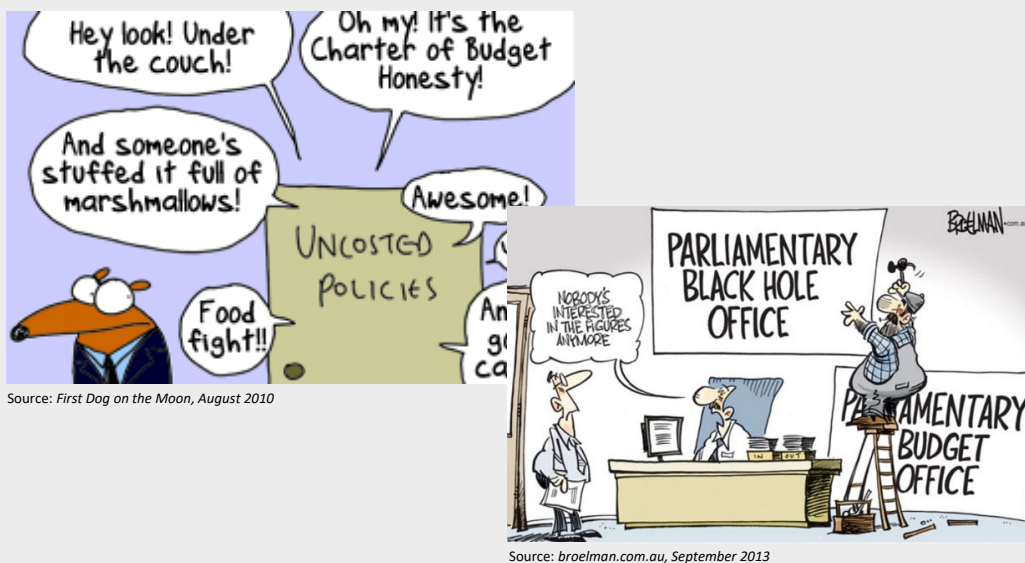
The 2011 joint Select Committee report which ultimately led to the creation of the PBO found that there had been debates about the need for such a fiscal institution dating back to the 1980s.

Those debates became more prominent in the 2000s and particularly at the end of that decade.

That timing is important. It represents the back-end of an era where debate about numbers and costings had become highly political, with frequent commentary about 'black holes' and un-costed policies.

Issues of costings and fiscal analysis were issues where the advantages of incumbency were strongly evident.

Charter of budget honesty and the PBO



These early cartoons give a sense of the debates around a decade ago.

In the late 1990s the *Charter of Budget Honesty* set out a framework for the conduct of fiscal policy.

One of its stated goals was to facilitate public scrutiny of fiscal policy and performance. This was to be achieved by adherence to principles of sound fiscal management; publicly stating a fiscal strategy; a variety of regular reports; a new intergenerational report; a pre-election fiscal and economic outlook document released by the secretaries of Treasury and Finance; and, by a provision to allow for publicly announced policies to be costed by Treasury and Finance, and then made public.

Of all of these provisions, the one about costings has been the least used. The 2011 Joint Select Committee report found that the election costings provisions had significant shortcomings in enabling the electorate to be better informed about the financial implications of election commitments.

The 2011 Select Committee proposed a number of new measures to address the shortcomings it perceived, including by amending the Charter to enable minor parties to access the existing election costings process and by providing an alternative source of costings through the PBO.

A further key issue in the Select Committee report was the absence of a *'statutory process to enable the proposals of non-government parliamentarians to be costed by those departments outside the election period.'*

Charter of budget honesty and the PBO (cont.)



In terms of the election period itself, there were concerns about the public nature of the process making it difficult for non-government parties to use without them running the risk that lodging a costing request could itself involve political challenges.

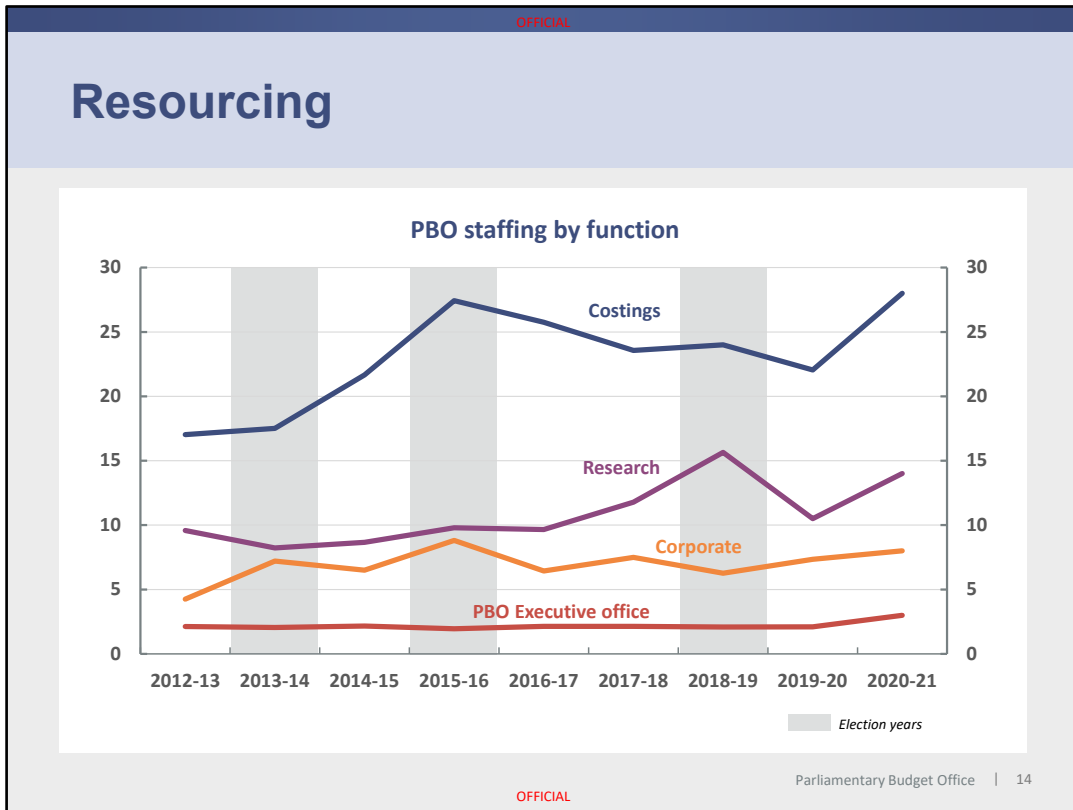
Similarly, the timing of the Pre-Election Fiscal and Economic Outlook, coming ten days after the issuing of the writs, made for challenges simply in terms of getting costings completed in an election context.

The Select Committee noted that concerns had also been raised in the review of Operation Sunlight that the Charter arrangements remained *'heavily biased in favour of the government of the day'*.

Early days of the PBO



The PBO has never been big, but it has managed to attract some very good people, and while many of those have come from the public service, and returned to it, others have come from outside the public sector altogether.



The relationship between staffing and functions has remained relatively similar since the PBO was first established.

Because we are an independent entity we have all the obligations that arise for any Commonwealth body, and so we maintain a corporate function, although we pay for some transactional services that we consume from others.

For example, the Senate provides our payroll services, and the Department of Parliamentary Services delivers IT support to us.

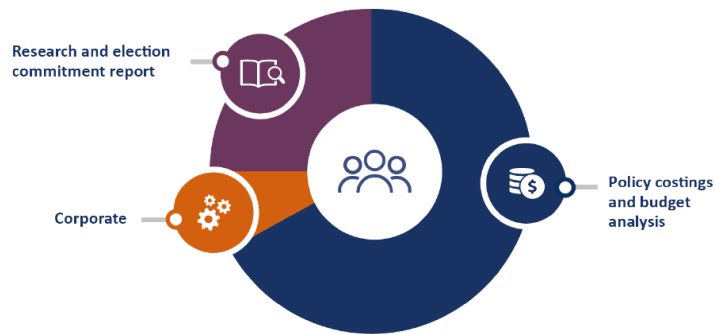
Resourcing (cont.)

Budget

- ~\$8.5 million per annum
- Additional \$0.5 million every third year (for elections)

Staffing

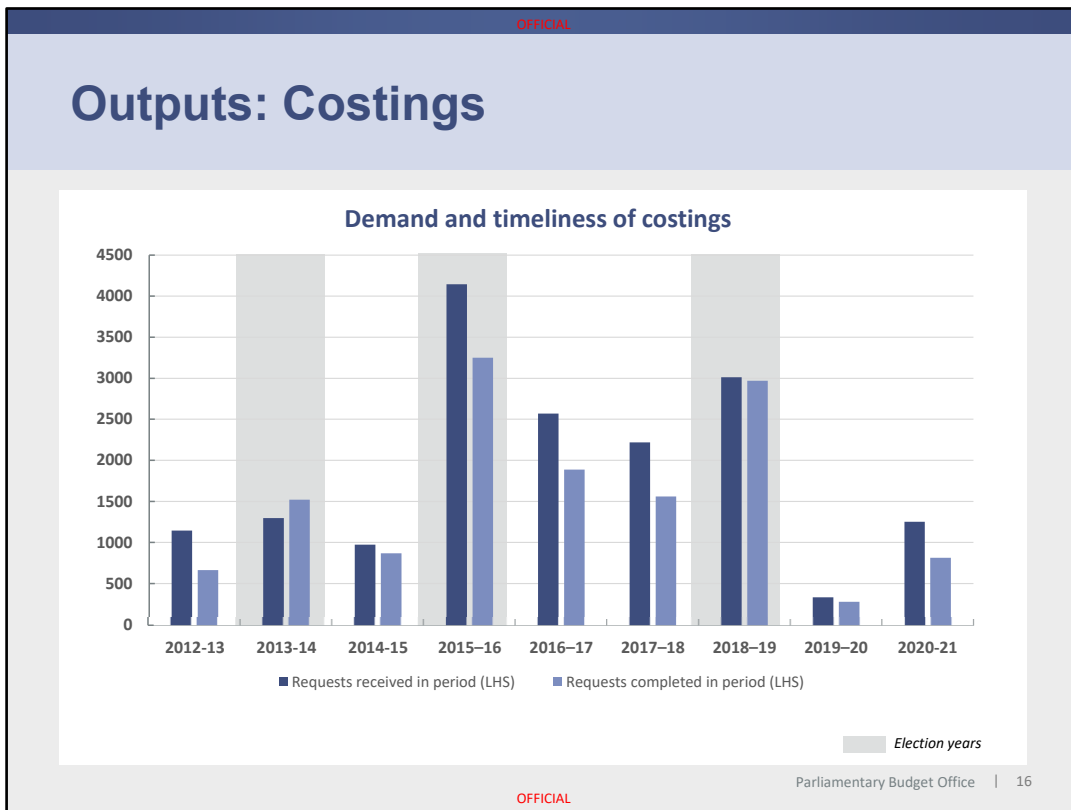
- Funded for approximately 44 full time staff
- Expanded to approximately 56 staff for the 2019 general election



Here is another view of resourcing, bringing in the financials.

As you can see, our resourcing adjusts according to where we are in the electoral cycle – to recognise that elections bring additional demand for services.

Interestingly, when the PBO was designed, this surge was intended to be provided by temporary consultants. This was the case in the 2013 General Election. Now, we use secondments from APS and Parliamentary departments to provide this surge capacity.



You can see that there is a peak in requests for costings around each election period.

This drops off, sometimes quite significantly, after the election is over, before starting to climb again.

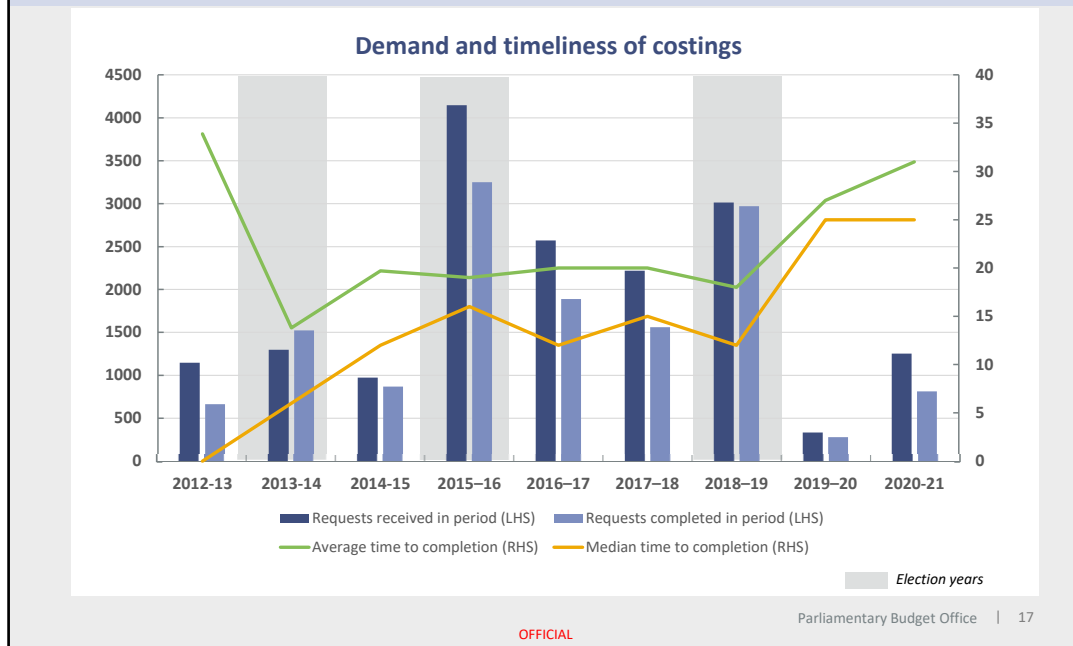
These numbers do not, however, reflect the nature of the requests.

Some are straightforward and relatively easy to cost. Others are very complex and require us to work through the intricacies of the proposed policy in a lot more detail.

In those more complex cases, there is often also a need to build new models and acquire data to which we do not already have access.

We get our data primarily from government departments and agencies, who may themselves face difficulties in extracting it from their own administrative systems.

Outputs: Costings

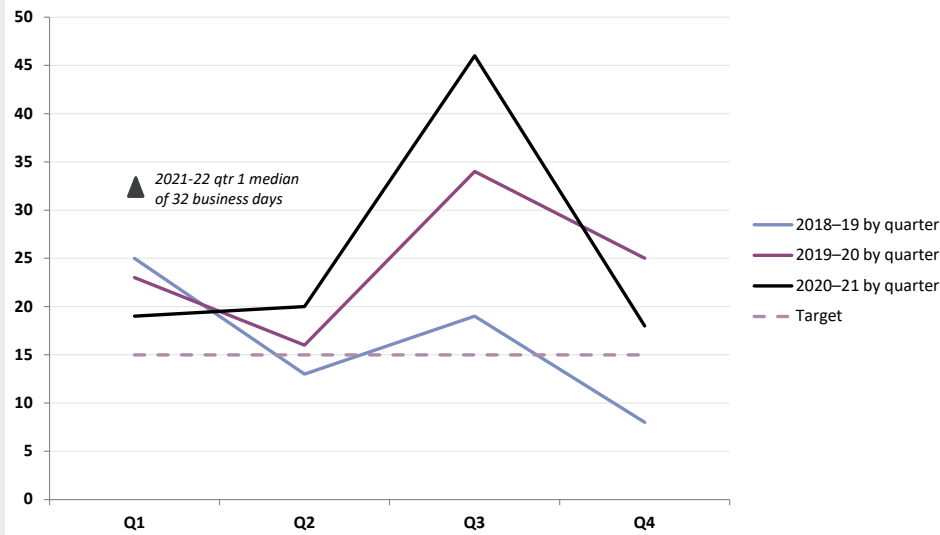


One result of this is that time taken to complete a costing can vary quite considerably. In fact, since the 2019 election, the volume of costings has reduced, the complexity has gone up and timeliness has reduced. This has implications for our stakeholders.

There are often questions raised about whether the PBO needs a power to compel the production of information. To date, we have relied on agreements with the government and with agency heads to give us the access we need, although some of our stakeholders might say that their experience with particular requests shows the limitations of that reliance. It can be a very slow process.

All our clients value timely responses. Our ability to respond is driven by the information to which we have access, the need to create new models to use new data and the sheer complexity of the request. We are highly dependent on other agencies to meet the needs of our requestors. A power to compel would not lead to the production of data that does not already exist in some form.

Outputs: Costings (cont.)



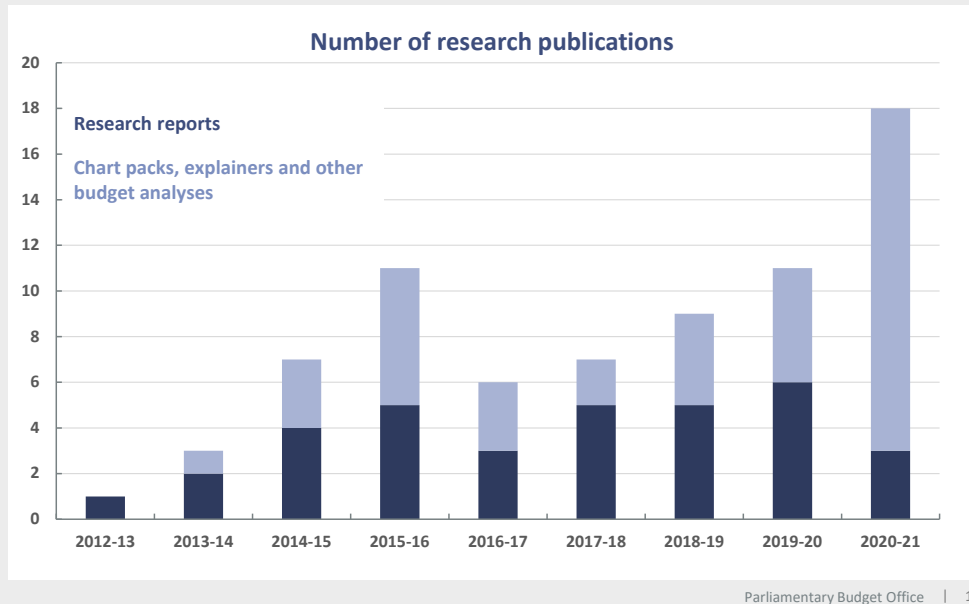
This is the timeliness data for the past 4 years, by quarter, against the targets we would like to achieve.

As you can see, the third quarters in both 2019-20 and 2020-21 were significantly different to the other quarters. That affects our stakeholders.

The timing of recruitment and training is part of that, so are seasonal leave and the complexity of requests.

In each year, though, the median time to complete costings fell again in the fourth quarter, sometimes quite considerably, as new staff became more skilled, models more refined and as the backlog of complex new requests was replaced by a higher level of requests for updates.

Outputs: Self-initiated work



The one side of the work of the PBO that I was familiar with is the public facing material we produce - the reports, charts and other publications that come out from time to time usually signalled by an email in advance.

As you can see, the overall volume of publications has increased over time as the PBO has become more established.

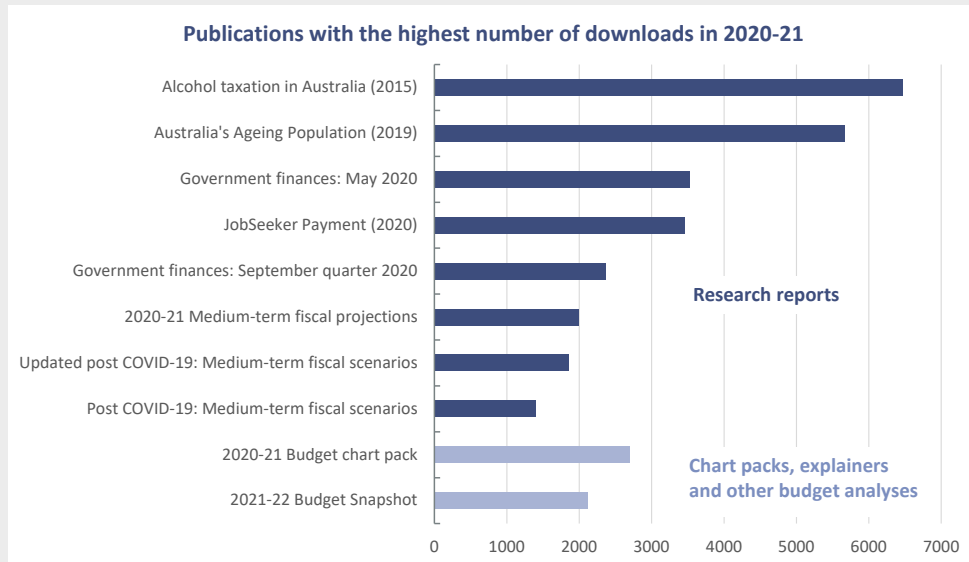
But there has also been a shift in the nature of the publications that have been produced.

Particularly last year, the balance shifted from large research reports towards a wider range of shorter pieces, whether they be chart-packs or other short documents that seek to focus on a specific theme.

Recently we started a series of short 'explainers' in order to hone in on particular themes or topics in a more accessible format. The first of these was published in September and is about the concept of 'bracket creep' in the tax system, and how it works.

Unlike the longer reports, the explainers are intended to have a longer shelf-life and we will gradually add to the list. The next one is likely to be about the budget item called the 'contingency reserve'.

Outputs: Self-initiated work (cont.)

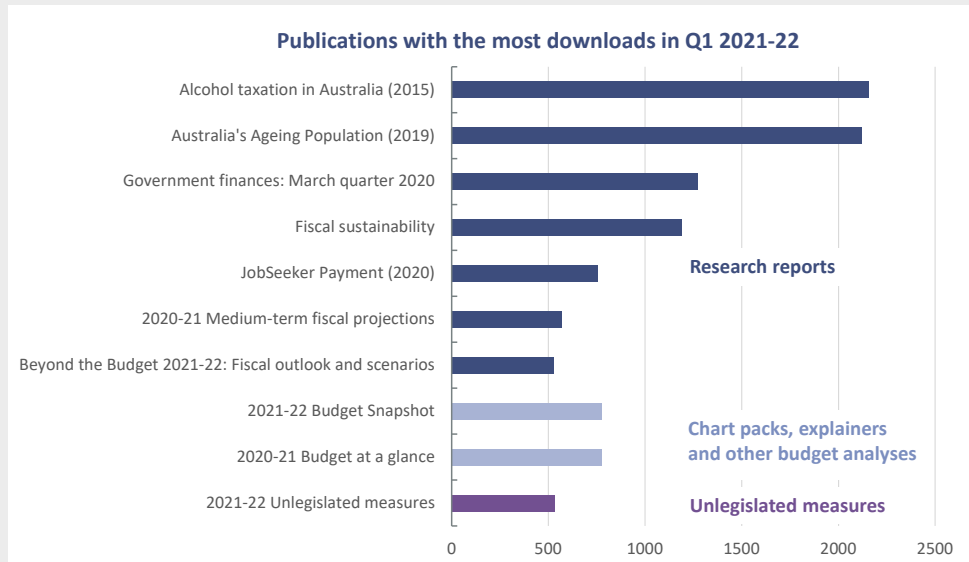


As an indicator of how our work is perceived, it is positive that downloads are fairly well distributed across a range of topical publications.

Some are quite long-lasting. Our outright best-seller is from 2015 and is about alcohol taxation.

We often wonder why it is such a popular publication – admittedly, the document is a good presentation of a complex topic, but I don't think that anyone quite expected it to last as long as it has. Perhaps it has turned up on a reading list in a school or tertiary institution?

Outputs: Self-initiated work (cont.)



There was and is a continuing strong interest in publications that put financial information into a context, picking up longer time-series and providing analysis over a longer time frame. The COVID-19 crisis and the response to it have significantly increased debt, and with it interest in the longer-term implications of debt.

So we have been exploring issues such as the sustainability of debt and how the current levels of debt compare with those levels Australia has seen, and been able to manage, back to Federation.



Plans for the future

Parliamentary Budget Office | 22

Where to next?

Overall performance on key attributes




92%

SATISFACTION AND AWARENESS RATE OF THE PBO



AWARENESS AND USE OF THE PBO

Awareness and use of the specific services are more mixed and *there is potential to grow use*. For example:

	Used this parliament	Unaware but interested
 Policy costings & budget analysis	76%	7% ↑
 Post-election reports (e.g. election commitments report)	49%	21% ↑
 Online tools	38%	23% ↑

SATISFACTION WITH THE PBO

 Policy costings & budget analysis	90% satisfied
 Direct contact	96% satisfied
 Publications (e.g. research reports)	86% to 98% useful

Once in each term of the Parliament, the PBO undertakes a survey of stakeholders to assess their views of our performance and to identify areas for improvement.

Two earlier surveys were conducted, in 2015 and 2018, with 63 and 34 participants respectively.

The most recent survey was conducted earlier this year, and there were 85 respondents, including 38 from the Parliament, committees, media, economists and the public service. Twenty participants took part in in-depth interviews. We therefore have a rich source of data available and have made the summary publicly available on our website.

I won't go through the full results, but one thing that is clear is that parliamentary stakeholders have different experiences of working with the PBO. A significant number do not realise that they can ask us for information. Others are very specific about how they want to use us – typically, the people who fit into that category have significant other support arrangements around them. Then there is another group who don't have that support, and are often under very significant time pressures.

Although there are some stakeholders who have not had their expectations met by the PBO, whether for reasons of timing, or because we simply weren't able to meet the request, as this slide shows, the general assessment is positive.

Stakeholder engagement and outreach



Feedback

"Most parliamentarians don't know what they [PBO] do. It would be good for them to get out a bit more."

"Hold briefings especially for crossbenchers or backbenchers. What does the PBO do? What can the PBO do for me?"

"Be prepared to provide off the cuff analysis, be available for chats and advice"

"PBO orientation/workshop for all new staff including high level discussion about what assistance can be provided."

"Provide in person briefings with journalists"



Some ideas to enhance our engagement

Develop an outreach program which might cover:

- orientation sessions and welcome packs for new Senators and Members of Parliament, and their staff
- similar service for Committees and their Secretariats
- Regular program of presentations
- informal sessions with key economic journalists, media, committees/staff and people with limited expertise in economics and policy).

But there is always plenty of room to improve and I want to talk a bit about those and how we think we might respond.

The first issue is about how often and how we engage with our stakeholders.

Perhaps it is not surprising that a number of parliamentary stakeholders do not know much about us. One reason is that there is considerable turnover amongst Parliamentarians and their staff, so there are always new people who are still discovering the services available to them. Another reason is that individuals may be aware of us, but not of what they can ask us to provide to them.

There is, however, an important group of people who know who we are and what we do, but who find that working formally through a costing request process takes up a lot of time, particularly when they have a general question to understand an issue quickly and at a fairly high level, and a need to understand those things quickly.

The feedback says we are not meeting those needs – the need to just talk something through. But it is important to be able to meet those needs better, to support the functioning of the Parliament.

So, in the coming months we will start to build out a broader approach to engagement, particularly to reflect the unmet needs, and the needs of those who don't have other strong support arrangements in place when they have to address complex issues of public finance.

Website improvement



Feedback

"Improve the website to make it easier to locate documents."

"PBO's use of categories for their publications is confusing."

"Make more mobile friendly. Interactive charts."

"an improved website. And info being available in different ways for some publications...Like how the OECD and the IMF do it."



Ideas

- Modernise our website with a user-focused approach
- Enhance the sophistication of our digital offerings and online tools
- Showcase interactive reports and dashboards
- Develop a portal for requests from Parliamentarians

Another area we could do better relates to how we present our material digitally, through our website.

We received some pretty clear feedback about our current web offering – it is too hard to find material and it is too static.

We have already started scoping out what our web strategy might look like going forward.

It is clear it needs to allow greater search capability and more interactive features. In other words, it needs to allow for significant levels of self-help.

Those comments hold both for our publicly released information, but also for the ability of parliamentary requestors to stay up to date on the status of their requests.

So, in the coming year we will look to place our digital offering on a more contemporary basis. That will include, for example, making more self-help tools electronically available, as graphs, data or models.

Feedback about how our role might evolve...

Feedback from stakeholders highlights their views on how they think the PBO's role might evolve. Some of these ideas would require legislative change, which would be a matter for Parliament...

"because they use Treasury's assumptions I sometimes wonder if it is more an accounting exercise than something completely independent. Being able to forecast would also be good to show independence and get another voice into the public debate."

"Be bolder and more engaged in the public debate including by considering different assumptions."

"Would like to see remit expanded to include forecasting and more research similar to the US Congress Budget Office."

"it would be good to see them have the ability to use their own assumptions (and not just Treasury's) and also to do their own forecasting. A little more independence."

Even though we have existed for 9 years now, there are still active debates about where to draw the line in terms of what the PBO should and should not do.

One common theme in the feedback is that the PBO should be more like other independent fiscal institutions – the Congressional Budget Office, in particular.

The government's economic forecasts

Table 2.1: Domestic economy — detailed forecasts^(a)

	Outcomes ^(b)		Forecasts	
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Real gross domestic product	-0.2	1 1/4	4 1/4	2 1/2
Household consumption	-3.0	1 1/4	5 1/2	4
Dwelling investment	-8.1	2 1/2	0	-1 1/2
Total business investment ^(c)	-2.0	-5	1 1/2	10
<i>By industry</i>				
Mining investment	6.8	1/2	3	3 1/2
Non-mining investment	-4.5	-6 1/2	1 1/2	12 1/2
Private final demand ^(c)	-3.2	3/4	4 1/2	4 1/2
Public final demand ^(c)	5.5	5 3/4	5	1 3/4
Change in inventories ^(c)	-0.3	1/4	0	0
Gross national expenditure	-1.4	2 1/2	4 3/4	3 3/4
Exports of goods and services	-1.8	-8	4	3
Imports of goods and services	-7.4	-4	6 1/2	9 1/2
Net exports ^(c)	1.2	-1	-1/4	-1 1/4
Nominal gross domestic product	1.7	3 3/4	3 1/2	2
Prices and wages				
Consumer price index ^(e)	-0.3	3 1/2	1 3/4	2 1/4
Wage price index ^(e)	1.8	1 1/4	1 1/2	2 1/4
GDP deflator	1.9	2 1/2	-1/2	-1/2
Labour market				
Participation rate (per cent) ^(d)	63.4	66 1/4	66 1/4	66
Employment ^(f)	-4.2	6 1/2	1	1
Unemployment rate (per cent) ^(g)	6.9	5 1/2	5	4 3/4
Balance of payments				
Terms of trade ^(h)	0.9	10	-8	-10 1/2
Current account balance (per cent of GDP)	1.8	3 3/4	1 1/4	-2 1/4

Source: The 2020-21 Budget

Parliamentary Budget Office | 27

In general, the issue is whether the PBO should, like almost all other Independent fiscal institutions, be more active in relation to economic or fiscal forecasts, either making them or assessing them. Australia is the only such national institution that is required to use official forecasts.

I imagine, though, that the economic forecasting theme is not an issue about a lack of publicly available forecasts and the PBO potentially needing to fill a gap.

As well as government, there are a number of private sector forecasters, although there are probably more that are interested in the relatively near-term than in the longer-term, and the private sector may not produce the forecasts of nominal GDP and its components which are needed for fiscal analysis.

Even the Budget itself did not show forecasts for nominal GDP until 2008-09, so there is value in considering the overall transparency of economic forecasting. More transparent economic forecasts would also reduce our need to ask for additional information, and therefore speed up our service to Parliamentarians.

I also assume that, in meeting costing requests, our stakeholders will want us to continue producing estimates that are comparable to those which are produced by government. In that case, we need to continue to use government assumptions, so that we can continue to show the effect on the current baseline of a proposed change in policy.

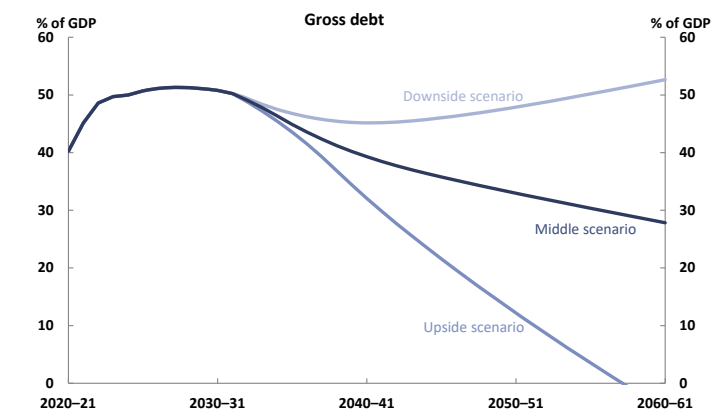
So, in my view this is really an issue that relates to our analytical work. That is, would the PBO, left to its own devices, come up with the same or similar forecasts to government? If not, what does that imply for the official forecasts themselves?

My perception is that this discussion, in Australia as well as overseas, has often been motivated by a sense of doubt about how various official forecasts have been put together, and therefore how confident external users can be in them.

The main thing I want to say about that is, if that is the key argument, addressing it is about ensuring openness, transparency and scrutiny.

This is a broader theme than just the role of the PBO, although it is interesting to note that, of the 34 national level independent fiscal institutions in the OECD's database, 3 (Belgium, The Netherlands and the UK) produce the official forecasts themselves, 30 assess official forecasts up front, while 16 publish an ex post report to improve forecasting practice. Only Australia has no mandate in relation to official forecasts.

Fiscal sustainability scenarios



Source: *Beyond the Budget 2021-22*

Parliamentary Budget Office | 28

For our longer-term work, however, looking at issues such as fiscal sustainability in an environment of high debt levels, where we are looking out 10, 20, 40 years or more, very slight variations in key assumptions can make a significant difference over time, through compounding.

In those cases it is very important to understand just how sensitive the numbers would be to, say, a sustained period of low productivity.

Our current approach to such cases is to run scenarios where the key economic variables differ over sufficiently long periods of time. This helps to scope out the range of possible outcomes, but it does not itself tell you which scenarios are more likely than the others.

For that you need a relatively sophisticated economic model that picks up interactions.

The constraint on our ability to undertake economic modelling has limited our work in that respect, although this is not simply an issue of mandate, it is also a practical issue about skills and investment.

What about policy?



Terry Moran: ‘we need a Parliamentary Policy Office’ to evaluate merit

By [Andrew Trounson](#)

Tuesday May 24, 2016

*“The PBO should be able to produce its own forecasts. As well as **evaluate the policy decisions** of government on the basis of their impact to the budget.*

*“I would like to see their role much broader and for them to have **more courage**. Sometimes I think I can feel them holding back....*

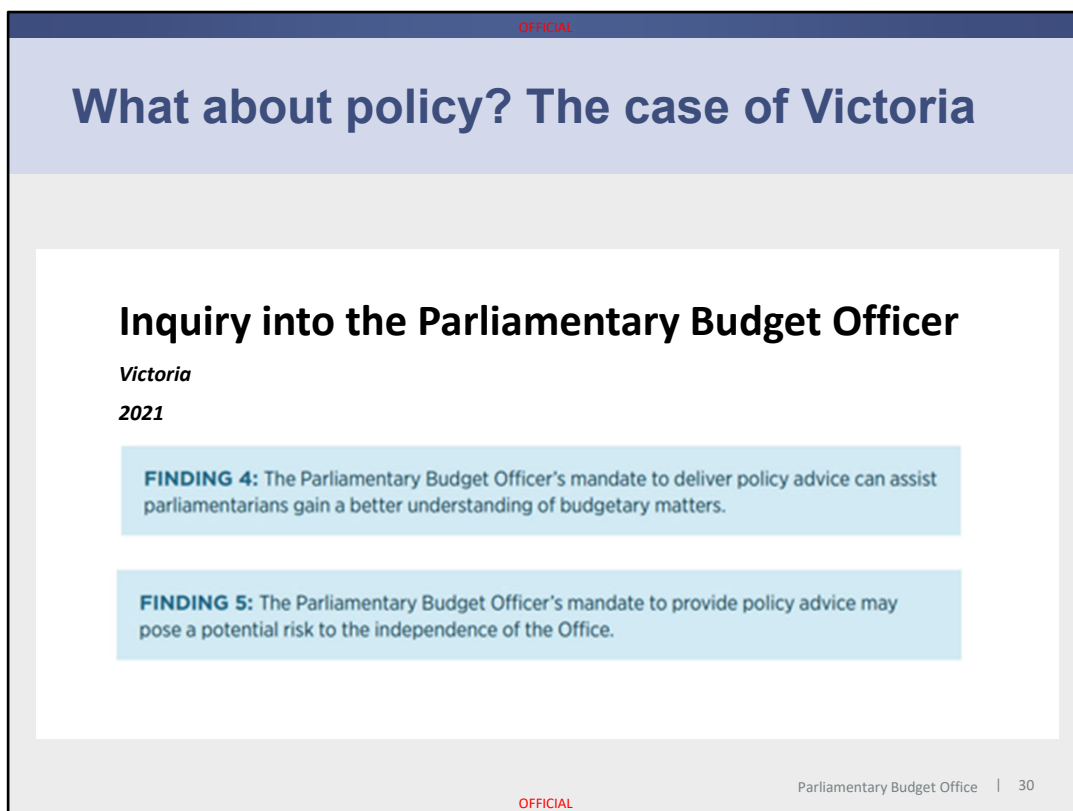
*“I would like to go to them with a problem — for example, we have low bulk-billing rates, what would be a solution, what are the levers, what would they cost and how do we pull them. **PBO is so concerned with not providing policy advice.**”*

-2021 Stakeholder survey

From time to time, another suggestion is made – that the PBO should be more active in relation to policy. Or, alternatively, that something like the PBO should be set up specifically to undertake policy analysis.

The key argument is the same as that which led to the creation of the PBO – that there would be value in an independent institution able to provide policy related information and analysis to assist the Parliament to discharge its role more effectively.

Such an institution would, for example, bring together research and relevant experience from other jurisdictions. There is obviously room to discuss whether this needs to be a separate function or not, or how it might sit with the existing capabilities and roles of the Parliamentary Library and the PBO.



There is in fact an example of a PBO that does this sort of work – the Victorian PBO – and the Victorian Parliament recently undertook an inquiry that specifically examined this function. The interesting thing about that report is how equivocal the findings were, both valuing the policy advice function and wary of it too.

There are some important differences between ourselves and the Victorian PBO. For example, the Victorian PBO is able to produce pre-election reports at the request of parliamentary leaders, whereas we produce only ex-post reports.

The Victorian PBO has as its legislative objective to ‘inform policy development’, but this does not include developing policy proposals. Instead, they focus on advice to help members develop their own policy. For example, they focus on considerations of design and implementation, and on the efficiency, effectiveness and value for money of particular policy proposals.

While the Victorian PBO therefore differs from ours in some important ways, the fact that it has particular roles in policy provides a basis for asking whether there really is a clear distinction to be drawn between fiscal analysis and policy analysis?

Much of what we do is to provide information that supports internal consideration and iteration of policies. When we work with our requestors on a costing, we seek a lot of policy information and ask a lot of policy questions to allow a request to be framed in such a way as to determine whether and how we could do a costing.

Many policy questions are quite straightforward – what is the intent, what is the timeframe, who is to be impacted, what is the mechanism, what are the intentional interactions etc? The questions we ask reflect important factors that go just as relevantly into policy analysis as they do into fiscal analysis. And when the request comes through to us, it may include a request for distributional analysis – who does the policy impact and by how much? We would often also include a short discussion of relevant comparative information, from the academic literature or other sources. Again, policy is a relevant part of understanding fiscal impacts, and something that both could be and would need to be considered in discussing the case for an independent policy service.

There are a number of things we don't do now and that is probably the right stance – we don't comment on the specifics of legislation and we don't comment on the intricacies of implementation. It would be very difficult to engage with those issues from a position outside of government, not to mention complex. What this means in practice is that our costings tend to assume that a policy can come into effect as of a certain time, based on the advice and the intent of the requestor. We may, though, draw attention to specific additional risks where they are out of the ordinary – legal challenges, or constitutional challenges, for example, but the reason why we comment on those is that they can materially affect financial outcomes.

Nevertheless, there is a real boundary between analysis and advice. There is a line, and it is valued and respected both by the people who use our services and by members of the PBO itself. The line ensures that we do our job well and that our requestors are able to conduct their own conversations as they see fit, informed by what we have done.

If there was to be an independent policy capability to support the Parliament, the key question would be to keep that line clear.

Where to by 2024...

2021

Trusted, relevant and credible institution of the Australian Parliament, which is highly valued by our stakeholders



2024

Build on the solid base by engaging more systematically with our stakeholders and making our products more accessible.

In the next three years, then, there are going to be opportunities to build on what the PBO has already become, and a need to address issues that have been raised by our key stakeholders.

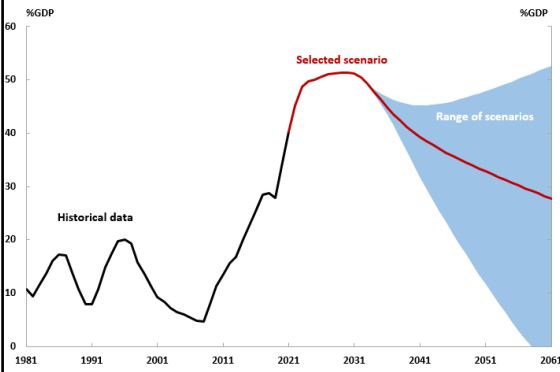
Example - Tools to understand the budget

PBO Fiscal Sustainability Dashboard

In the selected scenario, PBO estimates gross debt will be around 27.7% of GDP by 2060-61



Gross Debt



Scenarios

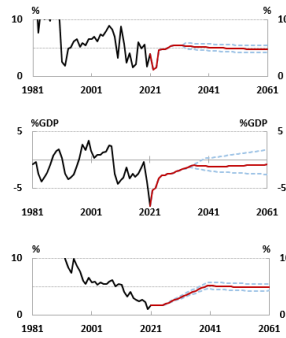
This scenario assumes the following in 2060-61

GDP growth	
Upside	5.5%
Central	4.9%
Downside	4.3%

Headline cash balance ¹	
Central	1.7%
Downside	-0.8%
Upside	-2.6%

Interest rates ²	
Central	4.3%
Downside	4.9%
Upside	5.5%

Historical perspective

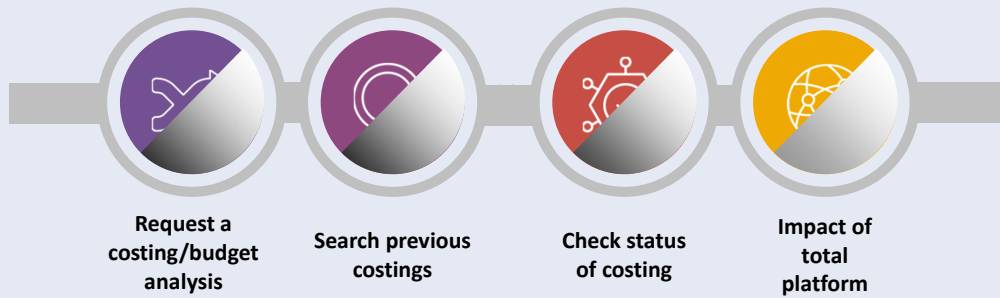


Alongside finding ways to just talk through issues informally, one way we plan to support our stakeholders is by providing tools and services to help parliamentarians understand the budget and fiscal context, and to formulate their policies.

This is a picture of the sustainability dashboard we are currently building. It will be simple at first, but we will add to it over time.

There are many other areas of the budget that would lend themselves to some sort of interactive tool, to help people to think through issues and implications, without having to put in a formal request to us.

Example - Parliamentarian self-service portal



Here is another opportunity that we are thinking about.

We would like to make it easier for parliamentarians to interact with us digitally, at a time that suits them.

One way to do that would be to create a secure and private portal for them to transact with us, check the status of their requests or even to see what the overall impacts would be of various policies they might want to include in their platforms.



The PBO began in order to serve the needs of our primary stakeholders – parliamentarians.

As their needs and interests change, so will the PBO need to change, and to be better able to handle a range of needs and preferences.

The PBO has established its place in the system.

The challenge for the future will be to build on the skills and reputation of the PBO, while becoming more adaptable and accessible to those we seek to support.