



PERFORMANCE

- Chamber and Federation Chamber
- Community awareness
- Committee services
- Inter-parliamentary relations
- Members' services

Photo: The secretariat of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics receives an award from the Clerk, 10 February 2012.

Chamber and Federation Chamber

With effect from 27 February 2012, the Main Committee was renamed the 'Federation Chamber'. Entries in this report in relation to the Federation Chamber would in previous years have referred to the Main Committee, and any comparisons as between comparative data years have been made on that basis. The work of the Chamber and Federation Chamber program component is delivered primarily through the Clerk's Office, the Chamber Research Office and the Table Office. Other departmental areas also contribute as required.

During the year, we provided effective secretariat and advisory support for the Chamber and Federation Chamber of the House of Representatives. Our main functions were to:

- advise the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives
- advise on programming of House business, and provide procedural support
- process and draft bills
- prepare and publish the record of proceedings of the House
- process and provide access to, and custody and archival storage of, the documents and records of the House
- undertake procedural and parliamentary research and publish statistical information on the business of the House
- provide secretariat support to certain domestic committees.

In 2011–12, the budget allocation for the component was \$3.4 million and expenditure was \$3.3 million. Staff levels, by location, are shown in Appendix 11.

Performance summary

The results of the department's annual survey of members (see Appendix 12) indicated high levels of satisfaction with our performance, consistent with the findings of earlier surveys. All respondents were satisfied with our advice and support, with 'extreme' or 'high' satisfaction reported as follows:

- advice and services received from the Clerks-at-the-Table in the Chamber and Federation Chamber—85 per cent 'extreme' or 'high' satisfaction (96 per cent in 2010–11)
- advice and services received from other staff in relation to Chamber and Federation Chamber duties—80 per cent 'extreme' or 'high' satisfaction (92 per cent in 2010–11)
- quality and availability of procedural and statistical publications and support in obtaining such information—70 per cent 'extreme' or 'high' satisfaction (87 per cent in 2010–11).

We continued to achieve high levels of performance as measured against performance indicators and service standards. We met targets set in the business plan and performed well against budget. Appendix 1 provides a summary of performance information.

The focus of the component's work is supporting the sittings of the House of Representatives Chamber and meetings of the Federation Chamber. Quantitative information on the sittings of the House and meetings of the Federation Chamber in 2011–12 and the previous two years is shown in Table 1.

In 2011–12, sitting days totalled 68. This represented an increase of 16 days from the previous year; an election year (30.8 per cent extra time) and an increase of one day (1.5 per cent) by comparison with the most recent non-election year (2009–10). What is more indicative of the increased demands placed on the program by the new sitting hours under the reform of parliament agreements are the statistics on the total hours of sittings and meetings of the House and Federation Chamber respectively (see Table 1). In 2011–12, the House sat an additional 77 hours (12.5 per cent extra time) and the Federation Chamber met for an additional 84 hours (37.8 per cent) compared to 2009–10, the most recent non-election year. Legislative activity continued at a high level during the period, requiring corresponding support from the department.

Further information on the business of the House and the Federation Chamber is in Appendix 3 and in the department's publication *Work of the Session* (available on the Parliament of Australia website).

Advice on practice and procedure

The Clerk, Deputy Clerk and other staff members provided advice to the Speaker, members and others on the practice and procedure of the House.

Our advice ranged from immediate support for the Speaker, ministers, shadow ministers and others during proceedings to detailed written advice. Subjects included the application of the standing orders and practice of the House, the content of questions without notice, the procedure for referring bills to House committees for inquiry, the election of House officers, procedures for private members' business, delegated legislation and the disallowance process, the requirements of the Constitution and standing orders in respect of financial legislation, privilege matters and requirements of the House in respect of the registration of members' interests.

Programming and coordination of business

Throughout 2011–12, we provided advice and services to facilitate sittings of the House and meetings of the Federation Chamber, including:

- programming and procedural advice to ministers, shadow ministers, party whips, other members, their staff and others

- the preparation and publication each sitting day of:
 - *the Notice Paper*—a document listing all unresolved business before the House in proposed order of consideration
 - *the Daily Program* (also known as 'the Blue')—an informal agenda for the day
 - procedural scripts for all items of business for use in the Chamber and the Federation Chamber
- the provision of Serjeants and attendants for sittings of the House and meetings of the Federation Chamber to oversee ceremonial and security arrangements and ensure that sittings could be conducted in an appropriate environment and that chamber papers were made available
- processing members' questions in writing to ministers, including editing for compliance with the standing orders, publication in the *Notice Paper* for the next day of sitting, and managing answers to questions
- providing a captioning service for the televised and webcast proceedings of the House and Federation Chamber
- the preparation of *This Week in the House*, a weekly online forecast of expected business for the House, and its counterpart document, *Last Week in the House*.

Table 1 Performance summary, Chamber and Federation Chamber, 2009–10 to 2011–12

Aspect of performance	Result		
	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12
Number of sittings of the House	67	52	68
Number of meetings of the Federation Chamber	55	46	59
Hours of sittings of the House ^a	614	511	691
Hours of meeting of the Federation Chamber ^a	222	248	306
Number of bills introduced	236	186	256
Number of bills passed both Houses and assented to ^b	178	116	221

a Excludes suspensions.

b Includes bills that passed both Houses in the financial year but were assented to in the following financial year.

Table 2 provides details of the number of questions in writing to ministers dealt with by the House of Representatives in the five years from 2007–08 to 2011–12.

Table 2 Questions in writing to ministers and answers to questions in writing, 2007–08 to 2011–12

	2007–08 ^c	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11 ^c	2011–12
Questions in writing ^a	437	642	571	441	678
Questions answered ^b	177	497	444	335	491

a Excluding questions withdrawn.

b The responsibility for responding to questions in writing rests with the individual ministers to whom the questions are put.

c Election year.

All sittings required the coordination of people, documents and actions, and programming of the following categories of business:

- government business (for example, legislation)
- private members' business (for example, a motion proposed by an individual member)
- House business (matters potentially involving all members—for example, question time, debate on committee reports or privilege matters).

A longitudinal view of the amount of time the House (Chamber and Federation Chamber inclusive) devoted to each of these types of business is shown in Figure 5. In the Forty-third Parliament, there was a reduction in the proportion of time allocated to government business and business of the House, reflecting the significant increase in private members' business time.

Figure 5 Government and private members' business and business of the House (Chamber and Federation Chamber), 2008 to 2012^a



a Includes other opportunities for private members, such as adjournment debates and discussion of matters of public importance.

Minority government and agreements on the reform of parliament

The department's annual report for 2010–11 outlined the effects on the operation of the department of the formation of the minority Labor government and aspects of the reform of parliament agreements made at the beginning of the Forty-third Parliament.

The additional demands that were placed on the Chamber support areas, as a direct result of the reform of parliament agreements under minority government, have not abated. A comparison of the statistics on the sitting hours of the House and Federation Chamber; the total number of bills passed, the number of private members' bills and the number of detail stage amendments moved to bills between this year and 2009–10, the most recent non-election year, provides some indication of the scale of the additional demands.

The increase in demand from members for procedural advice and guidance, particularly on issues that do not arise when the government has a comfortable majority in the House, has also been sustained. The written advices referred to in the last report—particularly those on House practice in relation to sections 53 and 56 of the Constitution and aspects of the financial initiative of the Executive—have proven to be useful resources as the House revisits these issues.

Throughout 2011–12, the House retained the longer sitting hours of the House and the Federation Chamber as reported on previously. To mitigate the demands this places on its staff, the Table Office has extended pre-existing shadowing arrangements, where other departmental employees relieve Table Office employees on some sitting nights after learning the duties over a period of time. These arrangements are effective in reducing fatigue, but they involve

additional risk and require particular care as their nature and purpose require that there is no person to person handover before the commencement of the next sitting.

The relief of Table Office employees is met by other employees at similar salary levels, who are also entitled to the payment of overtime or allowances for additional duty. These arrangements do not, therefore, result in reduced expenditure.

The passage of the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* and the release of Safe Work Australia's draft *Code of Practice on Preventing and Managing Fatigue in the Workplace* during the reporting period have added regulatory impetus to the department's determination to manage attendance and fatigue in the interests of the health and welfare of its employees. However, the department's financial position is limiting its choice of measures to address this issue. These fatigue management measures do not add significantly to current costs but have the effect of redistributing some of the demands of supporting longer sitting hours of the House and Federation Chamber to other employees who are fully engaged on their normal duties. Participation in these arrangements by employees outside the Table Office is voluntary. However, participation by Table Office employees, although subject to consultation, discussion and negotiation, has not been optional because of the duty of care considerations.

Processing and drafting of bills

Legislation

As in previous years, our support for the legislative process in 2011–12 included the following:

- receipt from the Office of Parliamentary Counsel, and custody under embargo, of bills before their introduction
- provision to ministers of bills for introduction and, after introduction, to all members in the Chamber
- uploading of bills, explanatory memoranda and proposed amendments to the Parliament of Australia website, and provision of an inquiry counter service for access to hard copies of bills and associated material
- processing of all bills and amendments to bills—from introduction to assent for bills initiated in the House, and from introduction in the House until passage by the House for bills initiated in the Senate
- provision of a legislative drafting service for private members
- preparation and delivery of messages to the Senate—244 messages relating to the passage of bills in 2011–12 (171 in 2010–11) and 15 other messages (39 in 2010–11)
- preparation and issue each sitting day of a *Daily Bills List*, providing cumulative information on the status of all bills before the parliament or assented to in the current calendar year.

Last year's annual report noted the considerable effort given to ensuring a smooth transition for bills information from the existing information technology system for the storage, management and publication of bills to the new parliamentary website. This additional support effort continued until the launch of the new website in February 2012, as a range of issues were resolved.

Chamber staff of both Houses continued to work with the developer of the bills system to maintain optimum levels of technical support. The Bills System Advisory Group continued its role in advising the Bills System Advisory Board on solutions for system enhancements and to satisfy business requirements.

Queries on the bills and legislation collection made available through the website during the year totalled 16,883,831, an increase of 22 per cent on the previous year (13,869,390 in 2010–11). The total number of legislation queries represented 25 per cent of the queries made through ParlInfo Search, the same percentage as in 2010–11. Work to include bills from earlier parliaments in the electronic storage system was ongoing, but slowed as a result of other demands on Table Office staff.

Legislative workload

During the year, 256 bills were introduced (186 in 2010–11), an increase of 28 per cent over the average for the previous four years. Two hundred and forty-four were initiated in the House of Representatives and 12 were received from the Senate; 221 bills passed both Houses (116 in 2010–11), of which 210 were initiated in the House of Representatives (101 in 2010–11) and 11 in the Senate (15 in 2010–11). Table 3 summarises bills introduced and assented to from 2007–08 to 2011–12.

In 2011–12, the House passed 221 bills (139 in 2010–11). This represented 3.3 bills on average for each sitting, compared with 2.7 bills on average passed in the previous year. The House amended 21.3 per cent of the bills it passed (10.8 per cent in 2010–11).

The House amended 47 bills that were initiated in the House (15 in 2010–11). The Table Office incorporated the amendments into the text of the bills and arranged for their reprinting (as third reading prints) before transmittal to the Senate. In addition, the House agreed to Senate amendments, and/or made amendments requested by the Senate, to 25 House bills (20 in 2010–11), with further processing by the office before the bills were presented to the Governor-General for assent.

The number of amendments moved during consideration in detail of bills has varied widely over the last 10 years, but the trend in recent years has been one of significant increase. This has placed increasing demands on departmental staff responsible for:

- storing and publishing amendments through the bills system and the website

- preparing the relevant supporting documents for consideration of amendments in the House
- creating third reading prints of the relevant bills when amendments were passed.

Of the 732 amendments moved, 457 were passed, including 30 private members' amendments. The House did not amend any bills initiated in the Senate this year, or in the previous year.

The Table Office prepared 7 third reading prints (15 in 2010–11) and 210 assent prints (101 in 2010–11). All documents accurately reflected the decisions of the Houses and were processed.

Legislative drafting

The department drafts bills, amendments and second reading (in principle) amendments for private members. It also ensures that these documents comply with the Constitution and the standing orders. Further, the department prepares bills and amendments in correct form and arranges copies for circulation.

The increase in the number of private members' bills being requested and introduced, noted in last year's annual report, has continued. In 2011–12, 25 private members' bills were introduced, the highest number since Federation, in 1901. Two private members'

bills were passed into law this year and one private senator's bill was passed by the House and became law. Of the 732 amendments moved this year, 305 were private members' amendments, of which 30 were agreed to. Table 4 provides Chamber statistics for private members' legislation. This does not reflect all of the department's work in this area, as some drafted material is not introduced. Table 4 shows an increase in the level of activity of the Forty-third Parliament (2010 onwards) compared with that of the Forty-second Parliament (2008 to 2010).

In order to meet the increasing demand for drafting services, the department has entered into an arrangement with the Office of Parliamentary Counsel (OPC) whereby an OPC drafter has been seconded to the department. This arrangement has had mutual benefits for the department and OPC.

Table 3 Number of bills introduced in the House, and number of bills assented to, 2007–08 to 2011–12

	2007–08 ^b	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11 ^b	2011–12
Bills introduced	167	210	236	186	256
Bills assented to ^a	142	148	178	116	221

a Includes bills that passed both Houses in the financial year but were assented to in the following financial year.
b Election year.

Table 4 Private members' bills introduced and amendments moved, 2007–08 to 2011–12

	2007–08 ^b	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11 ^b	2011–12
Bills introduced	4	6	15	17	25
Second reading amendments moved ^a	42	10	12	14	17
Consideration in detail amendments moved ^a	36	85	134	292	732

a Includes Federation Chamber.
b Election year.

Record of proceedings and House documents

Votes and Proceedings

The *Votes and Proceedings* continued to provide an accurate, comprehensive and concise record of proceedings. The draft document for each sitting day is published on the Parliament of Australia website, usually within an hour of the adjournment of the House.

The *Votes and Proceedings* is prepared from the *Votes Officer's Minutes*, an electronic draft record of the proceedings of the House and the Federation Chamber compiled progressively throughout a sitting day. It enables anyone with access to the internet to follow events in the House and Federation Chamber as they occur. Internal and external clients continued to provide positive feedback on this service.

The introduction of the new website in February 2012 involved a number of adjustments for the publication of the *Votes and Proceedings* and *Votes Officer's Minutes* to the website and ParInfo Search. In addition, the greater uncertainty and complexity associated with proceedings of the House in the context of a minority government has placed greater pressure on the relevant staff and has often meant considerably extended hours.

Documents

During the year, we processed all documents presented to the House and recorded their details in the *Votes and Proceedings* and the *Index to Papers Presented to Parliament*. We made copies available to members and their staff and others, principally in Parliament House, in response to requests, including through an online daily document-ordering system. The original documents were added to the records of the House, which we continued to maintain. We continued to review our requirements for tabling stock in the light of ever-improving online availability of documents and

declining demand for hard copies.

In 2011–12, documents presented to the House numbered 6533, an increase of 39.4 per cent over the previous year (4686 in 2010–11).

Work progressed on the development of an electronic repository for the Parliamentary Papers Series, which will enable access to the documents themselves as well as the data accessible through the Tabled Papers Register (see below).

To meet the needs of clients, on each sitting day the Table Office prepares and issues in electronic and hard-copy form a Disallowable Instruments List. The list provides details of all instruments presented to the House that are subject to disallowance, by number of sitting days remaining for a notice of disallowance to be lodged.

Parliamentary Papers Series

The Parliamentary Papers Series consists of documents of a substantial nature presented to the parliament. As reported previously, in May 2010 the Joint Committee on Publications undertook an inquiry into the electronic distribution of the series and recommended that an electronic Parliamentary Papers Series be developed, with a repository based in the parliament and managed by the Chamber departments. The presiding officers responded in November 2010 and agreed that an electronic Parliamentary Papers Series should be developed and that a digital repository should be managed by the parliamentary departments, subject to a business case being developed. The presiding officers' further response to the development of a digital repository and electronic distribution of the series was presented in the House on 28 June 2012 and work is under way for the repository to be available from the beginning of 2013.

House records

The department is responsible for the custody and preservation of, and access to, the official records of the House, including Acts, bills, *Votes and Proceedings*, and all documents presented to the House dating from 1901. The records are stored in an archive in the basement at Parliament House. We continue to monitor the suitability of the archive environment.

Petitions

Table 5 provides details of petitions presented to the House, and the number of signatures, for the past five years. The growing number of signatures demonstrates a strong level of interest by Australians in using the procedures of the House to draw attention to national issues that are of interest and concern to them. (See also the paragraphs on 'Standing Committee on Petitions' on page 21.)

House pictorial collection

The Chamber Research Office continued to upgrade the storage and cataloguing of the department's extensive pictorial collection, as other commitments allowed. The project involves examining images dating back some 60 years and including a description of the events and the people depicted. The project has two principal objectives:

- to enable better access to the collection for the House and the department
- to improve compliance with records management standards.

Research

The Chamber Research Office continued to collect, analyse and publish procedural and statistical information on the work of the House and its committees.

In 2011–12, the office provided:

- advice, and assistance with advice, for the Speaker, Deputy Speaker, and members, on the application of the standing orders and House practices
- secretariat support to the Standing Committee on Procedure and the Standing Committee on Petitions

- advice and publications on House statistics, practices and procedure
- information to the public, the media, and other parliaments on the operations of the House.

The high level of demand for services of the office—reported in the previous year—was sustained, reflecting continuing high levels of interest in the operations and procedures of the House.

Publications

The Chamber Research Office maintains, publishes and distributes the standing orders of the House. An insert to the *Standing and Sessional Orders* as at 8 February 2012 was produced to reflect a number of amendments made by the House earlier that day. These related to Question Time arrangements and the change of name of the Main Committee to the Federation Chamber. Consequential changes to the House *Infosheets* were also made. The authoritative text, *House of Representatives Practice*, has undergone significant revisions in response to procedural developments in the House over the course of the Forty-third Parliament. The sixth edition will be published early in the next reporting year.

Consistent with its primary role, the office produced publications detailing significant procedural events, usually following each sitting fortnight. *The Procedural Digest*, a subject-based record of proceedings, is published online, and the *Procedural Extracts*, a technical document, is also produced. The office published the *Statistical Digest* after each sitting fortnight. *Work of the Session*, a comprehensive six-monthly overview of the business of the House and committees, was published in August and December 2011.

The department continued its association with the Parliamentary Studies Centre at the Australian National University, in cooperation with colleagues from the Department of the Senate and the Parliamentary Library. In August 2011, a seminar entitled 'Minority government: perspectives on the impact on the House of Representatives' was hosted, with presentations by the Speaker; the Clerks of the House and the Senate; Mr Russell Broadbent MP, Deputy Chair of the House Procedure Committee; and Professor Anne Twomey of

Table 5 Petitions and signatories to petitions, 2007–08 to 2011–12

	2007–08 ^a	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11 ^a	2011–12
Number of petitions presented	150	141	163	129	183
Number of signatories	104,903	234,622	270,964	445,921	446,619

^a Election year.

The University of Sydney. Professor John Uhr chaired the seminar, which was attended by senior public servants, academics, and staff from the parliamentary departments and state and territory parliaments. The seminar enabled reflection and analysis from a variety of perspectives on the impact of changes during the previous 12 months.

Parliamentary committees

The department continued to provide effective secretariat and advisory support to a number of House committees, and to one joint committee, dealing with the powers and procedures of the House (see Table 6).

During the year, these committees held a total of 117 meetings (82 in 2010–11) and produced 39 reports (37 in 2010–11). The increase in the number of meetings and reports presented is primarily attributable to the role of the Selection Committee in the Forty-third Parliament. Details of meetings and reports are set out in Appendixes 4 and 5.

Selection Committee

As reported on in the previous period, a Selection Committee was re-established in the Forty-third Parliament. The Selection Committee has four important roles:

- selecting and programming private members' business and committee and delegation business
- setting speaking times for second reading debates. The committee has not as yet exercised this role
- considering all bills introduced and determining whether to refer bills directly to House or to joint committees for inquiry. This power can

be exercised by an individual member of the committee (85 bills were referred to committees under this procedure in 2011–12; 28 in 2010–11)

- recommending items of private members' business for a vote of the House (69 items of private members' business, including 12 bills, were voted on in 2011–12; 44 items in 2010–11).

The committee consists of 11 members: the Speaker (as chair), the chief whips of the three parties, three government members, two opposition members and two non-aligned members. The committee met 44 times during the reporting period, typically twice each sitting week. On occasion, a third meeting was conducted to enable a bill just introduced to be referred to a committee for inquiry. The Selection Committee is supported by Table Office staff.

Standing Committee on Appropriations and Administration

The Appropriations and Administration Committee considers, among other things, estimates of the funding required for the operation of the department each year. When conferring with its counterpart Senate committee, the Senate Standing Committee on Appropriations and Staffing, the House Committee may consider estimates of the funding required for the operation of the Department of Parliamentary Services each year.

The committee consists of nine members: the Speaker as Chair, four government members and four non-government members. It is supported by the Clerk, the Serjeant-at-Arms and officers of the department. During the year the committee met seven times and presented two reports (see page 52).

Standing Committee of Privileges and Members' Interests

The Standing Committee of Privileges and Members' Interests met 12 times during the reporting period. During the reporting period, the committee completed and presented to the House a discussion paper on a draft code of conduct for members of parliament. The presentation of the discussion paper finalised the committee's work on the reference on this matter it had received from the House. The committee had an inquiry referred by the House in May 2012 into whether, in the course of a statement made to the House by the Member for Dobell (Mr Craig Thomson, MP), the member deliberately misled the House.

Standing Committee on Petitions

The Standing Committee on Petitions continued its role—begun with its creation in the Forty-second Parliament—of supporting the House's petitioning system, including scrutinising petitions for compliance with House standing orders. On sitting Mondays during the regular 'Petitions' timeslot in the House, the chair presented those petitions that had been found to comply and that were not to be presented by other members at the times available to them. On Mondays, the chair also presented responses by ministers to petitions that had been presented earlier and which the committee had passed on, with a request for a written response that would be presented to the House and published on the committee's web page.

During the year, 183 petitions in total were presented (an increase of 41 per cent on 2010–11, and totalling more than 446,000 signatures), and 134 ministerial responses were presented. The number of petitions and signatures might be considered notable because they demonstrate a growing commitment to the ancient tradition of petitioning parliament. The number of responses might also be considered notable because the figure equates to an almost full response rate. Responses sometimes refer to more than one petition—for example, a petition that is identical to one presented and referred very recently may not be forwarded for a response. While responses from ministers would not usually provide petitioners with the government's agreement to the request in their petitions, they do provide current and authoritative answers to the concerns raised in petitions.

The committee may hold public hearings, or 'round tables' from time to time and invite principal petitioners or relevant government departments and agencies to provide further evidence on petitions and responses. The purpose of such hearings is not to investigate or resolve the issues raised, but to enable further discussion and explanation of relevant legislation, policies and programs. In December 2011, for example, the committee held hearings in Melbourne and Traralgon, where petitions on local and national issues were considered.

Standing Committee on Procedure

The committee continued its focus on monitoring and reporting on the significant procedural reforms to the House that began with the Forty-third Parliament. In July 2011 it presented *Interim report no. 2: Monitoring and review of procedural changes implemented in the 43rd Parliament—Referral of bills to committees by the House Selection Committee*. In this report, the committee noted the positive aspects of the increasing number of bill inquiries being referred to committees and also expressed some concerns about the implications for resourcing. One recommendation was for the Selection Committee to provide reasons for its referrals of bills and, in March 2012, that committee began providing these reasons in its reports.

In March 2012, the Standing Committee on Procedure presented *Interim report no. 3: Monitoring and review of procedural changes in the 43rd Parliament—The effectiveness of reforms to the House committee system*. This was a valuable opportunity for the committee to consider the impact of reforms to House committees after the changes had been in effect for more than 12 months. The origins of many of these reforms can be traced back to recommendations in the committee's 2010 report on the effectiveness of House committees.

While the reference on reforms is its principal focus and involves a long-term and comprehensive review of the workings of the House and committees, the committee also has its traditional reference, the *Maintenance of the Standing and Sessional Orders*, to allow it to deal with other, particular, issues arising from the *Standing and Sessional Orders*.

Table 6 Committees supported by Chamber and Federation Chamber component, 2011–12

House committees
Selection Committee
Standing Committee on Appropriations and Administration
Standing Committee of Privileges and Members' Interests
Standing Committee on Petitions
Standing Committee on Procedure
Standing Committee on Publications
Joint committee
Joint Committee on the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings

Standing Committee on Publications

The committee met twice in 2011–12, and met with the Senate Publications Committee on another 11 occasions. The committee presented 13 reports recommending which documents presented to parliament should be included in the Parliamentary Papers Series. All reports were agreed for inclusion.

In 2010 the committee, together with the Senate Publications Committee, conducted an inquiry into the electronic distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series and presented a report. The presiding officers tabled their response to the report in the House of Representatives on 25 November 2010. The presiding officers' further response to the development of a digital repository and electronic distribution of the series was presented in the House on 28 June 2012.

Procedural training

The department continued to support the development of specialised knowledge and skills in the application of parliamentary law, practice and procedure through a range of measures for staff. Senior staff of the Chamber Research and Table Offices delivered specialised training for staff. These measures include:

- on-the-job training and experience. This has been a traditional and highly effective method of procedural training but, naturally, open to a limited number of staff. Opportunities for a greater number of staff to gain significant on-the-job experience in procedural support areas have increased as a result of the need to accommodate staff movements and to support the longer sitting hours in the House and Federation Chamber
- parliamentary and departmental briefing sessions
- specialist training programs developed in-house. Workshops on parliamentary privilege, facilitated by the Deputy Clerk, have continued. These have enabled staff, especially senior staff, to develop the necessary knowledge through practical exercises and guidance in the use of sources to develop advice on privilege matters
- pre-sitting briefings for rostered Clerks-at-the-Table each sitting day

- regular sitting debriefs following each sitting week or fortnight, focusing on matters of procedural interest. The sessions are facilitated by the Director, Programming, and a record is prepared for staff by the Chamber Research Office
- 'shadowing' opportunities, enabling staff outside the Table and Serjeant-at-Arms' offices to learn Chamber support duties on sitting nights. 'Shadows' provide important back-up capability in the event of staffing absences or turnover. A number of shadows have now been able to perform duties long-term following staff movements, and some now have sufficient experience to work independently and enable the staff member they shadow to finish work earlier on some sitting nights
- opportunities to draft papers, including for the Parliamentary Studies Centre and the Australia and New Zealand Association of Clerks-at-the-Table annual professional development seminar; and to deliver presentations at departmental or external events
- for a small number of staff each year, participation in the annual university course in parliamentary law, practice and procedure under the auspices of the Australia and New Zealand Association of Clerks-at-the-Table. These students are required to prepare a substantial research paper for the course and are assigned a mentor from the department's senior executive. They may also participate in parliamentary seminars and conferences.

Information technology

Further work was carried out with the House of Assembly, South Australia, to redevelop the department's Procedural Records System with a view to sharing the solution with the House of Assembly.

The project to redevelop the Chamber document production system and associated databases for the department and for the Senate progressed. Following a tender process, the department and the Senate engaged Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) to develop the Table Office's production system, which will replace the current document production system. Contracts were signed in February 2012 and in June, following extensive

consultations with key stakeholders, SAIC submitted draft requirements and solution design documents to the Chamber departments for review. A proof of concept application is expected to be demonstrated early in 2012–13 with project completion scheduled for late 2013.

As mentioned above, work progressed on the implementation of an electronic Parliamentary Papers Series. From the beginning of 2013, all documents which are made Parliamentary Papers will be available through ParInfo Search.

As noted last year and referred to above, the department provided considerable support for the project to redevelop the Parliament of Australia website, with emphasis on key documents and other material relating to the Chamber and Federation Chamber. The launch of the website in February 2012 involved a significant further contribution from departmental staff to ensure the smooth transfer of data and publication of House documents.

Improving performance

The increase in sitting hours of the Chamber and the Federation Chamber has increased demand for appropriately-trained procedural support staff. As noted above, procedural training and development continued to be a priority during the year. A new intensive training program delivered for the first time in 2010–11, enabled departmental staff to develop a detailed understanding of legislation and the legislative process. This program provided targeted assistance to staff who are less experienced in providing procedural support to the House, as well as to staff who are now engaged in the growing number of bills inquiries by committees supported by the department. The two-part program will be offered again in 2012–13.

Outlook

We were pleased to see signoff and commencement of the contract for the long-anticipated redevelopment of the central document production system and associated measures for the Table Offices of the department and the Department of the Senate. All staff in the program are being consulted and practical support is being given enthusiastically. This additional effort is expected to accelerate over the remaining 18 months of the project, from the current base of weekly consultations and frequent meetings in non-sitting weeks with the developers.

Other important advances in information technology measures which are proceeding jointly, include the implementation of an electronic Parliamentary Papers Series (with the Department of the Senate) in the next financial year and further progress in the redevelopment of the procedural records system (with the House of Assembly, South Australia).

As the program is focussed overwhelmingly on Chamber support which is responsive to the government's program of sittings and the parliamentary business that is set, there is very little discretionary expenditure. Nevertheless, given the tightening in the department's budgetary position, we are taking a fresh look at resource use across the program, while maintaining our focus on providing high quality services to the members and our other clients. At the same time it needs to be noted that this year there has been a significant increase in program activity across every indicator, with no sign that activity will ease in the next 12 months. As a consequence, there has been an increased training response from senior staff to ensure a sufficient supply of suitably trained Chamber support staff serving at the Table in both the Chamber and the Federation Chamber.

Community awareness

Engaging the community with the work of the House of Representatives and its committees remained a priority for the department in 2011–12. The International and Community Relations Office (ICRO), working with other departmental areas, used a range of products and services to inform the community about the House and encourage community participation in parliament's work. The Serjeant-at-Arms' Office supports school and other visits to Parliament House.

Performance summary

Community interest in the work of the House of Representatives was reflected in the ongoing demand for the department's community outreach products and services. As many of those services have been developed over several years, the focus this year was on maintaining product quality and broadening the reach of our community outreach services.

School and Chamber gallery visits to Parliament House continued at a high level during the year.

Community liaison

Print and electronic media

The magazine *About the House*, our two television programs—*About the House* and *MPI* (Matters of Public Importance)—and the *About the House* web page remained central elements of the department's strategy to provide information to the community in an accessible, interesting and modern way. Three issues of the magazine were published during the year. The television programs were broadcast on Sky News and the Australian Public Affairs Channel, with replays made available on the *About the House* news web page.

Letters, emails and phone calls from the public praised the quality of the magazine. The following comment from one reader reflected the overall feedback received during the year:

"I have recently started receiving copies of About the House and must compliment you and your team on such a well-produced, well written and informative magazine. Because of its provenance, it also has the added value of having credible information."

The *About the House* Twitter feed, introduced last year, also proved popular, attracting more than 7500 followers (an increase of 5000 from June 2011). The Twitter feed allowed for some interactivity, with people using the service to seek information about parliamentary work and procedures. The Twitter feed complemented our email alert service that provided regular news updates on parliamentary committee work to more than 3200 subscribers.

The department's media advisers continued to promote the work of parliamentary committees direct to the media. Their work assisted in raising the public profile of committee activities through regular reporting of that work in newspapers and on television and radio.

Seminars and presentations

Twelve seminars were conducted during the year on the work and procedures of the House of Representatives, six of which were seminars for individual government departments and organisations. There were 342 participants in these seminars (an increase of 13 from 2010–11). Evaluations by seminar participants gave an average satisfaction rating of 8 out of 10 for the seminars (the same as last year's average rating).

Three university lectures were presented by the Speaker and the Clerk under the House Calls program, one at Charles Darwin University in Darwin, the University of Western Sydney, and the University of Tasmania. The House Calls program allows staff and students to hear first-hand about the more practical operations of the House and its members.

Projects and events

A young women's forum was held at Parliament House in August 2011, organised by ICRO. The 'w.comm' forum, held under the auspices of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, brought together 10 young women (aged 18–25), one from each Australian state and territory, to discuss the role of women in politics and to engage with the political process. The two-day program included a range of discussions and presentations, including with parliamentarians,

political staffers, lobbyists, media representatives and a representative of the diplomatic community.

Evaluations undertaken at and after the forum indicated a high level of satisfaction among participants, who advised that the forum had met their expectations. In their feedback, participants commented that they had gained knowledge, direction, inspiration and realistic information from a variety of sources. Participants also made suggestions for future forums. Another forum is planned for 2013.

Parliamentary Assistants' program

The Parliamentary Assistants' program, successfully run by the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office, entered its twelfth year. University students apply for places on the program, which promotes understanding and engagement with the work of the parliament through part-time employment in the House of Representatives. (For further details see page 45.)

Parliamentary internship program

The Australian National Internship Program has operated under an agreement between the Vice-Chancellor of the Australian National University and the presiding officers since 1993. Australian and foreign students enrolled at the university under the program undertake an internship placement of about 10 weeks as part of their formal course of undergraduate study. In both semesters of 2011–12, most students enrolled in the program were placed with a senator or a member. The departments of the House of Representatives and the Senate and the Parliamentary Library assist the program, including by providing an orientation seminar before the students take up their placements at Parliament House and elsewhere. During the placement, students complete a research project on a topic nominated and agreed with their 'host'. The report is assessed by the university and counts towards their degree at their home university. The program has continued to provide students from around Australia and from other countries with an opportunity to extend and complement their academic studies with an opportunity to study and work within the parliamentary environment.

Parliamentary exchange program for Australian Defence Force

Each year, a small number of Australian Defence Force representatives may spend a week at Parliament House, being hosted by a member or senator. This arrangement began in 2003 and expanded on a program started in 2001, under which members and senators take up a short placement with Defence personnel and participate in their working life. The arrangements for participation by members and senators are made through the Parliamentary Secretary for Defence in conjunction with the Department of Defence. In 2011–12, 15 Australian Defence Force representatives were placed with a member or senator. The departments of the House of Representatives and the Senate supported the exchange program.

Public visits to the House

Public visits to observe proceedings

Over the 68 sitting days of 2011–12, there were 79,241 visitors to the House of Representatives Chamber galleries. This was an increase on last year (68,038 visitors), which was an election year. The introduction and debate of the Clean Energy Bills created a great deal of interest in the community and, coinciding with Canberra's Floriade festival, resulted in the highest number of people visiting the galleries in a single day on 13 September 2011, when the bills were introduced (2368 people). High levels of attendance were recorded too on 19 and 20 September 2011, during debate of the bills.

Budget and Budget Reply nights were also well attended, with 713 visitors attending Budget night on 8 May 2012 and 603 attending the Budget Reply two nights later.

On Thursday, 17 November 2011, the Honourable Barack Obama, President of the United States of America, addressed members and senators in the House of Representatives Chamber (see also page 39). The Serjeant-at-Arms' Office, in collaboration with the Usher of the Black Rod's Office and the Ceremonial

and Hospitality Division of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, organised gallery bookings for the invited guests of members and senators, school groups, distinguished visitors and media representatives from Australia and the United States to attend the address. More than 724 people were recorded as entering the galleries for the address that day (this does not include school groups).

The President had been received at Parliament House the day before on 16 November 2011 with a Ceremonial Welcome. Arrangements were made for two school groups to attend the welcome in the Marble Foyer.

School visits to Parliament House

School visits to Parliament House are coordinated by the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office, working in partnership with the Parliamentary Education Office and Visitor Services.

The total number of students participating in school programs was 114,794, which is consistent with the number of visiting students last year. There were increased numbers of students from several states, with the biggest increases recorded from the Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia (see Table 7).

All students participated in a guided tour and visited both Chambers; 87 per cent (100,130) received hospitality; and 78 per cent (89,624) participated in the Parliamentary Education Office program.

Parliamentary Education Office

The department and the Department of the Senate jointly fund the Parliamentary Education Office (PEO), which is administered by the Department of the Senate. The mission of the PEO is to provide parliamentary education services to schools, teachers

and students. The PEO also provides parliamentary education support services to members and senators.

The two departments liaise closely on the strategic direction of the PEO and the content of its teaching, educational material and online resources. The PEO Advisory Committee, chaired by the Deputy Speaker, provides strategic guidance to the PEO and is available to provide the presiding officers with advice on the parliamentary education support needs of members and senators. The Advisory Committee met in November 2011 and June 2012. The Clerk Assistant (Table), and the Clerk Assistant (Procedure) of the Department of the Senate, attended as observers.

A total of 89,624 students from every state and territory participated in the PEO's experiential role-play program at Parliament House during the year (compared with 88,423 last financial year and the record of 91,648 in 2009–10). This brought the cumulative total of students who have participated in the role play programs since the Parliament House building opened on 9 May 1988 to over 1.6 million. A number of members and senators met with student groups that attended Parliament House and participated in the PEO's programs.

The PEO continued to invest in range of outreach strategies to ensure that it is able to provide parliamentary education services to a broad student population, not just those who are able to travel to Canberra. An extensive review of the PEO website structure and content has been completed to improve accessibility and the currency and readability of website material. In addition, an expanded range of materials was developed for secondary students and a greater emphasis was placed on providing factual information about current events and the achievements of the Forty-third Parliament. Additionally, an inter-departmental project board has been initiated

to consider the introduction of a new booking system for school tours with a view to achieving improved efficiency and functionality.

The PEO website continued to be an effective and popular vehicle for the dissemination of parliamentary education material and resources to teachers and students located around Australia. Patronage of the PEO website has continued to increase significantly, with over 589,998 visitors accessing over 4.884 million page views in 2011–12. This compares with 542,738 visitors and 4.718 million page views in 2010–11 and represents an increase of 8.7 per cent in visitors and a 3.5 per cent increase in page views. A project board is considering the introduction of a content management system for the PEO website. The department is represented on the project board by the Clerk Assistant (Table).

The PEO continued its work with members and senators in a targeted school visits program called Parliament Alive. Three Parliament Alive visit programs were successfully conducted this year to schools in outer Adelaide and outer Brisbane electorates. These activities provided participating students with an

invaluable opportunity to learn first-hand about the role and work of their federal member or senator. A highlight of the Parliament Alive program was the active involvement of relevant members and senators. In addition to Parliament Alive, the PEO conducted a number of other parliamentary education programs, both at Parliament House and around Australia, involving students, trainee and qualified teachers, Indigenous groups and adults.

The PEO has also continued to produce a wide range of educational resources, both in print and in video, including a new publication, *Role Playing the Parliament – A Teacher's Guide*, which is intended to encourage and assist teachers to conduct parliamentary role-play activities in the classroom. In addition, in March 2012, the Speaker and President of the Senate launched the Despatch Box Education Kit. Taking the form of a replica despatch box, the kit contains all the props, costumes and resources required to conduct role-play programs in the classroom as well as a comprehensive suite of PEO parliamentary education resources. The demand for PEO publications and resources continued to increase over the course of the year.

Table 7 Students visiting Parliament House, by location and year, 2007–08 to 2011–12

Year	ACT	NSW	NT	Qld	SA	Tas.	Vic.	WA	Other	Total
2007–08	3,733	67,148	532	15,077	4,523	1,050	17,002	3,100	295	112,460
2008–09	4,031	69,673	341	14,333	4,024	1,113	16,913	3,591	171	114,190
2009–10	3,703	70,294	623	15,845	4,618	1,394	17,041	4,378	59	117,955
2010–11	2,730	67,715	707	16,411	4,205	1,262	17,458	4,048	62	114,598
2011–12	1,637	66,036	899	17,389	5,059	1,676	17,312	4,706	80	114,794



Photo: Australia Day Achievement Medallion presentation, 30 January 2012.

Improving performance

The Parliament of Australia website was comprehensively redeveloped during the year which allowed us to refresh the House of Representatives web pages and the information they contain. The web pages are hosting more short video clips of committee and other parliamentary activity, and committees are increasingly using online surveys lodged on the website to help gather direct input from the public. (For further information, see page 31.)

The growing popularity of the *About the House* Twitter feed over the year has provided the opportunity for greater interactivity with the community, with people using the service to ask questions and receive answers on parliamentary work and procedures. This complements the department's efforts to promote community engagement as a two-way process rather than one whereby the department simply presents information to the public. The direct feedback on our products also allows us to more quickly enhance our community outreach services.

A tender for the printing and mailing of the *About the House* magazine resulted in a reduction in printing costs, as the department seeks to minimise its expenses while maintaining the same standard of service.

The Serjeant-at-Arms' Office, in particular, continued to work with the PEO and Visitor Services as part of the Venue Management System Project Board and Evaluation Committee to select a new booking system which will include a web-based school booking component. When complete, this should reduce the workload on the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office and make it easier for school groups, in particular, to arrange to visit Parliament House.

The Serjeant-at-Arms' Office staff also continued to coordinate and provide induction training to colleagues from other parliamentary departments, including Security and Visitor Services. Training covers the functions and responsibilities of the House of Representatives, and operational requirements for the Chamber, Federation Chamber, and Chamber galleries.

Outlook

The twenty-fifth anniversary of Parliament House in 2013 will provide an additional opportunity to engage the community with the work of the House of Representatives, with a book launch in May 2013 and an Open Day scheduled to take place on 14 September 2013.

We will continue to explore ways in which to deliver information to the public using the latest technology. As an example, work has commenced on making the *About the House* magazine available as an e-publication and developing an 'app' for distributing news about the House.

Budget constraints will affect community engagement programs. However, the delivery of products and services online will assist in reducing costs.

The Serjeant-at-Arms' Office will continue to participate in site visits and demonstrations from vendors as part of the evaluation of new booking systems. The forward plan is that a vendor will be selected and implementation will be underway by the end of 2012 and the office will then work with the vendor to ensure the realisation of a new and more user-friendly booking system. School bookings for 2013 have opened and in the first week of bookings we have already booked 1563 schools with 58,507 students to visit parliament in 2012–13, and participate in a school program.

The Serjeant-at-Arms' Office continues to meet regularly and work together with our colleagues in PEO and Visitor Services as well as the wider community to provide the best possible service to the variety of people who visit Parliament House.

Committee services

Committee services

The work in this program component is primarily performed by the Committee Office. The office supports parliamentary committees in discharging their responsibilities for parliamentary consideration of policy and legislation and scrutiny of government.

The expenditure on these services in 2011–12 was \$7.486 million, which was \$0.342 million below the budget allocation of \$7.828 million. Staff levels, by location, are shown in Appendix 11.

Performance summary

On 1 July 2011, nine Committee Office secretariats were supporting nine House investigatory committees and nine joint investigatory committees. As the financial year coincided with the midpoint of the parliamentary cycle, committees were well established and most had one or more inquiries underway.

In addition, the office supported two joint select committees during 2011–12. The Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety was established in September 2010 and, by resolution of both Chambers, had its life extended to report by 30 April 2013, rather than the same date in 2012. The Joint Select Committee on Australia's Clean Energy Future Legislation was established on 15 September 2011 and reported on 7 October 2011. After presenting its final report, the committee was dissolved.

Committees supported by the Committee Office in 2011–12 are shown in Table 8.

The department also supports the Liaison Committee of Chairs and Deputy Chairs. While this committee has formal processes, and is chaired by the Deputy Speaker, it is not a formal committee of the parliament but a means by which chairs and deputy chairs of committees administered by the House can discuss aspects of committee administration and support. In previous parliaments the committee generally met every six months, but it has met more frequently in the

Forty-third Parliament. The committee met four times in 2011–12: in September and November 2011 and March and June in 2012.

Committee activity

The 2011–12 financial year was marked by high levels of committee activity as House and joint committees continued to play an increasing role in the scrutiny of legislation, in addition to conducting longer-term reference inquiries. Bills inquiries are generally conducted within short timeframes and prior to the Forty-third Parliament were not a significant feature of House and joint committee work.

On 1 July 2011, the investigatory committees supported by the department had 36 ongoing inquiries. During 2011–12, these committees commenced 115 inquiries, tabled 91 reports relating to 95 inquiries and made oral statements in discharge of their requirement to provide an advisory report on a bill or package of bills for a further 11 inquiries. As at 30 June 2012, the committees had 49 ongoing inquiries.

The inquiry-related activities of committees are summarised in Appendixes 4 and 5. Changes to the standing orders at the beginning of the Forty-third Parliament, which enabled the re-established Selection Committee to refer bills to House and joint committees, continued to impact significantly on committee workloads. Prior to the Forty-third Parliament, committees that the department administers only occasionally conducted inquiries into bills and pre-legislation proposals. In 2011–12, 79 bills were referred to committees supported by the department by the Selection Committee. In addition, a package of 19 bills was referred to the Joint Select Committee on Australia's Clean Energy Future Legislation by a resolution agreed by both Houses, and a package of 11 bills relating to the Minerals Resource Rent Tax was referred to the House Economics Committee by the Treasurer. Taking into account those bills inquired into as a package, 54 bills inquiries were undertaken by committees supported by the department in 2011–12.

Table 8 Committees supported by the Committee Office, 2011–12

Forty-third Parliament House committees
Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
Standing Committee on Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries and Forestry
Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and the Arts
Standing Committee on Economics
Standing Committee on Education and Employment
Standing Committee on Health and Ageing
Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Communications
Standing Committee on Regional Australia
Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs
Joint committees
Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit
Joint Committee on the National Broadband Network
Joint Select Committee on Australia's Clean Energy Future Legislation
Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works

Note: Six other House committees mainly concerned with the domestic operations of the House (in addition to the Joint Committee on the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings) are supported by other program components of the department and are discussed on pages 20–22.

During the year, the Committee Office supported some inquiries which attracted significant public interest and support staff were required to be creative in the way in which they managed stakeholder engagement in often very short timeframes. For example, the Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs conducted an inquiry into two bills, the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2012 and the Marriage Amendment Bill 2012, each of which sought to allow same-sex marriages in Australia and to recognise same-sex marriages conducted overseas. To assist in meeting the demands from interested parties, a dedicated email system and phone lines were established for the inquiry. The committee received submissions from religious bodies, lawyers, celebrants, human rights organisations and advocacy groups and held a public hearing in Sydney. It also ran an online survey which received almost 280,000 responses. The committee's report was presented in June 2012.

The office also supported the Joint Select Committee on Australia's Clean Energy Future Legislation which was set up in September 2011 to examine 19 bills that sought to implement the government's decision to place a price on greenhouse gas emissions and move to an emissions trading scheme by 2015. The inquiry was conducted within a very short timeframe, with the committee meeting for the first time on 15 September 2011 and presenting its final report on 7 October 2011. The committee processed a large amount of written evidence and correspondence, and took evidence at public hearings held in Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney. As part of the hearings, the committee conducted teleconferences with organisations in regional locations in Queensland and Western Australia.

During 2011–12, the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit (JCPAA) acquired an important new role as the parliamentary oversight committee for the newly created Parliamentary Budget Office. Funding for a Parliamentary Budget Office was announced in the 2011–12 Budget. Shortly thereafter, the government responded positively to the *Report of the Joint Select Committee on the Proposed Parliamentary Budget Office*, introducing legislation to amend the *Parliamentary Services Act 1999*. The amendments

enabled the establishment of the Parliamentary Budget Office, and named the JCPAA as the oversight body.

The JCPAA is now responsible for

- approving the appointment of the Parliamentary Budget Officer
- considering the operations and resources of the office
- drawing the attention of Parliament to any significant matters relating to the office.

In May 2012, following the unanimous approval of the JCPAA, the inaugural Parliamentary Budget Officer was appointed by the presiding officers.

Delegations and visits

In 2011–12, departmental staff provided support to a number of outgoing committee delegations.

In August 2011, the Secretary of the House Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and the Arts (CCEA Committee) supported committee members during their participation in the inaugural annual parliamentary committee visit to the People's Republic of China (PRC). The addition of a third committee visit within the annual delegations program—in similar terms to the existing New Zealand Committee Exchange and the annual Asia–Pacific committee visit—provides an opportunity for a parliamentary committee to visit China each year, ideally with a program focus based on a current inquiry by the committee. For this historic first visit by a committee of the Australian Parliament to the PRC, the comprehensive program of visits and meetings related to the CCEA Committee's inquiry into the impacts of climate change on biodiversity.

During the 10-day visit, the committee met with members of the National People's Congress, including members of the Environmental and Resources Protection Committee, as well as officials in several provincial administrations. The committee also held productive meetings with representatives of various industries and organisations with an environmental focus.

Highlights of the visit to the PRC included:

- meetings with representatives of state institutions such as the State Grid Energy Research Institute; the Institute of Environment and Sustainable Development in Agriculture, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; and the Chinese Renewable Energy Industries Association
- meetings with production industries such as Yingli Green Energy, the world's largest producers of solar panels; the Zhonghang Huiten Windpower Equipment Company, in Baoding; and the China Huaneng Beijing Co-generation Power Plant, in Gaobeidian
- opportunities to visit and receive briefings at the Sino-Singapore Eco-City, in Tianjin; the Wuzhong Chengqu Wastewater Treatment Plant, and about the Lake Tai Wastewater Treatment project (supported by AusAID), in Suzhou; the Michell Wool Plant, an Australian-owned wool processing factory, in Jiangsu; various carbon sequestration forestry projects in the Qinghai region; and the recently completed Three Gorges Dam, the world's largest hydro-electric dam project, in Yichang, Hubei Province.

In September 2011, the secretariat of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters supported the committee's visit to Indonesia and Tonga as part of the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Committee Exchange program. In addition to strengthening parliamentary relationships and cooperation with Indonesia and Tonga, the visit enabled committee members to gain an understanding of the democratic developments in these countries and the electoral support that Australia provides. The program included a combination of high-level meetings and opportunities for delegates to hear at first-hand the experiences of individuals of their country's democratic progress. The report of the trip was presented in June 2012. Committee members expressed their appreciation for the support for the trip provided by secretariat staff.

In April and May 2012 the secretariat of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade (JSCFADT) supported a delegation to the UK, Spain, Germany and the United States. The delegation comprised members of the Defence Sub-Committee of the JSCFADT as part of its *Review of the Defence Annual Report 2010–2011* and Senators

from the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade as part of its inquiry into *Procurement procedures for Defence capital projects*. The key aim of the delegation was to visit countries that design, build and maintain/sustain submarine fleets, deal with large scale defence procurement issues, and to visit the project office of the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) and Lockheed Martin. The delegation found that first-hand inspections and briefings by suppliers and US government officials greatly assisted to better understand the dynamics of supply chains and their implications for Australia's ongoing defence capability.

Government responses to committee reports

In 2011–12, the government responded to some important reports from the previous year. In November 2011, the government responded to the June 2011 report by the Standing Committee on Regional Australia, *Of drought and flooding rains: Inquiry into the impact of the Guide to the Murray–Darling Basin Plan in Regional Australia*. The committee's report investigated the impact that the guide had on regional communities and found that there was widespread community recognition that a better balance needed to be achieved between the consumptive use of water and water for the environment. The committee made 21 recommendations. In its response, the government

welcomed the committee's report as part of a process of strengthening community and parliamentary engagement in the reforms. The government agreed, or agreed-in-principle, to a number of measures recommended by the committee to help ensure that the reforms deliver a healthy river system and strong communities. The committee has maintained an ongoing dialogue with the Minister for Water about the government's response to the report and in May 2012 the minister referred a follow-up inquiry for the committee's response on three key outstanding issues. Also in November 2011, the government presented its response to the June 2011 report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, *Doing Time — Time For Doing: Indigenous youth in the criminal justice system*. The committee's report, which received international attention, identified the level of overrepresentation of Indigenous young people in the criminal justice system as a national crisis which all levels of government together need to address. The government accepted (in whole, in part, or in principle) all of the report's 40 recommendations, and its response set out where action had already been taken against specific recommendations and indicated how the government would take action to pursue others.



Photo: The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry holds a public hearing in Grafton, 1 September 2011.

Analysis of performance

Table 9 Committee Office performance indicators 2007–08 to 2011–12

Indicator	2007–08 ^a	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11 ^a	2011–12
Members' satisfaction rates (%) ^b	95	100	100	100	95
Reports, total ^c	51	58	55	42	91 (11)
Staff numbers, Committee Office ^d	61	63	64	63	65

^a 2007–08 and 2010–11 were election years. Committees cease to exist during election breaks (October 2007–February 2008, and July–September 2010).

^b Members' satisfaction rates represent the proportion of members who stated they were 'satisfied', 'highly satisfied' or 'extremely satisfied' with committee services.

^c Oral reports (shown in brackets) may be given in discharge of a reference from the Selection Committee.

^d Staff numbers are based on historical data for 30 June each year.

Committee support

In addition to providing day-to-day support for committees, the department also continues to assist the work of committees through the development of support systems and projects to ensure that support staff are equipped to perform their roles effectively. For example, in 2011–12 the document *Minutes of parliamentary committee meetings — a style manual* was revised and redrafted to reflect current practice. The manual promotes consistency in the style of minutes of proceedings of committees serviced by the department. A consultation session was held with committee support staff in May 2012 and input from the session is expected to feed into the final draft, due for completion later in 2012. Other projects are discussed below.

Records management and archiving

Archiving of committee records continued in conjunction with the department's Records Management Unit. More than three shelf metres of committee records were transferred into the custody of the National Archives during the year. A further two shelf metres of committee records to be retained permanently at Parliament House were sorted, boxed and placed in appropriate on-site storage.

The Records Management Unit continued the project to extend the use of electronic records management to the entire committee office. To date, four committee secretariats and the office of the Clerk Assistant (Committees) have made the transition to electronic records management, with the remaining secretariats to follow in 2012–13.

Digitisation of committee reports

The department completed digitising all House committee reports tabled since 1901. A further 1528 joint committee reports (tabled between the Third and Thirty-ninth Parliaments) have been identified that require digital copies to be uploaded to the Register of Committee Reports. No joint committee reports were tabled prior to this period and digital copies of subsequent reports are uploaded as a matter of course. This project will commence at a later time.

Improving performance

The Committee Office has been involved in several projects aimed at improving its operational efficiency and maintaining a high standard of service to its clients and stakeholders. In addition to the activities discussed in detail below, the Committee Office continued to provide advice and assistance to the Department of Parliamentary Services in relation to its project to redevelop the Parliament of Australia website.

HTML generator

The Committee Office continued to improve the provision of information online by publishing committee reports (including graphics, tables and footnotes) as a web page, in addition to making reports available in portable document format (PDF). In doing so, the department is seeking to comply with the current *Web Content Accessibility Guidelines* (WCAG 2.0) requirements as set down by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). Providing reports in this way enables screen readers to easily translate information for sight-impaired people.

Revisions to the software program obtained from the Department of the Senate and project tools have further increased the efficiency of this project, with significant inroads being made to the backlog of reports provided in both formats.

Reports tabled in the Forty-third Parliament are being accorded priority, followed by the two previous parliaments.

Extension of the Senate Committee Information Database and CommDocs

The department and the Department of the Senate continued to collaborate on a project to roll out the Senate Committee Information Database (SCID) system to committees supported by the department, and the CommDocs system to committees supported by the Department of the Senate. SCID (to be known as the Shared Committee Information Database for departmental staff) assists with the electronic lodgement, management and publishing of committee submissions and associated committee

web pages. CommDocs provides a secure and access-controlled web-based interface for committee secretariat staff to distribute committee documents to committee members.

During 2011–12, one secretariat supporting a House committee continued to trial SCID for one of its inquiries and suggested some enhancements to the system prior to its roll out to additional secretariats, which are expected to occur in late 2012. Once the roll out of the two systems is complete, the next phase of the project is to develop and implement further enhancements to both systems.

Outlook

2012–13 is likely to be another busy year for the Committee Office, with the tempo of activities, particularly for bills inquiries, showing no signs of tapering. The pressures of bills inquiries is leading committees and the secretariats that support them, to try innovative ways of conducting inquiries. New approaches are being tried to gain community input in the often short timeframes for the inquiries. Committees are also likely to increasingly choose to make verbal reports of their findings on legislation to the Chamber, as well as to table written reports for longer inquiries in the more traditional manner.

In the face of expenditure pressures, the Committee Office will continue to maximise the productivity benefits of emerging information technology. This will include ongoing cooperation with the departments of the Senate and Parliamentary Services to develop shared applications and increase the utility of the Parliament House website.

Inter-parliamentary relations

The Australian Parliament's international program is focused on:

- broadening links with other national parliaments
- contributing to the work of international parliamentary organisations
- strengthening parliamentary democracy, particularly in our immediate region.

The program is administered primarily through the International and Community Relations Office, with input from all three parliamentary departments. The office is funded jointly by this department and the Department of the Senate.

Performance summary

A significant number of parliamentary visits were coordinated during the year. Parliamentary strengthening programs were expanded, particularly for Pacific Island parliaments. Projects relating to women in parliament were initiated. More information about the parliament's international program was made available to the community.

Delegations and visits

During 2011–12, the department coordinated 25 official overseas visits, which included bilateral visits to 12 countries, attendance at 9 conferences, workshops and seminars, and 12 other visits (see Appendix 8). There were 12 official visits to Australia by parliamentary delegations from other countries as guests of the Australian Parliament (see Appendix 6), along with 15 other visits (see Appendix 7).

The regional focus of the visits program was maintained. Three parliamentary committee visits to countries in the Asia–Pacific region are now a regular part of the annual visits program, along with an annual parliamentary delegation visit to countries that belong to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Feedback received from parliamentary committees is that they value the opportunity to visit other countries in the region to find out how those countries are dealing with topics being investigated by Australian committees. For example, the House of

Representatives Climate Change Committee was able to gain an insight into the way in which China is dealing with environmental and climate change issues when it visited there in August 2011.

Parliamentary delegations from China, Japan, Thailand and Samoa visited Australia as guests of the Australian Parliament. This year, for the first time, a delegation of parliamentarians from ASEAN countries also visited Australia as guests of the parliament. While previously there have been bilateral visits from countries belonging to ASEAN, this was the first visit by a delegation comprising parliamentarians from the various ASEAN nations. The delegate from Indonesia reflected the overall feedback received on this visit when he wrote:

"I thought the program was spectacular and it was such a great learning experience. In my view the program was successful for ASEAN parliamentarians to gain insight and understanding of Australia and its political system."

The visit to Australia by a delegation from the People's Republic of China in October 2011 included a parliamentary dialogue between Australian and Chinese parliamentarians. This dialogue, which now takes place annually, was introduced through a parliamentary memorandum of understanding between the Australian Parliament and China's National People's Congress.

Support for other parliaments

The Pacific Parliamentary Partnerships program, established with AusAID funding last year, was expanded to include the Cook Islands, Samoa and Vanuatu. As part of the program, a range of capacity-building projects were supported for these parliaments and the parliaments of Kiribati, Tonga and Tuvalu.

Departmental staff were involved in delivering a number of these projects, including:

- community outreach and media training in Tonga
- a parliamentary needs assessment for the Cook Islands
- preparation of a parliamentary procedure and practice manual for Samoa.

A community outreach workshop for parliamentary staff from Pacific Island parliaments was coordinated at Parliament House in Canberra in April 2012.

Pacific Island parliaments were also supported with training and equipment provided through an Education Trust Fund administered by the department on behalf of the Australian Region of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Provision of information technology equipment was again a focus of support this year.

The annual Inter-Parliamentary Study program was conducted in March 2012, attended by senior parliamentary staff from 12 parliaments (four from Asia, one from Africa, one from Australia, two from the Pacific region, two from Europe, one from North America and one from South America). The two-week program allows for detailed study of Australian parliamentary processes and practices. Participants indicated a high level of satisfaction with the program content and arrangements, providing an average rating of 4.5 out of 5 in their evaluations.

The Australian Parliament was invited by the Inter-Parliamentary Union to participate in a needs assessment mission to the new Parliament of Burma (Myanmar). The two week mission took place between late April and early May 2012 and the Director of the International and Community Relations Office participated in the mission. The outcome was a report to the Burmese Parliament, with 60 recommendations relevant to its future development.



Photo: A delegation from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations visits the Australian Parliament, 23 May 2012.

Participation in international parliamentary organisations

Australian parliamentary delegations attended meetings and conferences of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum and the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (for more details see Appendix 8). The department also supported a number of regional events for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

An annual planning workshop was coordinated for Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Australia, part of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. The workshop developed the group's 2012–13 action agenda, which includes a range of projects to connect women in the community with parliament. As part of this work, a young women's forum was coordinated at Parliament House in Canberra in August 2011. (For more details see pages 24–25.)

A regional climate change workshop for Pacific parliaments was held in Queensland in August 2011. The two day workshop was coordinated in association with the Inter-Parliamentary Union and was supported by funding from AusAID. It was attended by parliamentarians from 13 Asia–Pacific countries and included presentations, panel discussions and briefings on climate change mitigation and natural disaster management. Feedback from delegates indicated that the workshop was worthwhile and provided them with valuable information they could use in their countries.

A website was established for the Australian Region of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association to improve communication and information sharing between members of the association at the regional level, and to help inform other regions and the general community about the association's work.

During the year, discussions continued on the future directions of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Support was provided for Australian parliamentarians who attended meetings to discuss the proposed reforms.

Improving performance

Further funding sourced from AusAID, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the Inter-Parliamentary Union enabled an expansion of parliamentary strengthening programs.

The redevelopment of the Parliament of Australia website enabled the web page for the international program to be refreshed. More information, including news stories and video material, is now being included on the web page to better inform the community about the parliament's international work.

Projects such as the 'w.comm' young women's forum helped to connect the community to the work of parliamentary organisations such as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

Outlook

Parliamentary strengthening programs have become an important focus for the International and Community Relations Office and delivery of capacity building projects will remain a priority in the year ahead.

We will continue to provide the community with information on the parliament's international program and seek to better connect the community with that work.

Budget constraints will impact on the number of delegation visits to Australia that can be hosted by the Australian Parliament.

Members' services

The members' services program component comprises the provision of advice, services and support to members in Parliament House and payment of members' salaries and allowances. The department's responsibilities include:

- support for accommodation at Parliament House
- the delivery of office and communication services such as stationery, printing and information technology
- the payment of salaries and allowances.

These responsibilities are undertaken by the Finance Office, the Information Systems and Publishing Office, the People Strategies Office and the Serjeant-at-Arms' office.

In providing these services, the department liaises closely with the Department of Parliamentary Services. That department is responsible for building maintenance and the central information technology services for Parliament House generally, while staff in the Department of the House of Representatives are the primary contacts for members in relation to the provision of services.

The expenditure for members' services in 2011–12 was \$2.72 million. The budget allocation was \$3.38 million. Staff levels, by location, are shown in Appendix 11.

Performance summary

The results of the 2012 members' survey indicated the levels of satisfaction with the work of the areas. The work of the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office in supporting members received a high level of satisfaction with 100 per cent satisfied (87 per cent in 2011) and 89 per cent extremely or highly satisfied (78 per cent in 2011). Once again this year, all members were satisfied with their home pages on the Parliament of Australia website (60 per cent were either extremely or highly satisfied compared with 50 per cent in 2011). In respect of services for salary, electorate allowances and deductions, 100 per cent of members were satisfied (87 per cent in 2011) and 89 per cent were extremely or highly satisfied (58 per cent in 2011).

Address by the President of the United States of America

A significant event managed by the program component was the address by the Honourable Barack Obama, President of the United States of America, on 17 November 2011 to members and senators in the House of Representatives' Chamber. The address was a very high profile parliamentary event and involved many people working behind the scenes to make it a success. The department was responsible for the planning and delivery of key arrangements for the address, including advice to the Speaker and members, overall logistics, media and security. The President's visit to Parliament House created intense media and public interest and required careful planning, which was achieved through coordination with parliamentary colleagues in the Senate, Department of Parliamentary Services and the Australian Federal Police, officers of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, as well as our contacts in the US Embassy, White House and the US Secret Service.

Other highlights

A high priority for the program component was the provision of advice and support to the Speaker and his office in relation to control and management of the precincts and ceremonial and other events at Parliament House. We worked closely with colleagues in the Department of the Senate and the Department of Parliamentary Services on these matters. We also worked in partnership with parliamentary departmental colleagues to deliver major projects, such as physical security and information technology enhancements. Another important priority was to represent the department and support the interests of the House and members on a range of inter-parliamentary committees and boards providing whole-of-parliament governance.

The department assumed responsibility for the payment of additional salary to ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries from December 2011. The transfer of responsibility was recommended by the Williams Report on the review of the administration of parliamentary entitlements, and accepted by the Special Minister of State. The result is that ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries are paid their base and additional salary components by a single agency.

The review of media arrangements conducted by members of the Joint Committee on the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings continued during the year. Roundtable discussions were held with parliamentary officials, senators and members and representatives of the media. New rules for media-related activity in Parliament House and its precincts are expected to be finalised in 2012–13.

Information and communication technology projects to achieve innovation and efficiencies through the development and replacement of many of the support systems for the Chamber, committees and members' services continued. All projects proceeded after development of detailed business cases.

On behalf of the presiding officers, the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office organised a reception to commemorate the 111th anniversary of the Australian Parliament, and mark the annual meeting of the Association of Former Members of the Parliament of Australia, on 9 May 2012.

During the year, the presiding officers agreed that the focus for activities to mark the 25th anniversary of the opening of Parliament House on 9 May 2013, would be the launch of a book on the commissioned art and craft work in Parliament House and an Open Day. The parliamentary departments engaged Pamilie Berg Consulting Pty Ltd to write, design and document the book for publication.

Services and advice

Media services

The presiding officers' *Guidelines for Filming and Photography and General Media Rules in Parliament House and its Precincts* are administered by the Serjeant-at-Arms and the Usher of the Black Rod. This includes:

- responding to requests for filming and photography which fall outside the guidelines
- liaison with the media associated with events
- considering instances of non-compliance with the guidelines.

In relation to breaches of the guidelines, the Serjeant-at-Arms wrote during the year to editors of major daily newspapers, to the head of a party secretariat, to the President of the Parliamentary Press Gallery and to individual photographers. The instances of non-compliance were reported to the Joint Committee on the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings for consideration as part of the media review.

The three main events during the year which required negotiation of agreed arrangements with the media were:

- the visit by the US President

- the introduction of an extended Speaker's procession to the Chamber on sitting Tuesdays
- the ballot for the leadership of the Labor Party.

The Deputy Serjeant-at-Arms was primarily responsible for this work, which was high profile and successful.

As mentioned, there was a review of media arrangements in Parliament House by members of the Joint Committee on the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings. The department made a submission to the review, participated in a roundtable discussion with committee members and provided comments on draft revised rules for media related activity in Parliament House and its precincts. The Deputy Serjeant-at-Arms was Secretary to the review.

Information services

To help keep members and their staff informed about developments in the House, five editions of the members' bulletin, *House Update*, were published during the year. In addition, the annual series of briefings on procedural and other developments in the House was continued. Seven briefings were held during the year.

The department continued to operate its drop-in centre every sitting Tuesday to enable members and their staff to get information or provide feedback on any of the services provided by the department. During the year, the centre operated during all 18 sitting Tuesdays, and 17 members or their staff used the service. As in previous years, the sessions were staffed by senior departmental staff members with a representative of the department responsible for electorate office IT—which was initially the Department of Finance and Deregulation and later in the year, the Department of Parliamentary Services—invited to attend to increase the value of the service to members. Any comments relating to services provided by the Department of Parliamentary Services were referred to the appropriate office of that department.

Accommodation services

The Serjeant-at-Arms' Office manages accommodation, capital works and maintenance services within the House of Representatives' wing.

During the year, the office arranged 10 office relocations as a result of changes in the ministry and to office holders. There were 491 requests to supply and move furniture, 58 less than the previous year in which there was a high requirement for furniture changes as an election year. All tasks were performed to agreed timeframes and standards, and to the satisfaction of party whips and individual members.

We contributed to several major security projects within the department including the upgrade to the House of Representatives security entry configuration, security gates on the entrance and exits to the car-parks, security film on windows, and the emergency isolation of the House of Representatives Chamber. Door actuators were fitted to the main entry and link-way doors to improve access and comply with *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* standards.



Photo: Election of the Speaker, the Hon. Peter Slipper MP, 24 November 2011.

Photo supplied by Auspic.

We also contributed to several accommodation projects with the department, including the ongoing lighting upgrade.

Replacement of office furniture

During the year, the department and the Department of the Senate commissioned the GHD Group Pty Ltd to review the business case for replacement of office furniture for departmental staff and staff of members. The furniture was some 25 years old, and catered for an office environment of the late 1980s. GHD supported furniture replacement as there was insufficient furniture stock; most of the existing furniture was not designed for current computer configurations and the furniture was restricting the flexibility of office layouts and reconfiguration. The departments accepted the report.

The House Standing Committee on Appropriations and Administration was briefed on the project. A project to replace the furniture of departmental and office holders staff in high use members' suites subsequently commenced, with the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office set up as the trial office. *The Parliament House Office Furniture Style Guide* provides the basis to ensure design consistency.

Maintenance, access and transport services

Maintenance requests are coordinated by the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office, and include emergency, routine and periodic work. During the year, 353 emergency requests were processed; all were attended to within five minutes of receipt. Routine maintenance requests for repairs or alterations to suites or common areas totalled 174. The pre-emptive maintenance program actioned by the office avoids a large number of emergency requests, particularly by members returning after a break. One major refurbishment was undertaken which involved redecoration, replacing carpet and refurbishing furniture. Sixteen ensuite refurbishments were undertaken in members' suites.

There were 202 requests for assistance with telephone faults, relocations and allocations of telephone numbers. Faults reported were referred to telephone support within five minutes of receipt, and telephone support officers resolved faults within an agreed time period.

The Serjeant-at-Arms' Office approved 914 requests for access to suites and general circulation areas for general maintenance and services provided by the Department of Parliamentary Services. This reflects the continued high level of maintenance and project activity in Parliament House.

During the year, the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office responded to 275 filming or photography requests and dealt with 541 proposals to use the facilities at Parliament House. Requests for filming and photography during functions and events are included with proposals to use facilities.

The Serjeant-at-Arms' Office continued to coordinate transport services for members, including managing the shuttle service on behalf of the Department of Finance and Deregulation during sitting weeks. In 2011–12 there were 12,165 bookings with a 98.9 per cent success rate. This figure is consistent with last year's booking number and reflects the continued higher usage over previous years.

Parliament House Security

The Serjeant-at-Arms represents the department on the Security Management Board. The Board is established pursuant to section 65A of the *Parliamentary Service Act 1999* to provide advice to the presiding officers on security policy and the management of security measures for Parliament House. Matters considered by the Board during the year included:

- testing and revising the Continuity of Parliament Plan. The Parliamentary Precincts Regulations 2011 were made on 29 September 2011. The Regulations provide for the legal framework for the control and management of the parliamentary precincts to be applied to an alternative location in the event that Parliament House is unavailable, for example, due to an earthquake, terrorist attack or other major event
- major physical security enhancement projects
- the development of a whole-of-parliament protective security policy
- enhancements to the security of the parliamentary computing network.

Police access to the parliamentary precincts

Prior to members of the Australian Federal Police (AFP) attending the precincts, the AFP Officer-in-charge at Parliament House seeks the permission of the Presiding officers, through the Serjeant-at-Arms and the Usher of the Black Rod. There were many requests during the year—frequently daily. Most requests were for attendance by the Police Protective Liaison unit, in response to requests to the AFP by members and senators, mainly ministers, for offensive communications to be followed up.

Security screening

Guests of government and parliament are subject to automatic exemption from security screening on entry to Parliament House. Approvals for any other exemptions from security screening are jointly made by the Usher of the Black Rod and the Serjeant-at-Arms. During the year, exemptions from security screening were approved for 37 groups or individuals (20 in 2010–11).

Protests and assemblies

The presiding officers have the discretion to approve or not approve the conduct of protests, and assemblies within the precincts. During the year, as in other years, there were many such assemblies and activities particularly during sitting weeks. Major assemblies, which involved extensive preparatory and other work by the Australian Federal Police and the parliamentary departments, were the Convoy of No Confidence in August 2011, a number of large rallies during the year by the Consumer and Taxpayer Association, and a march by Aboriginal protesters from the Aboriginal tent embassy on 27 January 2012.

Heritage Advisory Board

The presiding officers approved a new Heritage Management Framework for Parliament House during the year. The framework was developed by the Department of Parliamentary Services. The department was consulted and provided comments on draft documents.

As a key element of the new framework, the Heritage Advisory Board was established during the year. The primary function of the board is to oversee and

provide advice to the presiding officers on heritage management of Parliament House. Additionally, the board is required to oversee detailed heritage issues for Parliament House. The members of the board are the Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services (Chair), the Serjeant-at-Arms and the Usher of the Black Rod. The board met twice during the year, in May and June 2012. At the second meeting, the building's architect, Mr Romaldo Giurgola, AO, and former director of Mitchell/ Giurgola and Thorp Architects, Mr Harold Guida, were invited to brief the board.

Information and communication technology review

During the year the presiding officers requested the Parliamentary Service Commissioner to undertake a review of the information and communication technology (ICT) for the parliament. Mr Mick Roche was commissioned to conduct the review. The review examined the management and delivery of ICT services and equipment to the parliament, each House, committees of the parliament, members, senators, their staff and the parliamentary departments. It considered ways in which provision of ICT services to the parliament could be enhanced and made more efficient and effective. The department supported the review through provision of advice and participation in the tri-partite steering committee and liaison group. The report of the review is due early in the next financial year, and it is anticipated that there will be implications for each of the parliamentary departments.

Software and hardware services

As mentioned, projects to develop and replace many of the ICT support systems for the Chamber, committees and members' services continued. These systems included the Table Office's document production system (see pages 22–23), the Procedural Records System (see page 22), the Senate Centralised Information Database (see pages 34–35) and the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office bookings systems for school visits, galleries and committee rooms (see also pages 26–27).

The bookings systems project encompasses existing 'venue management' systems used by three parliamentary departments. During the year, a request for tender was issued, and tender evaluation progressed. It is anticipated that the new bookings systems will achieve many efficiencies. For this department, this will be particularly for schools' bookings as schools will be able to make their bookings online. The booking systems project is expected to be completed next financial year.

Further enhancements to the petitions database were made during the reporting period. A project to develop an online petition facility was commenced and is expected to be available in the next financial year. Implementation will be subject to agreement by the House to electronic petitioning.

A new standard software environment, which includes Microsoft Windows 7 and Office 2010 was developed by the Department of Parliamentary Services for use by all parliamentary network users. In preparation for the rollout of this environment, staff in the department carried out considerable testing and made modifications to some applications to ensure that all departmental applications would work correctly. The new software environment has been rolled out to many departmental users and has begun to be rolled out to PCs in the Parliament House offices of members and their staff.

Implementation of the electronic records management system, e-Trim, continued during the year. Additional committee secretariats and the office of the Clerk Assistant (Committees) now use the system (see page 34).

During the year, there was further investigation into multifunction devices to replace existing printers and fax machines. A suitable device was chosen from the Major Office Machines whole-of-government panel. This device was tested against the network faxing software solution. In the next financial year, there will be a rollout of multi-function devices to all members' offices in Parliament House, which will give greater functionality to members' offices such as photocopying, scanning and the ability to receive faxes via email.

Internet and intranet services

The project to redesign the Parliament of Australia website continued, with the new website launched in February 2012. The project was managed by the Department of Parliamentary Services in conjunction with this department and the Department of the Senate. Substantial work by staff from the two Chamber departments was necessary to update the content and automate publishing of some of the content, particularly the committee information. Training was provided for staff involved in publishing material to the website. Some enhancements, such as the photo array, were developed and deployed on the site.

A project by the Department of Parliamentary Services to develop and deploy additional website enhancements is underway; the department and the Department of the Senate will be involved in this project. As part of the website enhancement project, collaborative work commenced with the Department of the Senate to share some of the information technology support systems for committees. (See pages 34–35.) System modifications to enable the use of relevant systems across the two committee areas have started and will be finalised in the next financial year. In addition to the efficiencies already gained through the secure portal for committee documents (CommDocs) the intention is that this work will streamline web publishing and enable the online lodgement of committee inquiry submissions.

New intranet sites—RepsNet and the Members Services Portal—were deployed in October 2011. These sites have been developed on a Sharepoint 2010 platform. Since deployment, publishing training and support has been provided to staff with publishing responsibilities on the sites. Further enhancements will be undertaken in the next financial year, specifically the development and release of a Travel Wiki for staff use.

Printing

The department's in-house printing service produced of the order of 4 million impressions in 2011–12 (compared with 2.8 million in 2010–11). The increased volume was as a result of the heightened activity in a mid-year of the parliamentary cycle and the increased size of Chamber documents. In addition, more committee reports were printed in-house.

The printing service continued providing the Valet Service to the department's multi-function device (MFD) fleet. This service, which includes regular maintenance, has resulted in a reliable fleet with few service outages.

Messenger services

The Serjeant-at-Arms' Office provided courier and mail services, as well as Chamber support for the House of Representatives and the Federation Chamber, in accordance with its service charter, despite an increase in the sitting hours of both Chambers. Some flexibility was achieved by utilising staff who undertake both messenger and office-based duties. The attendant supervisor, Ms Cheryl Lane, retired in March. On her last sitting day, statements in recognition of Cheryl's service were made to a full House by the Speaker, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, the Chief Government Whip and the Chief Opposition Whip and three other members.

Parliamentary assistants program

The parliamentary assistants program, managed by the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office, entered its twelfth year. Parliamentary assistants are university students who perform the duties of messengerial attendants for an average of 10 hours per week; rosters are planned around student commitments and the requirements of the House of Representatives.

Seven positions were offered this year: three existing parliamentary assistants and four new students were appointed. The successful applicants came from metropolitan and country New South Wales, Canberra and Victoria, and all studied at universities in Canberra. Former parliamentary assistants were also engaged in the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office to work on the front counter, transport and other members' services.

Members' salaries

All processing of members' salaries and entitlements by the People Strategies Office was in accordance with legislation and administrative decisions. As mentioned, in the 2012 members' survey, 89 per cent of members were extremely or highly satisfied (58 per cent in the 2011 survey), and in total 100 per cent were satisfied with services in relation to their base salary, electorate allowances and deductions (87 per cent in the 2011

survey). Annual expenditure on members' salaries and other entitlements was \$35.022 million during 2011–12, an increase of \$7.003 million over the \$28.019 million spent in 2010–11. All performance targets were met during the year, with all salary variations completed when required and with 99 per cent accuracy. The cost per transaction rose slightly, from \$6.95 to \$7.15.

From December 2011, the People Strategies Office commenced paying the salaries of ministers and parliamentary secretaries. The transfer of the payment of the salaries of ministers and parliamentary secretaries from the Ministerial and Parliamentary Services Branch, Department of Finance and Deregulation was the result of a recommendation of the Review of the Administration of Parliamentary Entitlements conducted by Ms Helen Williams, AO.

In December 2011, the Remuneration Tribunal published the *Initial Report of the Review of the Remuneration of Members of Parliament*. The review was undertaken after the Remuneration Tribunal's jurisdiction was expanded by the *Remuneration and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2011*. The review considered that the base salary of a member of parliament should be \$185,000. The Tribunal's decision was informed by an assessment of the work of backbenchers. This form of assessment was recommended by the Committee for the Review of Parliamentary Entitlements. The report also advised that the Manager of Opposition Business and shadow ministers would receive an Office Holders Allowance.

Following the passage of legislation to amend the *Members of Parliament (Life Gold Pass) Act 2002* and to disconnect the link of an additional pension to the additional salaries of parliamentary office holders and ministers, the Remuneration Tribunal determined the increase to members' base salary with effect 15 March 2012.

The increase was processed by the People Strategies Office in March 2012. The additional salary of office holders was also adjusted in accordance with the formula outlined in the Remuneration Tribunal's Determination 2012–03.

Improving performance

The focus during 2011–2012 was on achieving results. It was a busy year for the program component with a number of external factors impacting, as well as ongoing advisory, operational and project responsibilities. Strategies to enhance and sustain performance levels included planning, people management, relationship building, innovation and review. Performance was sustained at a high standard and was again highly dependent on the professionalism of staff.

The department continues to work closely with the departments of the Senate and Parliamentary Services on a range of matters and on various inter-departmental boards and groups. (See pages 48–49.) This collaboration is important to ensure that strategic priorities are addressed effectively.

Outlook

In 2012–13 the department will continue providing advice and services of a high standard to support members in Parliament House and to pay their salaries and entitlements. It is anticipated that activity levels during the year will be at levels consistent with a final year of the parliamentary cycle, and that the extended sitting hours of the Forty-third Parliament will continue to affect workloads.

It is anticipated that important priorities for the member services' program component during the year will include:

- supporting the implementation of parliamentary and departmental IT projects—including the website enhancement project; the electronic records management system; and redevelopment of Chamber, committee and members' services systems
- responding to the recommendations of the ICT review
- the completion of the review of media arrangements applying in Parliament House, and implementation of the revised rules
- processing any further determinations made by the Remuneration Tribunal in relation to members' salaries and allowances

- a request for tender for new office furniture for the furniture replacement project and roll out of the new furniture
- rolling out new multi-function devices in members' suites
- finalisation, with parliamentary departmental colleagues, of a whole-of-parliament protective security policy
- participation in the Heritage Advisory Board, including further development of policies and frameworks for heritage management at Parliament House
- further development of capability within the program, including through the documentation of systems and processes and the use of supplementary and back up resources
- activities to mark the 25th anniversary of Parliament House and the centenary of Canberra, in 2013.

The department will continue to ensure that whole-of-parliament governance arrangements operate effectively.



Photo: Members and senators in the House of Representatives Chamber to hear an address by the Honourable Barack Obama, President of the United States of America, 17 November 2011.

Photo supplied by Auspic.