



Overviews

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Clerk's review

This is my first review as Clerk of the House. As I did not take up office until 1 January 2014, my review takes in the last six months of my predecessor, Bernard Wright, and my first six months as Clerk. The period also includes the transition from the Forty-third to the Forty-fourth Parliament. Such transitions are always significant. This one was even more significant than usual for a number of reasons: there was a change of government, there was a significant turnover of members (42 new members), and the House moved from minority back to majority government.

Wrapping up the Forty-third Parliament

The Forty-third Parliament concluded on 5 August 2013, bringing to an end one of the more challenging and dynamic periods in the department's history. While previous annual reports have referred to the challenges presented by minority government, it is useful to review some of the key achievements of this period.

Private members' business gained greater precedence in the work of the House during the period. As a result, the department's staff were required to adapt quickly to the new environment and assist members in drafting bills, parliamentary amendments and motions. It is notable that in 2012–13 (the final full year of minority government), 30 private members' bills were introduced, compared to six in 2008–09.

Chamber support staff assisted with the introduction of new standing orders and new procedures and practices to reflect them. This work demonstrated the flexibility of our staff and their capacity to adapt quickly to new procedures and standing orders.

In addition to the procedural changes affecting the House, the work of parliamentary committees also changed significantly with minority government. The number of bills referred to committees reached unprecedented levels, which resulted in the adoption of innovative approaches to supporting these inquiries. In the Forty-third Parliament, the House Selection Committee referred 188 bills to committees supported by staff of the department. In contrast, in the Forty-second Parliament, only six bills were referred to committees supported by the department. The massive increase in bills inquiries in the Forty-third Parliament resulted in a significant increase in workload and changes in the style of work required. Most bills inquiries were urgent, often needing to be completed in less than two weeks. At the same time, many committees continued with their conventional policy and scrutiny inquiries. Again, it is pleasing to report how staff rose to this challenge and found effective ways to support the large number of bills inquiries while at the same time continuing to support standard committee operations.

In summary, the department's support to the work of the House and committees during the Forty-third Parliament was notable in its demonstration of the capacity of departmental staff to meet change head on and achieve our goals.

Transitioning to the Forty-fourth Parliament

In the transition to the Forty-fourth Parliament, the department's staff maintained the same level of professionalism and vigour as in the Forty-third. Soon after the dissolution of the Forty-third Parliament, staff began preparations for a seminar for new members on 15 and 16 October 2013. The seminar provided new members with an overview of the work in the House and the Federation Chamber, focusing on consideration of legislation, private members' business, and opportunities to hold the executive to account. Members also received information on the work of committees and the parliament's international and community engagement. In line with the department's collaborative approach, staff from the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS) and the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) were included in the seminar program so that they could explain their role and services to members.

The first session of the Forty-fourth Parliament was held on Tuesday 12 November 2013. The opening of a new parliament features many traditional procedures, but it is underpinned by detailed and tested administrative processes that ensure the day runs smoothly. Departmental staff carefully planned the events scheduled to occur in the House, and also liaised with staff from the Department of the Senate and DPS on the wider parliamentary arrangements.

The new Speaker, the Hon Bronwyn Bishop MP, was elected and took the chair on 12 November. The department provided her with a detailed briefing paper on all aspects of the department's operations. The Hon Bruce Scott MP was elected Deputy Speaker and was also provided with ongoing briefings and support.

With the commencement of the new parliament, the department's principal function of supporting the proceedings of the House, the Federation Chamber and committees began in earnest. The department provided advice and support on the drafting of new standing orders and held briefing sessions for chamber staff on the application of the new procedures. It is noteworthy that many staff who work as clerks and deputy clerks in the House and Federation Chamber perform these functions in addition to their main work in other areas of the department. Preparation for these positions is mostly through on-the-job training, which is supplemented with coaching and regular debriefing sessions that elaborate on and explain procedural points of note occurring during sitting fortnights.

Staff in the Table Office quickly adapted to the new standing orders and procedures of the Forty-fourth Parliament. During the budget sittings, the Table Office implemented the first phase of the new Table Offices Production System (TOPS). Phase 2 of the project, which involves building further functionality, has commenced. TOPS is a joint project involving the Department of the Senate with assistance from DPS. The principal aim of the project is to deliver a system that efficiently creates, manages and publishes chamber documents in both electronic and hard-copy forms.

The legislative drafting support for members continued at a steady pace. The department assisted members with the production of private members' motions, second-reading amendments to bills, detailed amendments to bills, and private members' bills. While the demand for these services in the Forty-fourth Parliament has not reached the levels seen in the Forty-third Parliament, the demand was still significant. We are pleased that we have continued our arrangement with the Office of Parliamentary Counsel for the provision of a legislative drafter to assist with drafting support.

House and joint committees were quickly established. Most committees scheduled their first meetings in early December and commenced their forward work programs. The House Standing Committee on Economics, for example, resolved to conduct a public hearing with the Reserve Bank of Australia on 18 December 2013. Most committees had commenced inquiries by February 2014 and were actively engaging with the community. Our staff continued to provide effective procedural, research and administrative support to these inquiries.

The Committee Office has been quick to embrace enhanced information technology. The Shared Committee Information Database (SCID) was deployed to the Committee Office on 2 April 2014. In the long term, SCID will deliver productivity savings and improved services. To support this initiative, the department has been conducting a rolling program of SCID training for committee staff. The department has also been working with the Department of the Senate on a new venue management system. The new system provides an online booking function for visiting schools taking part in parliamentary education activities, as well as for committee rooms within Parliament House. The new system will be fully operational by the end of the next financial year.

People

The development of our staff has continued to be a key focus. As noted earlier, during the unpredictable work environment of the Forty-third Parliament, staff faced new challenges and delivered admirably. But we cannot afford to be complacent. We continue to invest in the training and development of our staff, which our staff appreciate, as shown in staff feedback and annual staff surveys.

A key development initiative has been the delivery of an integrated leadership training package to our senior executive service, executive level officers and parliamentary service levels four to six. This training has focused on self-knowledge, identification of strengths and weaknesses, and the opportunity to learn and embrace contemporary leadership skills and techniques.

In 2014 a formalised rotation policy for senior staff was endorsed. Previously, rotation within the department was based on voluntary movement. While this was adequate, the department's Executive and staff supported the view that greater outcomes could be achieved through a formalised policy. By having greater opportunities for rotation, staff will be exposed to new challenges and will be able to increase their operational knowledge and experience. Internal job rotation is part of our strategic

approach to increase leadership capacity within the department and to nurture our leaders, to ensure that they are well placed to deliver appropriate support and leadership in the longer term.

During the election period we supported a small number of staff to work on secondment to other government agencies and academic institutions. The program provided these staff members with the opportunity to gain exposure to the work of other organisations and then utilise that experience in our department.

During March 2014, the department sent a senior officer on a two-week development program in the United Kingdom Parliament. This provided a valuable opportunity to compare and contrast the work of the House of Commons with the level of support provided to the House of Representatives.

Capability

The department, like many Commonwealth agencies, is facing a significant budgetary challenge in future years as we operate within an increasingly tight budgetary framework. In addressing this challenge, we will carefully monitor our expenditure and seek to identify savings while not compromising our ability to deliver our principal functions. It is essential that the House of Representatives and its committees be sufficiently funded and supported to fulfil their key roles of legislating and holding the executive to account. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Appropriations and Administration, chaired by the Speaker, plays an important role in ensuring that the resourcing of the House of Representatives is sufficient and its competing needs are effectively represented to the executive government.

Collaboration

Constructive and effective collaboration with other parliamentary departments, public agencies, academic institutions and industry has increasingly been a focal point of our operations. We regularly liaise with state and territory parliaments about developments in parliamentary administration, procedure and practice.

The department has continued its positive approach to collaboration with the Department of the Senate, DPS and the PBO. We meet with the chief executives of these departments quarterly, and at other times, to discuss ongoing operations and areas of mutual interest. Staff at operational levels also meet regularly to advance common needs.

The People Strategies Office has delivered payroll services not only to our department but also to the PBO, and to DPS up until January 2014 when DPS elected to discontinue this arrangement and deliver the service in-house. As part of this transition, four staff members were transferred to DPS. I would like to commend the staff in the People Strategies Office for their capacity to deliver these services efficiently and effectively. They have demonstrated that significant economies of scale could be achieved.

On the international front, the department continues to provide support for training and capacity-building in the Pacific region. I am pleased to note that the Pacific Parliamentary Partnerships program continued in 2013–14. As noted in last year's annual report, five years of funding has been secured for the Pacific Women's Parliamentary Partnership Project.

Outlook

In the coming year, we will continue to focus on strengthening our capacity to deliver high-quality services by developing the skills and knowledge of our staff and improving our systems and processes.

Through our formalised rotation policy for senior staff, there will be greater opportunity to broaden our staff's experience and deepen their knowledge of the department's operations. This will be rewarding for staff and, at the same time, make the department more resilient and effective and build its capacity. In addition, there will be an increased emphasis on leadership training so that staff have the knowledge and confidence to take on more responsibility.

Another priority is to continue our commitment to effective collaboration with the other parliamentary departments. It is essential that there be a high level of effective collaboration between the parliamentary departments so that we can meet parliament-wide challenges and continue to deliver the high-quality services that are expected of us. The Department of the House of Representatives is committed to this goal.

The department is partway through the life of its current enterprise agreement, which nominally expires on 30 September 2015. In early 2015 and no later than four months before the nominal expiry date of the current agreement, the department will commence preparations and negotiations for a new enterprise agreement.

We will also continue to embrace new technology and systems as a way of enabling us to deliver high-quality services as efficiently as possible. We will seek to implement fully the Table Offices Production System, the Shared Committee Information Database and the venue management system.

On the international front, the department will continue its parliamentary strengthening programs and welcomes the establishment of two new projects under the Pacific Parliamentary Partnerships program to support ongoing development of the Papua New Guinea Parliament and the re-establishment of the Fiji Parliament.

As noted in previous annual reports, increased pressure on our funding is likely to continue. We have experienced these pressures before and will meet the ongoing challenges with confidence in our ability to deliver savings through flexible and innovative responses.

In conclusion and on behalf of the department, I take this opportunity to note the retirement of the former Clerk of the House, Mr Bernard Wright. Mr Wright served the department with distinction for more than 40 years, serving as Clerk from December 2009 to January 2014. He is highly regarded by staff and members, both past and present.



The Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Hon Bronwyn Bishop MP, accompanied by the Clerk, Deputy Clerk, Serjeant-at-Arms, and Clerk Assistant (Table) at the opening of the Forty-fourth Parliament. Photo: David Foote DPS/Auspic.

Departmental overview

Purpose

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

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

Role and functions

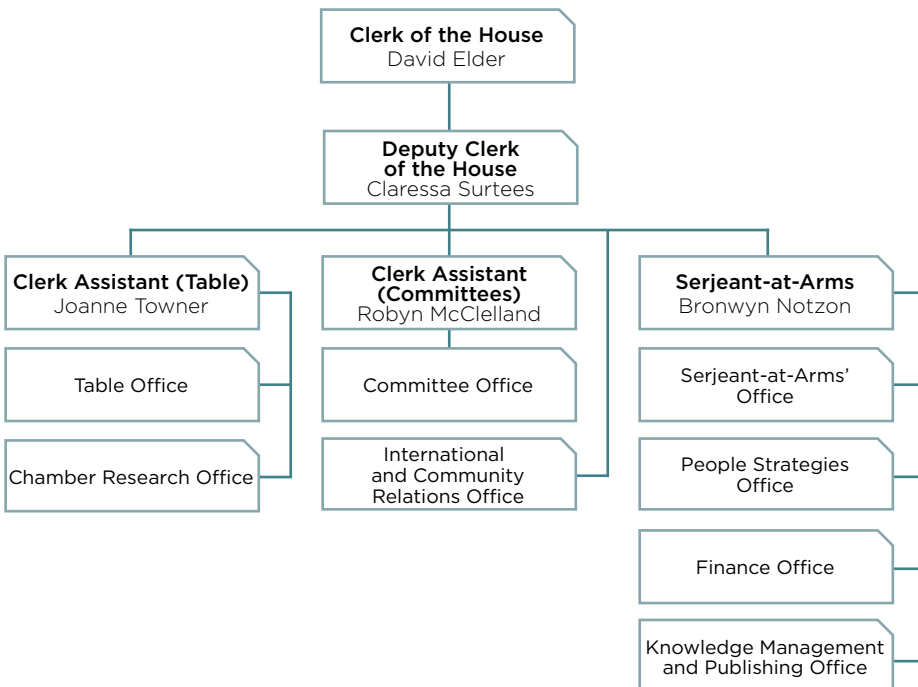
The *Parliamentary Service Act 1999* provides the legal framework for a nonpartisan Parliamentary Service to serve the Australian Parliament. The Act establishes this department and the other three parliamentary departments—the Department of the Senate, the Department of Parliamentary Services and the Parliamentary Budget Office. The Act provides for the management, leadership and responsibilities of Parliamentary Service employees as well as the functions of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the Parliamentary Service Commissioner and the Parliamentary Service Merit Protection Commissioner. The other parliamentary departments report separately to the parliament.

During 2013–14, the department continued in its role as a service department for the parliament, supporting the work of the House of Representatives, including its members in their parliamentary work, its committees and some joint committees comprising members of both Houses. The department also maintained its focus on providing assistance to the House and the parliament in their relationships within Australia and internationally.

Organisational structure

The department is managed by its Executive, comprising the Clerk, Deputy Clerk, Clerk Assistant (Table), Clerk Assistant (Committees) and Serjeant-at-Arms. Their work is carried out through eight offices. Figure 1 shows the department's organisational structure at 30 June 2014.

Figure 1 Organisational structure at 30 June 2014



Outcome and program structure

The department has one outcome:

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

The department has two programs. **Program 1: Other departmental** contains five components, and **Program 2: Administered** supports one activity.

Program 1: Other departmental

- **Program component 1.1: *Chamber and Federation Chamber***

Departmental activities:

Resources supporting the effective operation of the Chamber and Federation Chamber of the House of Representatives.

- **Program component 1.2: *Community relations and awareness***

Departmental activities:

Resources supporting the provision of services to increase community understanding of, and interaction with, the work of the House of Representatives and the Australian Parliament.

Revenue from other sources (s. 31).

- **Program component 1.3: *Committee services***

Departmental activities:

Resources supporting the House of Representatives and some joint committees in fulfilling their role in the parliamentary consideration of policy and legislation and the scrutiny of government.

- **Program component 1.4: *Inter-parliamentary relations***

Departmental activities:

Provision of advice and support to facilitate the conduct of the parliament's international and regional affairs.

Revenue from other sources (s. 31).

- **Program component 1.5: *Members' services and corporate support***

Departmental activities:

Provision of advice, services and support to members in Parliament House.

Payment of members' salaries and allowances.

Provision of advice, services and support to the department.

Provision of limited information technology support, financial and human resource management, and office services.

Revenue from other sources (s. 31).

Program 2: Administered

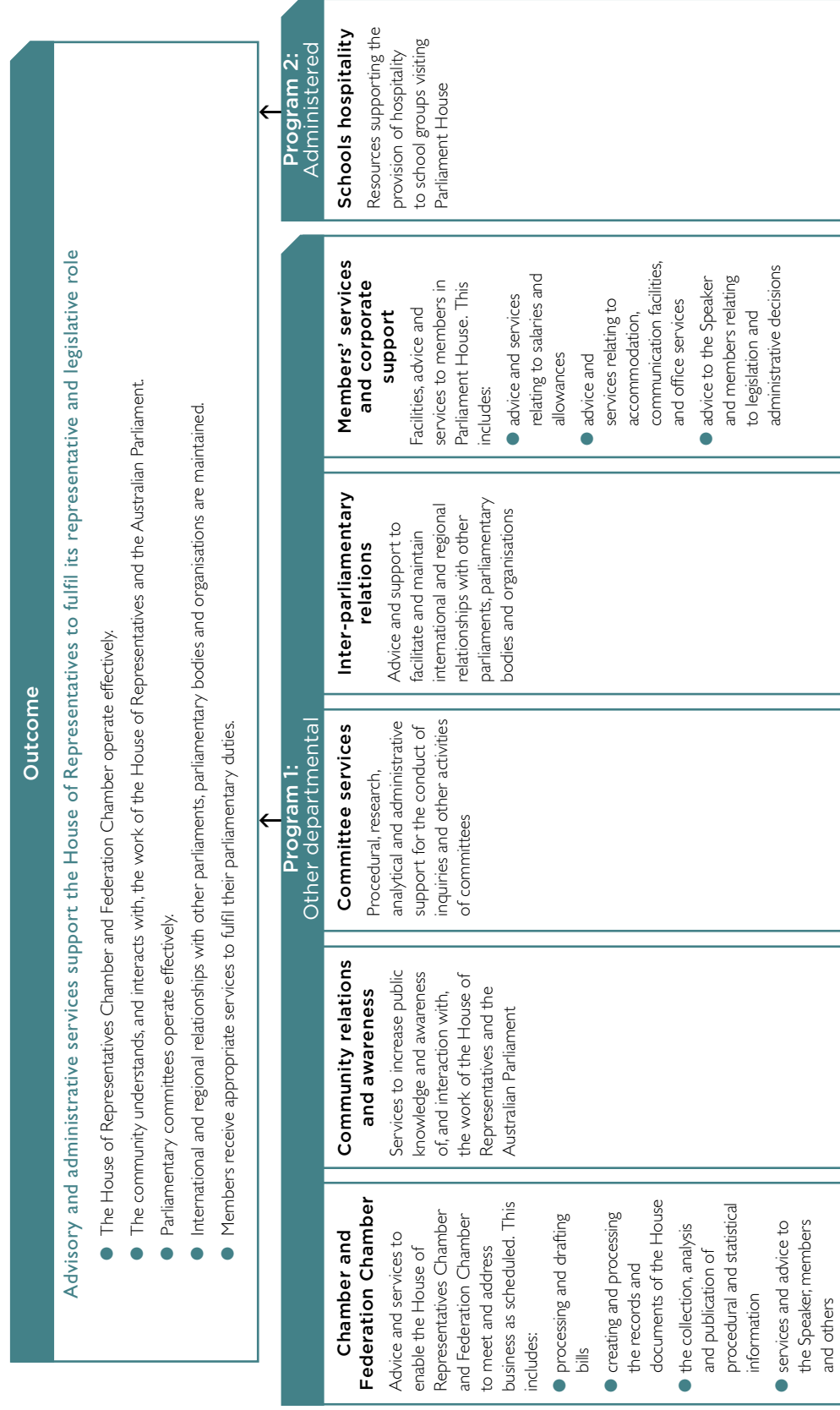
- **Program component 2.1: *Schools hospitality***

Administered activity:

Resources supporting the provision of hospitality to school groups visiting Parliament House.

Figure 2 shows the outcome and program structure of the department.

Figure 2 Outcome and program structure at 30 June 2014



Financial performance

The department ended the 2013–14 financial year reporting a surplus attributable to the Australian Government of \$0.152 million. The same amount of surplus was recorded in 2012–13. Due to the dissolution of the Forty-third Parliament and subsequent commencement of the Forty-fourth Parliament in November 2013, this small surplus reflects a reduction in expenses associated with committees, chamber activities and support for members for the first five months of the reporting period.

Through the 2013–14 Budget, the department was able to secure a small amount of additional funding to support two new short-term joint select committees and an extension of funding for support for parliamentary reform. New ongoing administered funding as an expense measure to provide modest hospitality to schools groups visiting Parliament House was also secured.

While this additional funding alleviated the immediate need to find further efficiencies and savings, wage and salary expense trends have remained static. The reduction in the department’s own-source income is attributable to the conclusion of some funding agreements under the Pacific Parliamentary Partnerships program and the reduction in service provision income associated with the discontinuation of DPS payroll services.

The department’s statement of financial position continues to remain healthy with adequate cash reserves available to fund planned asset replacement. The transfer of the ICT function to DPS is reflected in the statement of changes in equity. Assets totalling \$0.596 million were transferred to DPS, and current and prior year appropriation (represented as cash reserves) totalling \$1.327 million was returned to the budget and reappropriated to DPS. This resulted in a baseline reduction to the department’s operating appropriation of \$0.779 million and a reduction to the department’s capital budget of \$0.407 million.

In the coming financial years, the department will need to closely monitor expense levels. The impact of the increase in the efficiency dividend to 2.5 per cent until 2016–17 has resulted in a significant decline in real terms of the department’s appropriation. Over many years the department has implemented efficiencies and savings measures in order to remain within budget; however, as we approach the middle year of the parliamentary cycle, traditionally the peak for activity levels and increased expenditure, reductions in services will very likely be needed to maintain financial sustainability.

Figure 3 Financial performance, 2009–10 to 2013–14

