



# Part 1

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*View of the House of Representatives Chamber from the Table.*

*Image: Penny Bradfield, Auspic/DPS.*

# Clerk's review

## Overview

2018–19 was an eventful year for the department, with the complex and ever-changing political environment colouring the work we do. The significant issues and developments for the department during 2018–19 can be characterised as relating to the political environment, and departmental capability, innovation and collaboration.



## The political environment

The role our department plays in uncertain circumstances is vital in supporting the parliamentary institution as it comes under great pressure and strain. In 2018–19 uncertainty related to ructions caused by section 44(i) of the Australian Constitution, changes in political leadership and ministerial roles, loss of a government majority in the House, and the 2019 general election.

Early in the reporting period, on 28 July 2018, five by-elections were held in four states. Four of these by-elections related to questions arising around members' qualifications under section 44(i) of the Australian Constitution, and a further by-election was caused by the resignation of one member for unrelated reasons. This was the greatest number of by-elections held on the one date since Federation. Following the declaration of polls, the department had a role in welcoming back returning members, and welcoming one new member. Subsequently, a further by-election was held following the resignation of the former member for Wentworth, and the department again made arrangements to welcome a new member.

By-elections and the work flowing from them have implications for many parts of the department, with arrangements needing to be made for new and returning members to be sworn in, and for accommodation and administrative arrangements and a program of induction briefings to be made for new members. The outcome of the Wentworth by-election also resulted in a shift from majority government to minority government. The resulting volatility presented many challenges for chamber support staff, and areas of the department had many more opportunities to provide procedural advice and services to a range of clients and stakeholders.

Volatility in the political environment continued throughout the first half of the reporting period, and although departmental staff are only observers in these processes, the volatility does have an impact on our work. Many ministerial changes flowing from these events kept staff across the department very busy. The challenges for staff included physical moves involving a large number of members' Parliament House offices, chamber seating arrangements, committee membership changes (including for positions of chairs), members in new roles in the House, and salary adjustments. Departmental staff responded professionally and flexibly to periods of uncertainty and unexpectedly high workloads. Throughout the tumult and the demanding workload, the department performed very admirably. The feedback received from the Speaker and from members indicates that there is great satisfaction with the services the department has provided.

2018–19 was also the final year of the parliamentary cycle, a general election having been held on 18 May 2019. The Forty-fifth Parliament drew to a close on 11 April 2019, with the prorogation of parliament and the dissolution of the House of Representatives for a general election for the House of Representatives and half the Senate. Somewhat unusually the prorogation and dissolution occurred with little notice of the ceremony for the reading of the Proclamation. Again, staff of the department responded well to these challenging and uncertain circumstances. The election period involved elements of work relating to the conclusion of the Forty-fifth Parliament—including arrangements and support for former members as they transitioned from their life at parliament—and preparations for the commencement of the Forty-sixth Parliament.



*The Clerk and Deputy Clerk briefing the Speaker, the Hon Tony Smith MP, Deputy Speaker, Mr Kevin Hogan MP, and their staff, prior to the commencement of sittings on the final day of the Forty-fifth Parliament, 4 April 2019. Image: David Foote, Auspic/DPS.*

The outcome of the general election gave the department the opportunity to welcome 27 new members to the House of Representatives. Teams of staff from across the department worked together to arrange and prepare presentations for a seminar for new members, held on 25 and 26 June 2019. This was a critical opportunity for departmental staff to explain their roles, and establish our professional credentials for the provision of trusted advice and support as members familiarised themselves with their new roles.

## Departmental capability

During the reporting period, significant areas of focus for the department's capability development involved consolidation of procedural capacity, particular opportunities for professional development during the election period, re-accreditation against the Investors in People standard, and finalisation of a workforce plan.



A significant priority for the department during the year was the consolidation of its procedural capacity. During the reporting period, and arising from the review of the Clerk Assistant (Procedure) Office carried out in 2017–18, a departmental change was made to bring the activities of the Chamber Research Office into the Procedure Office, which comprises Chamber Research and Procedural Development sections. The new structure has been working well and has supported the department's strategic focus on enhancing its procedural capacity.



*The Speaker, the Hon Tony Smith MP, Second Deputy Speaker, Mr Rob Mitchell MP, members of the Speaker's panel, and members of departmental staff at the launch of the seventh edition of House of Representatives Practice, September 2018. Image: Penny Bradfield, Auspic/DPS.*

In late 2018 the department published the seventh edition of its flagship procedural publication, *House of Representatives Practice*. The completion of a new edition of *House of Representatives Practice* is a very significant event in the history of the House and the department. In distributing the new edition to mailing list recipients, the high regard in which the publication is held became evident from the comments received. *House of Representatives Practice* remains the authoritative text of the practice of the Australian House of Representatives, and is well used by many other parliaments. The seventh edition of *House of Representatives Practice* is a testament to the professionalism and dedication to the institution of the House that the department embodies.

With the end of the Forty-fifth Parliament, some staff had the opportunity for renewal and refreshment in anticipation of a new parliament. Many staff participated in cross-departmental activities during the election period, allowing teams of staff from across the department to work together over several months on matters of strategic value to the department.

The election period also allowed the opportunity for several departmental staff to undertake placements with other organisations. Six such mobility placements took place, some of which were still active at the end of the reporting period. During the forthcoming period, these staff members will be able to share with their colleagues the learnings and insights they gained during these valuable developmental opportunities.

During the year, the department underwent a process for re-accreditation against the Investors in People standard for people management. This standard is an internationally recognised measure of good practice that focuses on how well an employer creates an environment to lead, support and develop its people. The department was again awarded silver level accreditation, this time under a new, more comprehensive assessment framework. The department took up a recommendation of the assessment report, to establish a working group from all parts and levels of the department to identify and carry forward areas of future improvement. The working group was established and met several times during the reporting period, and is expected to report its findings and recommendations to the Executive during the next reporting period.

In 2018–19 the department finalised and started to implement its workforce plan. The plan has enabled the department to consider internal and external factors likely to affect the department's workforce supply, retention and productivity in the years to come.

## Innovation

As a department supporting the House of Representatives in its role as a legislative and representative body, much of the department's work remains relatively consistent from year to year. Nevertheless, the department takes pride in its innovative approaches to addressing challenges or emerging needs. During the reporting period, some of the highlights in this area related to the electronic recording of divisions, or formal votes of the House, in the Chamber, new approaches to procedural development, and sharing experiences of parliamentary innovations with other jurisdictions.

In early 2019, the department conducted the first live trials of the House Division Recording System. The system, developed in cooperation between the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS), as the information and communications technology (ICT) services provider, and our department, provides for the tellers to record votes in the House electronically using tablet devices. Although the system does not alter the voting process, by recording votes electronically it permits immediate publication of the results of divisions and information about the divisions for observers. It is a genuine innovation with which those staff in DPS and our department who have been involved in developing should be pleased.

Staff from the Procedure Office and the Parliamentary and Business Information Services Office (PBIS) worked together over two years on the development of the CATTalogue project, which culminated in the launch of the CATTalogue in April 2019. The CATTalogue is an exciting development, providing easily digestible portions of information about many of the more common, and also slightly more obscure, events and processes that can occur in the House. This is already proving to be a valuable resource both for departmental staff and for members. As I am not aware that any other jurisdiction has developed a similar resource, I believe it can be characterised as a very good example of innovation.

Also of note during the reporting period, the department held its 'House main course' tutorial program on House procedure. Held over several months, this intensive course was made possible only with a heavy investment and careful preparation by staff presenters. Participants also committed to the full program by dedicating attention to required reading in advance of each tutorial and engaging fruitfully in discussions during the sessions. I commend those involved in this most innovative initiative for developing and enriching the department's precious procedural capacity.

In May 2019, I appeared via teleconference before the Canadian House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, in relation to its study of parallel debating chambers. Coincidentally, shortly thereafter, the department marked the 25th anniversary of the second debating chamber of the House of Representatives, which first met as the Main Committee on 8 June 1994 and has been known as the Federation Chamber since 2012. This was a valuable opportunity to acknowledge a proud innovation of the Australian House of Representatives, and one which our department should be proud in supporting.

## Collaboration

The department works collaboratively with the other three parliamentary departments, and also with parliaments within Australia and overseas. Significant developments during the reporting period related to the Australian Parliament's inter-parliamentary work, proposals for the centralisation of defined transactional processes, and promoting the work of the parliament to the community.

The reporting period saw the re-establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA). Consequently, the secretariat of the Australia Region has reverted to the Commonwealth of Australia Branch and the Director of the International and Parliamentary Relations Office is now the Regional Secretary. This has been an important step in re-establishing connections between parliaments in our region and with other parliaments in the Commonwealth.

Early in the reporting period, DPS advised it had commenced the establishment of a Corporate Business Operations Centre (CBOC) to centralise the management of defined finance and human resources transactional processes. At the invitation of DPS, the heads of parliamentary departments signed a memorandum of understanding to the effect that when the CBOC is established and is in a position to do so, our department will determine whether we might wish to make use of any of the transactional services on a fee-for-service basis. During the reporting period, the CBOC sent a survey to the department as part of the process of gaining information about the services that could be provided, and this was completed by the department's Finance and People Strategies offices.

The department participated in the Parliament House Open Day, held on Saturday 6 October 2018. PBIS coordinated the department's involvement, and staff from across the department assisted on the day. The Open Day marked the 30th anniversary of the opening of Parliament House, and was used as an opportunity to hold the inaugural Speaker's lecture, on this occasion delivered by Paul Kelly, one of the most senior and distinguished journalists from the Federal Parliamentary Press Gallery. The topic of the lecture was, 'The parliament in its new home: the House of Representatives in action, 1988 to 2018'.

The lecture was well attended, and a copy of the lecture was made available on the department's website.

## The year ahead

Looking to the year ahead, 2019–20 is likely to be a year of challenges, with the commencement of the Forty-sixth Parliament early in the period, and the establishment of parliamentary committees expected shortly thereafter. Somewhat unusually, the sitting calendar for the second half of 2019 includes several sitting weeks during July, requiring our staff to respond flexibly to changing circumstances.

The department will continue to implement strategies arising from its workforce planning initiative. With its reliance on a professional and experienced workforce, the department will use its workforce plan to ensure that it is well positioned to respond to future opportunities and directions. The department's Investors in People working group will continue to consider suggestions arising from the accreditation report, and make recommendations to the Executive on how these suggestions can be progressed.

The year ahead will also see a transition in the department's most senior leadership. Mr David Elder announced early in 2019 his intention to retire as Clerk and he retired on 9 August 2019. Tributes were paid by the Speaker, members and others to his service and achievements. I was appointed as Clerk from 12 August 2019, with an acknowledgement as the first female to be appointed as Clerk of the House in the more than 118-year history of the parliament. As a consequence, a selection process to fill the next most senior position of Deputy Clerk will be finalised early in 2019–20.

I look forward to working with the Executive and all colleagues in delivering services and support to the House and the parliament. With a particular focus on development of procedural capability and knowledge management across the department we will enable the department to be well prepared to navigate the future and inevitable change.

### Claessa Surtees

#### Clerk of the House

(from 12 August 2019)



*Inaugural Speaker's lecture, delivered by Paul Kelly, at the Parliament House Open Day, 6 October 2018.  
Image: Michelle Hazell, Auspic/DPS.*

# Departmental overview

The department's purpose as set out in its *Corporate Plan 2018–19* is:

to support the House of Representatives, and the wider parliament, in the role of a representative and legislative body primarily by providing advice and services, and through engaging with the community and other parliaments.

## Role and functions

The *Parliamentary Service Act 1999* provides for a non-partisan parliamentary service to serve the Australian Parliament. The Department of the House of Representatives is established by and operates under the Act, together with three other parliamentary departments: the Department of the Senate, DPS, and the Parliamentary Budget Office.

During 2018–19, the department continued in its role as a service department for the parliament, supporting the work of the House of Representatives, its members and committees, and some joint committees (comprising members of the House and the Senate).

The department continued to provide services to increase public knowledge and awareness of the work of the House and the Australian Parliament, and to encourage interaction. The department also assisted the House and the parliament in maintaining institutional relationships with their state, territory and international counterparts.

## Departmental structure

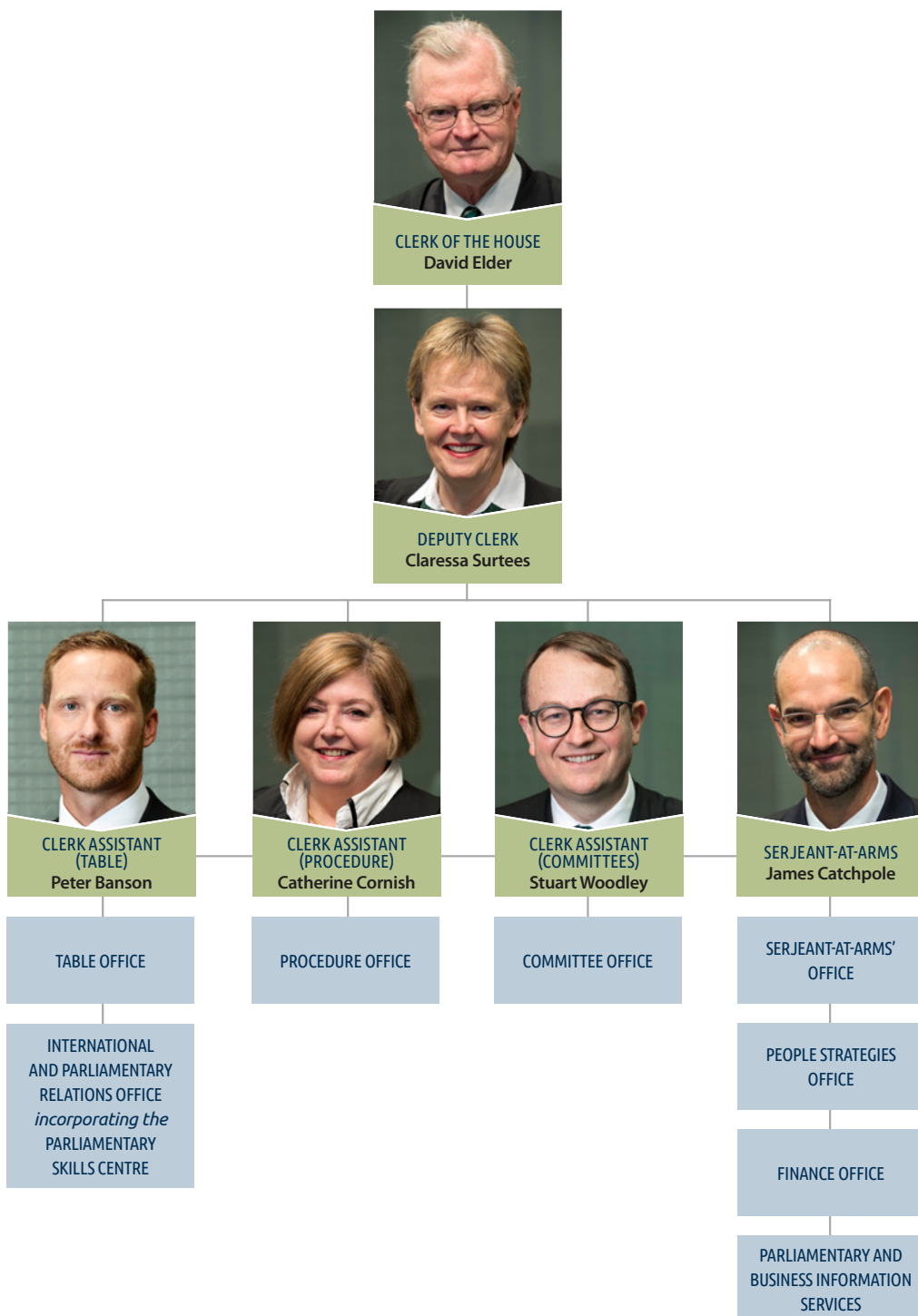
The department is managed by its Executive: the Clerk, Deputy Clerk, Clerk Assistant (Table), Clerk Assistant (Procedure), Clerk Assistant (Committees), and Serjeant-at-Arms.

Following the decision to establish, in an ongoing capacity, a Procedure Office and Clerk Assistant (Procedure) role at the beginning of the reporting period, the functions of the Chamber Research Office were absorbed into the Procedure Office. The Parliamentary Skills Centre and International and Parliamentary Relations Office were also consolidated into a single office under the leadership of one director.

Figure 1 shows the departmental structure at 30 June 2019.



Figure 1: Departmental structure at 30 June 2019



## Roles and responsibilities of the Executive

### **Clerk**

The Clerk is the most senior official of the department. The Clerk is the principal adviser to the Speaker, and is responsible for leading approximately 163 departmental staff members who provide administrative and procedural advice and services to the House and parliamentary committees, and support the parliament's international and domestic engagement.

### **Deputy Clerk**

The Deputy Clerk is the second most senior official of the department. The Deputy Clerk is responsible for advising and assisting members, their staff and departmental staff on matters of parliamentary practice and law, and for overseeing the drafting of private members' bills and amendments. The Deputy Clerk assists the Clerk in managing the department, and during the Clerk's absence performs the duties of Clerk.

### **Clerk Assistant (Table)**

The Clerk Assistant (Table) is responsible for the areas of the department that provide programming, procedural and legislative support to the Chamber and Federation Chamber of the House. The Clerk Assistant (Table) is also responsible for the areas of the department that support the parliament's program of international delegations and parliamentary strengthening.

### **Clerk Assistant (Procedure)**

The Clerk Assistant (Procedure) is responsible for the Procedure Office, which provides procedural research, publications and services explaining the work of the House and its institutional role. The Clerk Assistant (Procedure) also contributes to the House's parliamentary strengthening activities related to parliamentary procedure.

### **Clerk Assistant (Committees)**

The Clerk Assistant (Committees) is responsible for the Committee Office, which provides a range of support services—including procedural, research, analytical, drafting and administrative support—to House committees and to some joint committees.

### **Serjeant-at-Arms**

The Serjeant-at-Arms is responsible for the corporate areas of the department, which provide support and a range of services for members and for departmental staff. The Serjeant-at-Arms has a key role in managing ceremonial, access and security matters relating to the House.

## Outcome and program structure

The department's outcome and program structure for the year is set out in the *Portfolio Budget Statements 2018–19*.

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: Departmental—supports five activities
- » Program 2: Administered—supports one activity.

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

**Figure 2: Outcome and program structure, 2018–19**

