



Part 1

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Clerk's review

The 2022–23 reporting period was a time of change and transition. Nevertheless, the department continued to focus on advice, services and support to members, the House of Representatives and the Parliament. Our efforts support the effective operation of the Chamber, Federation Chamber and committees. We look to ensure that, members receive appropriate support to fulfil their parliamentary duties, international and regional relationships with other parliaments and parliamentary bodies are maintained, and the community understands and interacts with the work of the House of Representatives and the Parliament.

In contrast to recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic was not the most significant external influence on the department's operations. Instead, it was the changes to the parliament itself that had the most impact.

A different Parliament

The opening of a new parliament proceeds according to constitutional requirements, the standing orders and resolutions of the houses, and long-standing ceremonial practice. The opening of the 47th Parliament, on 26 July 2022, was a highlight of the period and the culmination of many weeks of preparation by staff, primarily in the Table and Serjeant-at-Arms' offices, with colleagues across the parliamentary service, to ensure that all House requirements were followed and that the various ceremonies proceeded smoothly.

The general election on 21 May 2022 resulted in a change of government for the first time in almost a decade, meaning all government and opposition members took on new roles. In any new parliament, following the formal opening and the swearing in of members, the House must choose a member to serve as Speaker. Following a ballot of all members conducted by the Clerk, in accordance with standing orders, I declared Mr Milton Dick MP elected as Speaker. A short time later, the Speaker conducted a further ballot and Ms Sharon Claydon MP was elected as Deputy Speaker.

There was also a substantial change to the composition of the House, with 35 newly elected members in 2022 and two further new members in 2023 resulting from by-elections. The crossbench initially increased to a record 16 members and then increased again to 17 when the Member for Calare chose in January to sit as an independent. The relatively high proportion of newer members and the increased size of the crossbench has changed the nature of some advice and services we provide.

As is customary, the department was pleased to provide briefings and ongoing support to all elected members, noting the particular requirements of those who were newly elected or had taken on new roles.

Perhaps the most dominant occurrence of the period was the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on 8 September 2022. The events and ceremonies that followed are evidence and confirmation of the character of Australia's system of government as a constitutional monarchy. Staff supported the various aspects of the Australian Parliament's arrangements. Following the announcement of the Queen's death, condolence books were available in Parliament House and there was a 96-gun salute to mark the Queen's passing, one

gunfire for each year of her long life. Wreaths were laid at Her Majesty's statue on Queen's Terrace. The Governor-General met with the Federal Executive Council, who confirmed proclamation of Prince Charles as King Charles of Australia, and the Governor-General read the proclamation of accession to the people of Australia from the forecourt of Parliament House.

On 23 September, following the observance of the Queen's death over a 14-day period of mourning across the Commonwealth, the House met and the Prime Minister moved that an address to His Majesty King Charles III be agreed to, expressing deep sympathy for the death of Her Majesty and congratulating His Majesty on his accession to the throne.



Condolence motion for the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, 23 September 2022. Image: David Foote, AusPic/DPS.

The plan for our parliament's response to the Queen's death had been developed over a number of years, with our department collaborating with parliamentary colleagues, the Office of the Governor-General and executive agencies. Implementation of the plan resulted in very intensive periods of work for some of our staff, in particular the Serjeant-at-Arms and the Serjeant's Office.

Supporting Parliament's work

The levels of activity recorded in this annual report are reflective of a new government seeking to implement its legislative agenda, with 186 bills introduced and 150 passed in the period. The House sat for 68 days, and the Federation Chamber met 62 times during the financial year. While the number of sittings is comparable to past years, the number of hours for which each chamber met increased substantially, with 901 hours of meeting supported across both chambers.

Staff supported consideration and passage of several notable bills during the reporting period:

- » the Restoring Territory Rights Bill 2022, the first private member's or senator's bill to pass into law since the marriage equality bill in 2017

- » the National Anti-Corruption Commission Bill 2022, to create a new Commonwealth anti-corruption agency to investigate and report on serious or systemic corruption in the Commonwealth public sector
- » the Constitution Alteration (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice) 2023, proposing to enshrine an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament in the Constitution. On 31 May, the Constitution Alteration proposal passed the House with the absolute majority required under section 128 of the Constitution. A referendum on the proposal is to be held on 14 October 2023.

The period included two Budgets, with the requisite support provided by the department. The Budget bills presented in March 2022 ahead of the federal election lapsed with the dissolution of the House and supply bills passed prior to the dissolution enabled the continuation of ordinary services of government and parliamentary services until December. On 25 October, a new 2022–23 Budget was introduced, then the Treasurer presented the 2023–24 Budget at the more usual time in May 2023.

Our staff supported parliamentary committees to hold more committee meetings than at any time since 2017–18. Due to the return of freedom of movement across Australia, committees were keen to hold public hearings, site inspections and other meetings outside Canberra. Committee visits and in-person meetings can lead to greater levels of community engagement and assist committees to gather a fuller brief of evidence. The department will continue to support committees to travel and to use the improved videoconferencing facilities at Parliament House, as appropriate.

The easing of pandemic travel restrictions internationally meant that much of the parliament's international engagement program could be conducted as usual. The Presiding Officers' delegation program resumed in-person engagement during the period, and the International and Parliamentary Relations Office supported 14 outgoing delegations to 17 countries. Eight incoming delegations were also supported in 2022–23, as were 26 virtual engagement activities. It is pleasing to see that feedback from key stakeholders on the department's support for the international program was so positive throughout the return to in-person activities.

Perhaps the most significant parliamentary relations event hosted in the period was the 26th Conference of Speakers and Presiding Officers of the Commonwealth (CSPOC), held in January 2023. This was the first of these biennial conferences to be held in three years (having been postponed from January 2022), and was attended by 110 representatives from 33 parliaments. I thank the staff involved in supporting this very important parliamentary conference that aims to strengthen parliamentary institutions.

Our staff and the parliamentary service

There is no doubt that the pandemic period introduced some fundamental changes to the department's working life. We continue to consider how to build on these changes to the benefit of staff and the department. The wellbeing of staff remained paramount throughout the year, as the department's transition away from pandemic times accelerated. While masks were used for much of the reporting period, when the 47th Parliament opened on 26 July 2022 many of the COVID-19 community restrictions that were central to our working and personal lives for the past few years had ceased.

The Presiding Officers determined that, for the opening of the 47th Parliament and the following sittings, the use of face masks would be strongly encouraged within Parliament House, where physical distancing is not possible. Our staff were wearing masks when working in the chambers and committee meetings when COVID-19 case numbers were high, and they were supported to wear masks when the mandate ceased. The clear, perspex screens remained in place in front of the clerks in the Chamber until the presentation of the Budget on 9 May 2023. Staff were encouraged to keep in touch with each other and were able to work from home when the House was sitting if they did not feel comfortable working at Parliament House.

A continuing significant commitment by staff related to the 2021 *Set the Standard: Report on the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces* (the Jenkins report). The parliamentary and public services collaborated in the progressive implementation of the report recommendations during the year.

While several of the Jenkins report's recommendations relate more directly to parliamentarians and their staff, or to other organisations, the department recognises its role in contributing to the overall culture in the parliamentary work environment. The department, together with other parliamentary departments, worked closely with the Presiding Officers, the Parliamentary Leadership Taskforce, the Parliamentary Workplace Support Service and other key stakeholders to progress the recommendations related to the parliamentary service.

With the Clerk of the Senate, the Secretary of the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS) and the Parliamentary Budget Officer, I met regularly with the head of the Parliamentary Workplace Support Service, independent chair of the Parliamentary Leadership Taskforce and senior government officials to be briefed on and consider actions in response to the Jenkins report. The Deputy Clerk, Mr Peter Banson, represents the department on the implementation group, and other staff have been involved in various interdepartmental working groups. The department is also represented on the Parliamentary Leadership Taskforce's staff consultation group. Through these avenues and through the department's Consultative Committee, staff have regular opportunities to provide input into these important processes. I acknowledge everyone's commitment to these significant workplace changes. I particularly thank Mr Richard Pye, Clerk of the Senate, Mr Rob Stefanic, Secretary of DPS, and Mr Stein Helgeby, Parliamentary Budget Officer, for their continued professional collaboration in relation not only to these changes, but also to the many and varied engagements we have in our shared support for the Australian Parliament.

Staff training and development this year continued to focus on work health and safety, wellbeing, bullying and harassment prevention, and leadership and management capability. An emerging leaders program for Executive Band 1 staff was initiated in January, and refreshed scenario-based training focused on professionalism in the parliamentary service.

Procedural training and knowledge sharing remains a priority for the department. We continued to run our highly regarded parliamentary practice and procedure training for all staff and offered additional briefings for staff performing the duties of clerk and deputy clerk in the chambers. The department was also represented at the first annual ANZACATT professional development seminar held in-person since 2019.

Staff supporting committees have a range of specialist learning opportunities available to them, including introductory topics for newer or less experienced staff, through to briefings

on complex matters. We continue to invest significant time and energy in our internal procedural training, and I would like to thank all staff involved for their participation.

Looking ahead

The 47th Parliament is now well underway, and we are entering the midpoint year of the parliamentary cycle. We expect the tempo of House business, committee activity and international engagement to remain high. We are well placed to provide a high level of support to the parliament, and the department will continue to support staff in their roles.

After a period of ICT challenges, several of the department's critical systems have now been replaced or upgraded. The projects to replace the systems supporting bills and other key chamber documents will be a priority in the year ahead. We are also looking forward to progress on a modern system for the department's collection and reporting of statistical information on the House of Representatives.

I am pleased that bargaining has commenced for a new enterprise agreement, and the department is awaiting advice from the Australian Public Service Commission on APS-wide common conditions. While the department is not a public service agency, alignment with the common conditions will ensure the department remains an employer of choice and will assist with recruitment and transfers.

The department's ability to provide the advice and support necessary for the House of Representatives, committees and members relies on our capable and dedicated staff. Our ability to attract and retain skilled people is critical to ongoing performance. In the next year, we anticipate the final phase of implementation of the Jenkins report, and embedding the resultant enhancements in the department's work health and safety framework. Much of the department's focus in the year ahead will be on continuing to rebuild our range of work 'post pandemic', to recruit effectively and to support staff, both in their professional development and in their health and wellbeing.

Claressa Surtees
Clerk of the House



Clerk of the House, Ms Claressa Surtees, and the Speaker, the Hon Milton Dick MP. Image: David Foote, Auspic/DPS.

Departmental overview

The department's purpose as set out in its Corporate Plan 2022–23 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, the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS) and the Parliamentary Budget Office.

During 2022–23, as many of the COVID-19 restrictions eased, parliamentary operations returned in large part to their pre-pandemic state. Throughout this transition, the department continued to provide the highest standard of support for 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 strengthen its services to increase public knowledge and awareness of the work of the House and the Australian Parliament, and to encourage interaction. In-person parliamentary engagement activities resumed during the period, and the department continued to assist the House and the parliament in maintaining institutional relationships with state, territory and international counterparts.

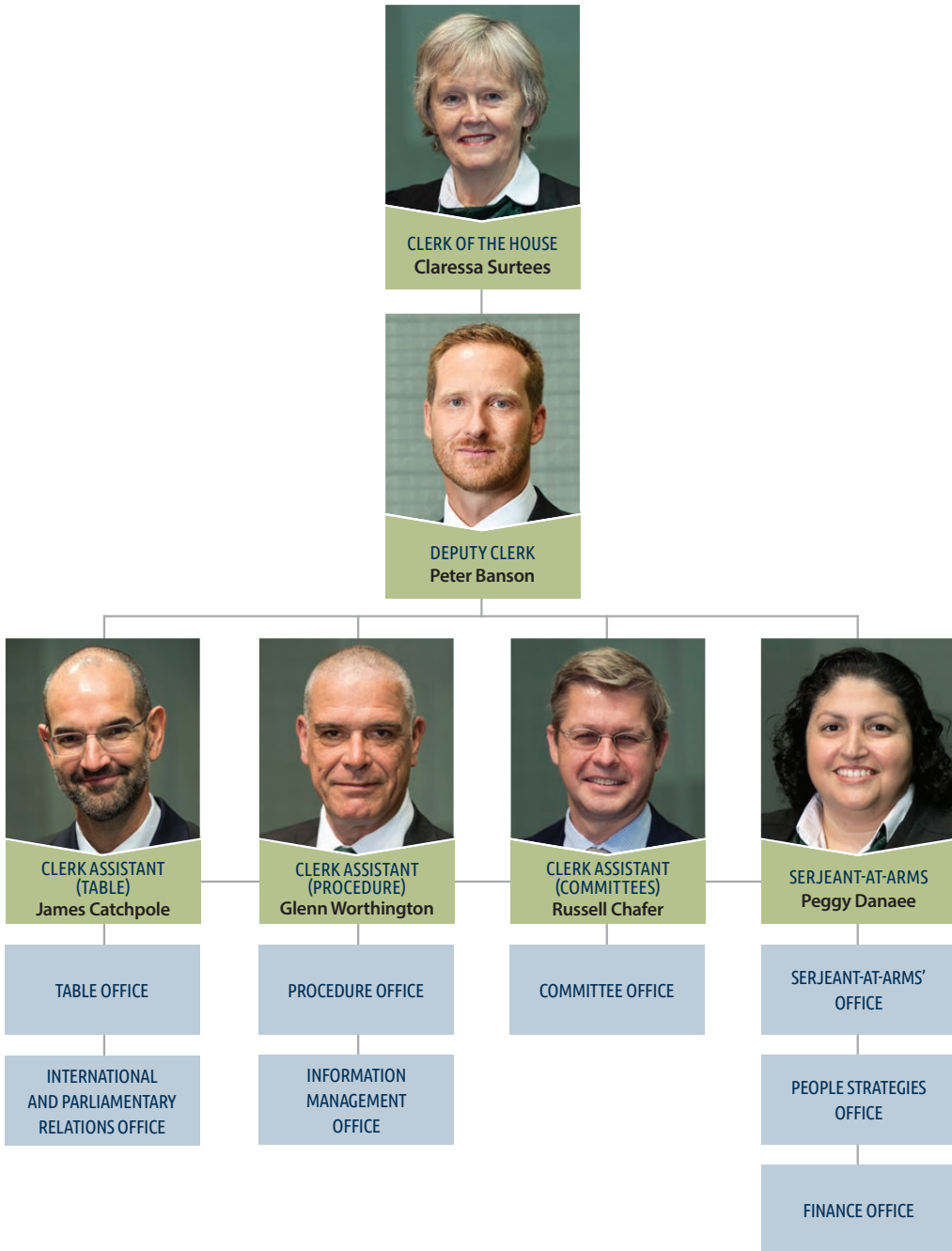
Departmental structure

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

No changes were made to the department's structure during the year.

Figure 1 shows the departmental structure as at 30 June 2023.

Figure 1: Departmental structure at 30 June 2023



Roles and responsibilities of the Executive

Clerk

The Clerk is the most senior official of the department. The Clerk is principal adviser to the Speaker and members on House and committee proceedings, parliamentary privilege and other parliamentary matters. The Clerk leads some 178 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. With the heads of the other three parliamentary departments, the Clerk leads the parliamentary service.

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 performs the duties of Clerk during the Clerk's absence.

Clerk Assistant (Table)

The Clerk Assistant (Table) is responsible for the Table Office, which provides 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, and the Information Management Office. 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 support services to House committees and some joint committees. Services include procedural, research, analytical, drafting and administrative support.

Serjeant-at-Arms

The Serjeant-at-Arms is responsible for the corporate areas of the department, which provide support and services to members and 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 2022–23*.

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, 2022–23

