**24 March 2022**

Parliamentary Budget Office Activity Report

## Overview

This activity report provides an update on Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) activities since the last activity report of 7 February 2022. Due to the short time between activity reports and because full quarterly data for 1 January to 31 March 2022 is not yet available, this report is a more concise version. Our next activity report will provide a comprehensive overview of activities for the full quarter including a comparison of performance.

## Requests from parliamentarians and parliamentary parties

In the period from 1 January to 28 February 2022, we received 337 requests for policy costings and requests for budget analysis. During the period, we responded to 400 requests, at an average turnaround time of 25 business days and a median time to completion of 27 business days (see Table 1). The completion performance over this shortened reporting period is an improvement on our December quarter (average turnaround time of 34 days), though still above our performance target of 15 business days.

Of requests flagged by our clients as being critical, 68 of these were completed at an average turnaround time of 13 days, a significant improvement on the year-to-date average of 22 days.

As noted in our last activity report we are aiming to reduce the average and median time taken for requests as we are concerned that the existing average timeframes may not sufficiently support the needs of our requestors. The results for January and February 2022 suggest that our efforts to improve completion times are having an effect.

In the period from 1 January to 28 February 2022, we received 85 responses from Commonwealth agencies to our information requests, with an average turnaround time of 12 business days (see Table 2).

Table 3 contains details of the responsiveness of Commonwealth agencies to information requests during this period.

From 1 July 2021 to 24 March 2022, 22 policy announcements that were made by parliamentarians or parliamentary parties included references to PBO policy costings and 6 of these costings were subsequently publicly released. Since 1 February 2022, 8 policy announcements referenced PBO costings, with 0 costings publicly released (refer to Table 4).

## Evaluations

As flagged in the activity report of 7 February 2022, there has been no activity in relation to evaluations.

## Self-initiated work program

The PBO has released one self-initiated publication since the last activity report of 7 February 2022: *Historical Fiscal Data*, a new database of historical time series in an easily accessible form. The database will be updated following the 2022-23 Budget.

Over the next few months, almost all of our public information resources will be redirected towards costing work in the lead-up to the general election and towards the preparation of the election commitments report.

## General election preparation

Preparations for the 2022 Election Commitments Report are nearing completion, including the temporary expansion of our workforce required to complete the report by the statutory deadline.

## Staffing

As at 31 December 2021, the PBO had 46.09 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff (headcount: 47). The PBO calculates this data on a quarterly basis and data as at 31 March 2022 will be included in the next activity report. In 2021‑22, the PBO is estimating an average staffing level (ASL) of 48.

### Response to COVID-19

The PBO continues to follow advice from ACT Health and the Presiding Officers relating to working arrangements in the context of COVID-19. Given the small size of the PBO, managing key person risk is a continued focus for the Executive.

### Review into Parliamentary culture

Following the publication of the Jenkins review in November 2021, the PBO is carefully considering the inquiry’s findings. The Australian Human Rights Commission provided a briefing on the report to all PBO staff on 2 March 2022.

The PBO is working closely with the other Parliamentary Departments to effectively coordinate responding to the Jenkins review and associated matters, including the Foster review and any recommendations from Comcare. This work is currently progressing via the Jenkins Review Implementation Group, chaired by Ms Kerri Hartland, in which the PBO participates.

# Requests from parliamentarians and parliamentary parties for costings and budget analyses

Table 1: Completion of costing and budget analysis requests

|  | 2018–19Total | 2019–20 Total | 2020–21Total | 2021–22Q1(a) | 2021-22Q2 | 2021-22Q3(b) | 2021–22Total | Trend(c) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Requests received in period | 3,019 | 332 | 1,253 | 458 | 603 | 337 | 1,398 | **-** |
| Requests completed in period | 2,970\* | 279 | 813 | 299 | 613 | 400 | 1,312 | **-** |
| Average time to completion (business days) | 18 | 27 | 31 | 33 | 34 | 25 | 31 | **↑** |
| Median time to completion (business days) | 12 | 25 | 25 | 36 | 34 | 27 | 32 | **↑** |

\*Includes 429 costings and budget analyses prepared for the purposes of the Election Commitments Report.

Note: The table identifies the number of ‘options’ received by the PBO, noting that a single request can contain multiple options.
(a) Since the publication of the 7 February 2022 Activity report, a further request has been assigned to the 2021-22 Q1 data, with a minor impact on requests submitted, requests completed and on the average time to completion.

(b) Includes results for January and February 2022 only.

(c) In comparison to the previous financial year.

**Figure 1: PBO response times for requests completed in 2021–22 quarter three (1 January to 28 February 2022 only)**



# Requests by the PBO for information from agencies

Table 2: Responses to PBO information requests

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2017–18Total | 2018–19Total | 2019–20Total | 2020–21Total | 2021–22Q1 | 2021–22Q2 | 2021–22Q3(a) | 2021–22Total |
| Responses received in period | 429 | 549 | 175 | 523 | 32 | 108 | 85 | **225** |
| Percentage received on time (%) | 99 | 98 | 99 | 99% | 100% | 99% | 99% | **99%** |
| Average response time (business days) | 9 | 7 | 12 | 11 | 10 | 6 | 12 | **9** |

(a) Includes results for January and February 2022 only.

Table 3: Information request responsiveness by agencies in 2021–22 quarter three (1 January to 28 February 2022)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Department/Agency** | **Responses received in period** | **Average of Time taken to respond (business days)** | **Responses received after due date** | **Per cent late** |
| Attorney-General’s Department | 1 | 5 | 0 | 0% |
| Australian Taxation Office | 5 | 6 | 0 | 0% |
| Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment | 1 | 7 | 0 | 0% |
| Department of Defence | 3 | 15 | 0 | 0% |
| Department of Education, Skills and Employment | 2 | 10 | 0 | 0% |
| Department of Finance | 14 | 8 | 0 | 0% |
| Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade | 1 | 5 | 0 | 0% |
| Department of Health | 5 | 6 |  1(a) | 20% |
| Department of Home Affairs | 7 | 15 | 0 | 0% |
| Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources | 4 | 9 | 0 | 0% |
| Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications | 4 | 9 | 0 | 0% |
| Department of Social Services | 21 | 19 | 0 | 0% |
| Department of the Treasury | 3 | 17 | 0 | 0% |
| Department of Veterans Affairs | 12 | 10 | 0 | 0% |
| National Indigenous Australians Agency | 1 | 13 | 0 | 0% |
| Services Australia | 1 | 5 | 0 | 0% |
| **Total** | **85** | **12** | **1** | **1%** |

 (a) The response was two days late.

# Publicly referenced costings

Table 4 shows the PBO costings or budget analyses that have been publicly referenced by parliamentarians. The table captures a costing or analysis that is referenced in the public domain for the first time. This includes references to costings that have been publicly released (and subsequently published on the PBO website), and those that have not been publicly released by the requesting parliamentarian, where there is a first public reference to the PBO. Subsequent public references of PBO costings or budget analyses are excluded from the table below.

Table 4: Costings or budget analysis publicly referenced for the first time
in 2021-22 (to 24 March 2022) – items added since the last report are italicised.

| Description of policy announcement | Party or Parliamentarian announcing policy | Method of Announcement | Date of announcement | Date of release of costing minute on the PBO website |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Wiping Student Debt* | *Senator Mehreen Faruqi* | *Online media article* | *24 March 2022* | *Costing minute not released* |
| *Wiping Student Debt vs Stage 3 Tax Cuts* | *Senator Mehreen Faruqi* | *Online media article* | *24 March 2022* | *Costing minute not released* |
| *Guaranteed Liveable Income* | *Mr Adam Bandt MP* | *Online media article* | *20 March 2022* | *Costing minute not released* |
| *Reinstating Regional Doctor Incentives* | *Mr Mark Butler MP* | *Interview transcript* | *8 March 2022* | *Costing minute not released* |
| *Universal Childcare and Early Education* | *Senator Mehreen Faruqi* | *Online media article* | *6 March 2022* | *Costing minute not released* |
| *Looking After Coal Workers* | *Mr Adam Bandt MP* | *Online media article* | *25 February 2022* | *Costing minute not released* |
| *Repurposing Snowy Hydro into a not-for profit retailer and public generator* | *Mr Adam Bandt MP* | *Online media article* | *18 February 2022* | *Costing minute not released* |
| *Home Battery Incentive Scheme* | *Dr Helen Haines MP* | *House of Representatives Amendment Bill* | *14 February 2022* | *Costing minute not released* |
| Truth and Justice Commission | Mr Adam Bandt MP | Online media article | 23 January 2022 | Costing minute not released |
| Air Filters for Schools | Mr Adam Bandt MP | Online media article | 23 January 2022 | Costing minute not released |
| Funding for Tenants’ Advocacy Services | Senator Mehreen Faruqi | Media release | 24 November 2021 | Costing minute not released |
| Ending Corporate Tax Avoidance | Mr Adam Bandt MP | Online media article | 12 November 2021 | 17 November 2021 |
| Horse Racing Transition Plan and Horse Betting Levy | Senator Mehreen Faruqi | Media release | 2 November 2021 | Costing minute not released |
| Make Functional Assessments a Medicare Benefits Schedule Item | Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme | Committee report | 19 October 2021 | 20 October 2021 |
| One Million Homes  | Mr Adam Bandt MP | Online media article | 17 October 2021 | 18 October 2021 |
| Free and Unlimited Mental Health in Medicare | Senator Jordon Steele-John | Media release | 20 September 2021 | Costing minute not released |
| Mining Super Profits Tax  | Mr Adam Bandt MP | Media release | 6 September 2021 | 6 September 2021 |
| Corporate Super Profits Tax | Mr Adam Bandt MP | Media release | 6 September 2021 | 6 September 2021 |
| Dentistry Vouchers for Older Australians | Rebekha Sharkie MP | Media release | 16 August 2021 | Costing minute not released |
| Distributional analysis of the stage 3 tax cuts | Mr Adam Bandt MP | Media release | 28 July 2021 | 29 July 2021 |
| JobKeeper | Dr Andrew Leigh MP | Online media article | 23 July 2021 | Costing minute not released |
| Aged Care Funding | Ms Clare O’Neil MP | Online media article | 12 July 2021 | Costing minute not released |

Note: All costings published on the PBO’s website are captured in the table above. While the PBO endeavours to capture all policy announcements that reference PBO costings, there may be announcements missing from the table above, for example, because the announcement was not reflected in any media monitored by the PBO.

Note: Since the publication of the last Activity Report, any new costings or budget analyses publicly referenced for the first time are presented in italics in the table above.