



13 February 2019

Parliamentary Budget Office activity report

Overview

This activity report provides an update on PBO activities since the last report dated 17 October 2018.

Requests from parliamentarians and parliamentary parties

In the first half of 2018–19, the PBO received 734 requests from parliamentarians for policy costings and analyses and responded to 974 requests at an average turnaround time of 27 business days and a median time to completion of 19 business days (refer to Table 1). The longer completion times than in previous periods reflected the volume of requests submitted to the PBO since the Budget in May 2018.

The PBO makes information requests to Commonwealth agencies to support its responses to parliamentarians (and its research program). In the first half of 2018–19, the PBO received 169 responses from Commonwealth agencies to information requests at an average turnaround time of six business days. Requests were provided, on average, three business days ahead of the due date (refer to Table 2). Table 3 contains details of the responsiveness of Commonwealth agencies to information requests during this period.

In the period since the last activity report, 17 policy announcements that were made by parliamentarians or parliamentary parties included references to PBO policy costings. Ten of these costings were subsequently publicly released (refer to Table 4).

Research program

The PBO's research program is set out in the 2018–19 corporate plan.

On 29 November 2018 the PBO released the *National fiscal outlook: As at 2018–19 Budgets*, and the *2018–19 National fiscal outlook: At a Glance*. These provide a national perspective on the fiscal outlook and a complete picture of the size of general government by examining outcomes across all levels of Australian government on a consistent basis. The *At a Glance* publication provides a graphical snapshot of each of the Commonwealth, state and territory budgets.

On 17 December 2018 the PBO released the *2018–19 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook Snapshot*, which provides a graphical summary of key information contained in the 2018–19 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook.

The PBO also released two guidance notes relating to the 2019 general election. These set out how the PBO will include medium-term financial impacts of election commitments in the next post-election report (3 October 2018) and the PBO's approach to costing policy proposals during the caretaker period (5 December 2018).

In terms of future research, good progress has been made on reports examining the impact of Australia's ageing population on the Budget, investment funds and net debt, alternative financing mechanisms and expenditure on the Newstart allowance. In advance of the next election, the PBO will release a guidance note on how it will engage with parliamentary parties to produce its post-election report of election commitments.

External engagement

Following the establishment of the panel of expert advisors, the PBO continues to seek input from the panel to assist with the development and evaluation of its work program and methodologies.

The PBO continues to work with Commonwealth agencies to arrange access to electronic data warehouses, where possible. This ongoing access reduces the time it takes to respond to parliamentary requests and reduces the ongoing burden on agencies in responding to individual requests for information.

In February 2019, the Parliamentary Budget Officer attended the 11th annual meeting of the OECD Network of Parliamentary Budget Officials and Independent Fiscal Institutions hosted by the Portuguese Public Finance Council and the Portuguese Parliament and met with counterparts in London. This provided an opportunity to build relationships with other institutions that have similar roles and mandates to the Australian PBO.

PBO staffing

The PBO is allocated a budget that supports around 40 staff and receives additional funding every third year in the lead up to a general election to boost its staffing. At 31 December 2018, the PBO had 40 staff (including one person on secondment from another Commonwealth agency).

Secondment arrangements undertaken by the PBO build capability in the PBO and agencies, and expand the pool of potential candidates that the PBO can draw upon during election periods when surge capacity may be required.

The PBO is continuing to participate in the Parliament of Australia graduate program. Five graduates are joining the PBO during 2019.

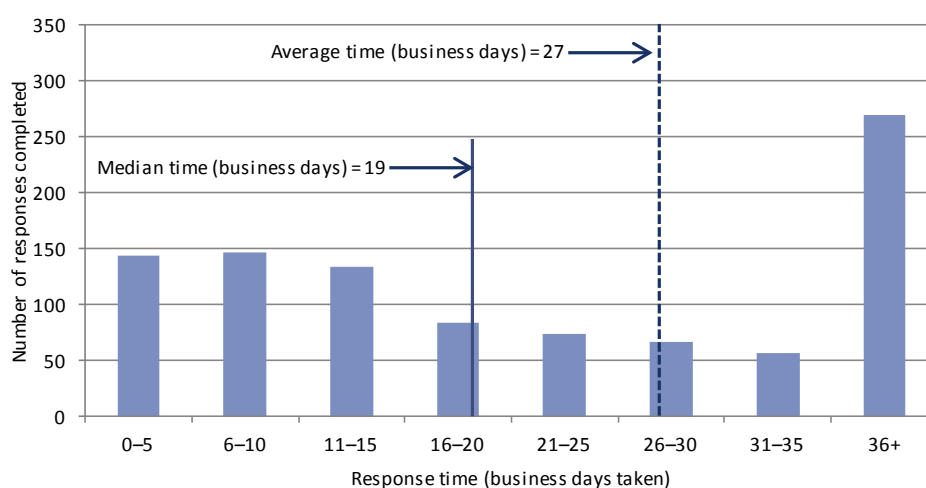
Requests from parliamentarians and parliamentary parties for costings and budget analyses

Table 1: Costing and budget analysis requests from parliamentarians and parliamentary parties to 31 December 2018

	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2018–19	2018–19
	Total	Total	Total	Total	Q1	Q2	Total
Requests outstanding at start of period	76	138	20	180	586	336	586
Requests received in period	973	4,146	2,572	2,218	438	296	734
Requests withdrawn in period	42	1,013	524	252	51	146	197
Requests completed in period	869	3,251	1,888	1,560	637	337	974
Average time to completion (business days)	20	19	20	20	29	24	27
Median time to completion (business days)	12	16	12	15	25	13	19
Requests outstanding at end of period	138	20	180	586	336	149	149

Note: The table identifies the number of ‘options’ received by the PBO, noting that a single request can contain multiple options.

Figure 1: PBO response times for completed requests in 2018–19 to 31 December 2018



Requests by the PBO for information from agencies

Table 2: Information requests to agencies to 31 December 2018

	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2018–19	2018–19
	Total	Total	Total	Total	Q1	Q2	Total
Responses outstanding at start of period	16	3	1	16	11	9	11
Requests sent in period	203	743	523	424	82	159	241
Responses received in period	216	745	508	429	84	85	169
Responses received by due date	147	695	499	425	80	83	163
Responses received after due date	69	50	9	4	4	2	6
Percentage late (%)	32	7	2	1	5	2	4
Average time taken to respond (business days)	13	7	8	9	7	5	6
Average punctuality (business days late)	3	-1	-2	-1	-1	-4	-3
Average lateness of late responses (business days)	11	3	3	3	3	3	3
Responses outstanding at end of period	3	1	16	11	9	83	83

As at 31 December 2018, there were no overdue responses to a request for information.

Table 3: Information request responsiveness by agencies in 2018–19 to 31 December 2018

Department/Agency	Responses received in period	Average time taken to respond (business days)	Responses received after due date	% Late
Attorney-General's Department	6	6	1	17%
Australian Bureau of Statistics	1	17	0	0%
Australian Competition and Consumer Commission	4	8	0	0%
Australian Securities and Investments Commission	3	10	0	0%
Australian Taxation Office	27	6	0	0%
Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre	1	10	0	0%
Commonwealth Superannuation Corporation	1	9	0	0%
Department of Agriculture and Water Resources	2	7	0	0%
Department of Communications and the Arts	3	7	1	33%
Department of Defence	1	8	0	0%
Department of Education and Training	9	7	0	0%
Department of Finance	23	5	0	0%
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	5	5	1	20%
Department of Health	10	8	1	10%
Department of Home Affairs	6	13	0	0%
Department of Human Services	6	5	0	0%
Department of Industry, Innovation and Science	3	3	0	0%
Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities	2	5	0	0%
Department of Jobs and Small Business	6	5	0	0%
Department of Social Services	14	3	0	0%
Department of the Environment and Energy	4	10	0	0%
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet	3	6	0	0%
Department of the Treasury	22	5	2	9%
Department of Veterans' Affairs	7	1	0	0%
TOTAL	169	6	6	4%

Table 4: Policy announcements with reference to PBO costings — in period since last Activity report

Description of policy announcement	Party or parliamentarian announcing policy	Method of announcement	Date of announcement	Date of release of costing minute
Increase in tax for high income earners	Australian Greens	Media article	30/10/2018	Costing minute not released
Drug testing sites in capital cities and regional centres	Australian Greens	Media article	9/11/2018	Costing minute not released
Make franking credits non-refundable – further information	Australian Labor Party	Hansard	20/11/2018	20/11/2018 – Costing posted on PBO website
CEFC to provide grant funding and concessional loans to households to install solar and batteries	Australian Labor Party	Media article	22/11/2018	Costing minute not released
Allow employees to opt out of receiving superannuation guarantee contributions	Not stated	Media article	25/11/2018	Costing minute not released
Liberal Democrats’ tax policy	Liberal Democratic Party	Introduction of Bill into Parliament	29/11/2018	29/11/2018 – Costing posted on PBO website
Higher education (consolidation)	Australian Greens	Media article	10/12/2018	12/12/2018 – Costing posted on PBO website
Postgraduate income support	Australian Greens	Media article	10/12/2018	12/12/2018 – Costing posted on PBO website
Securing the value of our resources – End fossil fuel subsidies	Australian Greens	Media article	11/12/2018	12/12/2018 – Costing posted on PBO website
The PaRRTy is over	Australian Greens	Media article	11/12/2018	12/12/2018 – Costing posted on PBO website
Direct subsidy of \$8,500 over 15 years for investors who build new dwellings and offer them to people in need on lower rents	Australian Labor Party	Media article	16/12/2018	Costing minute not released
Commonwealth to provide per-student subsidy for swimming lessons	Australian Labor Party	Media release	20/01/2019	Costing minute not released
Revenue implications of changes to vehicle taxation measures	Senator Tim Storer	Media release	30/01/2019	30/01/2019 – Costing posted on PBO website
Applying a road user charge to electric vehicles	Senator Tim Storer	Media release	30/01/2019	30/01/2019 – Costing posted on PBO website
Revenue implications of changes to vehicle taxation measures – Fringe benefits tax exemption	Senator Tim Storer	Media release	30/01/2019	30/01/2019 – Costing posted on PBO website
Revenue implications of setting mandatory Government fleet electric vehicle purchasing targets	Senator Tim Storer	Media release	30/01/2019	30/01/2019 – Costing posted on PBO website
Tax deduction for expenditure on energy efficiency measures for rental properties	Senator Tim Storer	Media article	8/02/2019	Costing minute not released