

Senate Estimates – February 2025 Hearings

PBO appearance at Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee - Opening Statement from the Parliamentary Budget Officer

Time and Date 9:15am, Monday 24 February 2025

Opening Statement

Thank you Chair.

I would like to commence my opening statement by thanking my predecessor, Stein Helgeby, for the work he put into the PBO and the great organisation he helped to build. I also would like to thank the Presiding Officers and the JCPAA for my appointment to the role of Parliamentary Budget Officer.

I see the Parliamentary Budget Office as an important institution in our democracy, having established itself by delivering high quality costings and budget analysis; helpful and important fiscal tools and the Election commitments report, which we will be producing this year.

I wanted to acknowledge some of the foundations of the work of the PBO. The most important being that we serve all members of the Parliament; that we do our work with independence, integrity and confidentiality. These are essential to the success and reputation of the PBO.

I would also note the importance of high quality and dedicated staff. My experience since joining the organisation is of a team that is engaged and working hard to deliver high quality independent fiscal and budgetary advice and analysis to members of Parliament.

These foundations are what make the organisation valued and well respected. I see my role as supporting and leading with those foundations and approach front of mind.

In terms of the PBO's work program, our immediate focus is on election preparation. This means:

- ensuring that we have the most up-to-date data and models available across a vast range of policy areas so as to be able to cost proposals and commitments leading up to and through the election period;
- ensuring that in the lead-up to the election, we continue to process requests for costings and budget analysis quickly and to a high quality to assist parliamentarians and parties with their preparations and to ensure we are ready for such costings for the ECR;
- providing guidance to policy departments on what might be expected during an election in terms of their prompt provision of data and models;
- preparing to be able to produce the Election commitments report; and
- considering the post-election arrangements for assisting with the new Parliament.

Beyond the election we will also continue to focus on building the fiscal tools and research that we have available through our website. These products have been very well received and do a number of things:

- They make it possible for parliamentarians; the media; interested groups and the general public to understand what drives budget outcomes – Build Your Own Budget is the main product that delivers this.
- They inform public debate and understanding of complex tax or expenditures that impact on the fiscal position – our papers on the tax mix and on imputation credits have been very well received as publications that are accessible and simplify complex parts of the revenue base.
- Our products also build and add to the information in the public domain – our Historical Fiscal Data series is an example of this.

Post election we will continue to look to build on this self-initiated work as required under our guiding legislation.

Finally, I wanted to briefly talk about the volume of work that the PBO is undertaking. As outlined in our recently published Activity report, requests for costing and budget analysis services in the 47th Parliament are at historically high levels.

- Since the 2022 election up to 31 December last year, the PBO has received 1,843 requests for costings and analysis from Parliamentarians. This compares to an average of 955 requests received by the equivalent time during the 3 previous election cycles.
- During the 2024 calendar year, the PBO completed 1,209 requests from parliamentarians, nearly three times the an annual average of 478.

We have been able to deliver this volume of activity while maintaining a median time of 15 business days or less. However, to achieve this, we have actively managed the prioritisation of requests with requestors, including placing lower priority requests on hold.

Between October and December 2024, the median time to complete requests was 13 days, but these requests had been on hold for an average of 29 days.

Our prioritisation framework is published on our website, and reflects consideration of a range of factors including:

- Relevance of the request to matters before the Parliament or soon to be before the Parliament;
- Level of priority given to the request by the parliamentarian's political party and/or the parliamentarian;
- Level of representation in the Parliament of the requesting political party or the group of parliamentarians supporting a joint request;
- Extent to which the parliamentarian or party has recently made use of the PBO's services;
- Length of time that a request has been with the PBO.

Generally, non-government requestors are also given priority as part of the prioritisation process.

I want to emphasise that we will continue to work to respond to all requests. The high volume means that we are not able to be as timely as we would like in our responses, but we aim to work through all requests.

During this period of high volume, we have also released a range of online interactive analytical tools and publications aimed at improving understanding of budget and fiscal issues.

Thank you and I am very much looking forward to engaging with the Committee and for the Parliament.