

Supplementary Budget Estimates Opening Statement

DPS response to COVID

1. This period has been a challenging one for DPS. To prepare for the August 2021 parliamentary sitting period and the subsequent ACT lockdown, the parliamentary departments including DPS reduced the number of staff presence onsite at APH by approximately 80% while still enabling the parliament to operate effectively.
2. Critical staff in Hansard, Broadcasting, security, catering and building maintenance roles remained on-site to support the work of parliament and service offerings were adjusted to comply with COVID restrictions.
3. For those critical staff required to work on site, extra control measures were put in place to ensure business continuity, this included dividing critical teams into different physical locations.
4. Temperature checking at all entrances was also introduced for the August 2021 sittings and remains in place for this sitting period.
5. During this time 21 DPS staff in non-critical roles and those unable to work from home due to the nature of their duties volunteered for secondment to Services Australia to assist with the government's support programs. This backs up from the previous deployment of 55 DPS staff during lockdowns in April 2020.
6. DPS also continues to work with the St Vincent de Paul charity organisation, as it has throughout the pandemic, in the supply of meals to homeless and vulnerable people. DPS originally supplied meals to the Night Patrol, Blue Door, Samaritan House and Oaks Estate programs. In the past 12 months DPS has supported Blue Door specifically by providing 625 meals per week.

Supporting Parliament

7. Investments DPS made in 2020 to implement additional videoconferencing infrastructure has been essential to meet increased demand for remote participation during lockdowns in New South Wales, Victoria and the ACT.
8. The expansion means it is now possible to host six simultaneous videoconference broadcast events with up to 200 remote participants per event.
9. During the August 2021 sitting period, Senators and Members utilised the videoconference facilities 922 times to represent their constituents, via remote participation in the Senate and House of Representative chambers.
10. Between 1 January and 30 September this year, 525 committee hearings totalling 2,077 hours were held.
11. Most of the 525 hearings had committee members and witnesses participate remotely by videoconference to engage in the important work that committees perform. The additional complexity remote participation places on Hansard and broadcasting should also be acknowledged.
12. The investment to expand video conferencing will continue. A project is currently underway to expand the permanent videoconferencing platform to 12 more committee rooms.
13. The 2020 and 2021 Service Desks have also experienced significant increases in demand for their support during this challenging period.
14. Between 1 January and 30 September this year, support staff handled an average of 243 contacts per day. Of the 45,427 contacts made during this period:
 - a. 36,165 were calls answered through the 2020 and 2021 phone lines
 - b. 9,262 were email, self-service and walk-in requests.

DMARC

15. I would like to address the implementation by DPS of Domain-based Message Authentication, Reporting, and Conformance – also known as DMARC.
16. As previously communicated to members and senators in October 2020, and again in August 2021, DPS is strengthening security on the aph.gov.au email domain as part of ongoing enhancements to protect the parliamentary computing network. These security changes mean that, from 6th December 2021, emails generated by third parties using **aph.gov.au** addresses will not be delivered.
17. The parliamentary network is one of the most highly targeted IT systems in the nation. Our parliamentarians are an attractive target for adversaries attempting to either exfiltrate information or disrupt our democratic processes.
18. Our parliamentary system has been the target of two significant cyber attacks in as many years.
19. Email is the single most vulnerable pathway to compromise IT systems, and compromise of the Parliament's network has significant ramifications for the reputation of the Commonwealth and confidence in our ability to protect our data.
20. The implementation of DMARC is a control under the Australian Government Information Security Manual and a feature of the Australian Cyber Security Centre's, Essential Eight Maturity Model.
21. It is designed to protect the aph.gov.au domain from being used for email spoofing, phishing attacks, and cybercrimes by blocking emails generated by third-party distribution services. Its application is *critical* to preventing

cybercriminals from impersonating our official site to send phishing emails to constituents and clients.

22. I recognise that this measure will require changes in our office work practices. I understand the majority of parliamentarians who are similarly affected through use of third-party services have already established new email domains.

23. I wish to emphasise that parliamentarians are not prevented from using their current platforms as long as they establish a different email domain – many parliamentarians already own ‘.com.au’ or similar website that includes an alternate email domain.

Jenkins and Foster Reviews

24. I also want to update the Committee on the important work underway by DPS to respond to the *Review of the Parliamentary Workplace* conducted by Stephanie Foster. This has been a high priority for the Presiding Officers and the Secretary.

25. DPS engaged with the Foster review to consider how policies and processes could be updated to support a safe workplace for all, particularly in response to 'Serious Incidents', and after-hours monitoring and reporting.

26. Recommendation 4 highlighted the need for an independent mechanism for responding to serious incidents at Parliament House. DPS acted swiftly to establish accommodation within the building and transition the newly established Parliamentary Workplace Support Services team to begin operating as soon as 30 August 2021.

27. Recommendation 6 called for operational procedures to be reviewed to ensure they are fit for purpose with respect to appropriately responding to serious incidents within Parliament House. DPS urgently developed a draft

Serious Incident procedure, in close consultation with the Australian Federal Police, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Department of Finance.

28. The new procedure approved by the Parliament's Security Management Board, chaired by the Secretary, provides better clarity around critical roles, responsibilities and required actions, including appropriate reporting mechanisms, in the event of a serious incident.
29. DPS has also assessed options for additional patrolling of areas accessed after-hours and revisited after-hours access reporting arrangements.
30. These options have been put to the appropriations committees of both houses, and we are carefully considering the merits of how these changes might contribute to the prevention of serious incidents while maintaining privacy and parliamentary privilege considerations.
31. DPS is also working with the AFP to review our memorandum of understanding for operational security services at Parliament House to ensure our collective response remains fit for purpose
32. DPS is concurrently working with the Department of Finance to review and update the memorandum of understanding that reflects the agreement between the Presiding Officers and Special Minister of State, which enables the separate administration of the Ministerial Wing.
33. DPS has also taken a proactive approach to assisting the *Independent Review into the workplaces of Parliamentarians and their staff* conducted by *Kate Jenkins*. This includes providing Ms Jenkins with information to enable her to navigate the complex organisational relationships that are the administrative and operational framework of the Australian Parliament.

34. Along with contributing a DPS submission, the Secretary collaborated with the other parliamentary department heads in the drafting of a joint high-level submission, focusing on respective roles and responsibilities.

35. DPS staff were supported and encouraged to make confidential submissions, participate in focus groups and complete an online survey.

Retail Services Strategy

36. At the last Estimates hearing on the 24th of May, President Ryan, informed you of the proposed implementation of a retail strategy to meet recommendations of the Australian National Audit Office by enhancing service offerings to building occupants and achieving value for money for the Commonwealth.

37. The first tranche of this implementation is seeking expressions of interest for health and wellness services: specifically hairdresser and beautician services, a physiotherapy service and a general practitioner.

38. The second tranche is market testing for hospitality services will involve a mix of casual dining, takeaway food and beverage services, and general store services.

39. All affected licensees and those who are unaffected by the changes have been informed in writing.

40. The process of expressions of interest for the first tranche has been delayed because of COVID-19 restrictions and the uncertainty they have caused in the ACT business environment.

41. Expressions of interest will be advertised at the beginning of 2022.

42. DPS has engaged a probity advisor and independent panel members to ensure an appropriate and effective evaluation of submissions will occur.