

Submission

Inquiry into the printing standards for documents presented to Parliament

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The State Library of South Australia is one of the deposit libraries for the Commonwealth Library Deposit Scheme and currently receives hardcopies of such publications as departmental annual reports, audit reports, committee enquiries, Acts, Bills, Notice Papers, etc.

Inquiry into the printing standards for documents presented to Parliament

Parliamentary records should be statements of facts, not glossy advertising brochures. In this respect I agree with the current printing standards – documents should be as inexpensive to produce as possible within the requirements for clarity of content and for preservation. To reduce costs still further, both of printing and postage to receiving entities, there are alternatives that could be considered given the growth and “mainstreaming” of the online environment. Should perhaps full reports be online and only summaries produced in hardcopy? Should “master copies” of documents be stored in a digital format for long-term preservation purposes, removing the need for archival quality paper for most hardcopies? Should individual documents be online and only bound sets of complete series be produced in hardcopy for deposit libraries?

If all parliamentary records were to become electronic only in format (as the Parliamentary Papers Series will be from 2017):

- Use a server for storage of master copies with off-site backup, using best practice digital preservation principles (Perhaps in partnership with the National Library?)
- Publications to be in PDF/A format (archive-quality PDF which complies with ISO 19005). PDF/A prevents editing of individual documents and makes each document an entity – fonts, etc, are a part of its metadata – thus ensuring long-term viability as technology changes
- For access, put copies of the publications on a publicly accessible server via file transfer protocol (FTP) or some other secure transfer method. This prevents hackers accessing the master copies and ensures master copy metadata is not changed.
- Have a free print-on-demand service for those who would still require a hardcopy but do not have the facilities to simply print the PDF. The hardcopy would be of a suitable but plain “reading copy” standard - A4, double-sided, stapled - unless there is a specific requirement for something more “glossy”, in which case a “glossy” hardcopy could be offered on a cost-recovery basis
- The publicly accessible PDF copies will need a search engine that has a simple layout but powerful capabilities, eg the public might know a document only by the name the media give it (eg “The Smith Report”), or by some keyword or publication number. They are unlikely to know government terminology or be familiar with series (eg “Parliamentary Papers”). Any search capability must be easy to use but be able to search from one field to many fields of a document or set of documents. There should also be the usual lists – by title, by date, by Parliament, by number, etc, but such lists could be dynamically compiled as a search result and exportable as a PDF which can be saved or printed for further reference

The impact of the Parliamentary Papers Series (PPS) shifting to online-only format from 2017 will affect the State Library of South Australia: positively, in that it will save storage space and binding costs; negatively, in that unless access to online copies is simplified and search capability improved, the general public will have much difficulty locating what they want, especially as it usually takes 3-4 years to produce contents pages and indexes.

There are also the health aspects to consider – trying to read a lengthy document online can be harmful for the eyes: eye moisture is reduced because the blink-rate is reduced when looking at screens which, long-term, can affect eye health, and prolonged screen use can cause eye-strain and headaches for many people. The Committee should consider production standards for online parliamentary records, if online is to become the standard format.

Standards could be based on such codes as:

- INCITS/ISO/IEC 10180:1995 (R2009) - Information Technology - Text Composition
- Standard Page Description Language (Spdl) - Information Technology Industry Council
- NS 11021:2013 - Universal Design - Accessible Electronic Text Documents - Requirements For Design, Mark-Up And File Formats - Norwegian Standards (Norges Standardiseringsforbund)
- AS 10179-1998 - Information technology - Processing languages - Document style semantics and specification language - Standards Australia