



PARLIAMENT *of* AUSTRALIA HOUSE *of* REPRESENTATIVES

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Mr Dennis Pecar
Secretary
Joint Committee on Publications
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Pecar

REVIEW OF PARLIAMENTARY PRINTING STANDARDS

The Department of the House of Representatives prepares and receives documents that are subject to the Parliamentary Printing Standards. The department produces its Annual Report and reports of certain parliamentary committees and delegations for presentation to the House, and to the Senate for reports of certain joint committees. The department also receives and is a repository for all documents presented and deemed to be presented to the House.

As an entity that prepares documents subject to printing standards, the department has been active in ensuring the costs of producing printed documents are kept to a minimum while ensuring public accessibility principally through electronic means. As a repository for printed documents, the department supports a minimum standard for government documents required to be presented or deemed to be presented to the House that will ensure the integrity of the original records of the proceedings of the House and enable Members to fulfil their parliamentary and constituent responsibilities with hard copy where necessary.

Costs of producing documents and value for money (Terms of reference 3 & 4)

The largest category of printed documents prepared by the department is reports of parliamentary committees. The department has significantly reduced the number of committee reports for each print run. Printed committee reports that were once provided to executive agencies, inquiry participants and the media are now made available electronically and stakeholders are strongly encouraged to access reports in this format. Reports are posted on committee websites promptly after presentation. The majority of committee reports are also published in the electronic Parliamentary Papers Series (ePPS). Committee secretariats will send printed copies of reports in response to requests where access to an electronic copy is limited or unavailable. The print run for reports has further reduced with the discontinuation of the printed Parliamentary Papers Series, which expired for reports made Parliamentary Papers from 2017.

In 2014 the department introduced standard report covers for committee reports, which has delivered savings and, together with the decrease in numbers of reports required to be printed, has increased opportunities to print reports in-house. In-house printing allows the department to respond to immediate demand without the risk of generating surplus copy.

Current level of need for printing standards (Terms of reference 1, 2, & 5)

The printing standards apply explicitly to documents that are made Parliamentary Papers.¹ Executive agencies are advised that as any document presented to the Parliament may be made a Parliamentary Paper, all documents for presentation should meet these standards.² The discontinuation of the printed Parliamentary Papers Series (PPS) could give rise to suggestions that the printing standards are redundant and should be withdrawn.

The continued application of a minimum printing standard to documents for presentation to the Parliament serves a two-fold purpose. First, it ensures the integrity of documents that constitute the original records of the proceedings of the House; that is the single document that is presented or deemed to be presented to the House. Second, a minimum printing standard ensures the usability of any stock of printed documents provided to assist Members in the discharge of their parliamentary and electorate responsibilities.

Original records of the proceedings of the House

Standing Order 28 requires that: ‘Under the direction of the Speaker, the Clerk shall have custody of the Votes and Proceedings, records, and all documents presented to the House.’ Documents that are presented or deemed to be presented to the House form part of the original records of its proceedings.

Minimum printing standards prescribing the use of archival quality of paper and binding should be set to ensure the integrity and legibility of original records received from executive agencies into the future. These standards should acknowledge the likely range of interest in the documents presented, so that documents deemed to be presented may be adequately secured with a copper staple or other appropriate method (as is current practice), while more significant documents such as documents presented by the Speaker and ministers after Question Time should continue to have more substantial bindings and covers.

The requirement to produce B5 copy, which facilitated the production and distribution of bound volumes of the PPS (the production of bound volumes of the PPS was discontinued from 2011), could be relaxed to an A4 standard with no adverse consequences. Relaxing standards in this way would facilitate moves to in-house printing for many documents.

¹ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Guidelines for the presentation of documents to the Parliament (including Government documents, Government responses to committee reports Ministerial statements, annual reports and other instruments)*, August 2016, paras 4.1-4.2:

4.1 ‘The requirements ... apply to Government documents which include, but are not limited to, annual reports, periodic reports with a statutory basis, reports of a Royal Commission and other miscellaneous documents that the government wishes to have tabled.

4.2 For the purposes of these Guidelines, Government documents do not include Government responses to Parliamentary Committee Reports ... Ministerial Statements ... or Deemed/Clerk’s Documents...’.

² Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Guidelines for the presentation of documents to the Parliament (including Government documents, Government responses to committee reports Ministerial statements, annual reports and other instruments)*, August 2016, para 4.6.

Increased online availability of tabled documents, for instance the ePPS from 2013 and the posting of parliamentary committee reports on committee webpages (including the back capture of the majority of House committee reports since Federation), has diminished the demand for providing physical copies of documents. It is likely that projects to back capture and publish significant parliamentary documents, such as the Parliamentary Library's project to digitise Parliamentary Papers from 2012 back to 1901, will further reduce requests for copies of historical documents.

Stock copies of printed documents

Besides acting as a repository for original documents constituting the proceedings of the House, a stock of some documents presented in the House by parliamentary and executive agencies is received for use by Members in discharging their parliamentary duties and representing their constituents. When a Government document is presented to the House, 30 copies of stock are required for provision to Members on their request. The number of stock copies required is under constant review and has been reduced significantly as Members increasingly access documents online. The principal considerations for stock copies of documents are adequate supply and shorter term usability.

It should be noted that not all documents presented to the House are subject to minimum printing standards or indeed require stock copies to be provided. As Ministers and Members may present a range of documents, inevitably some of these are not of an archival standard. Of course, this should not preclude their presentation to the Parliament.

As a receiving entity then, the department supports a minimum archival standard of paper quality and binding for more significant documents that are tabled or deemed to be tabled in the House and become original records of the proceedings of the House. Where required, stock documents need to be of a standard that would facilitate use by Members in the more immediate business of parliamentary proceedings and constituent representation, however archival considerations are generally of lesser importance in these instances.

Practicality of the Parliamentary Papers Series in an online environment (Terms of reference 6 & 7)

The PPS is a subset of all the documents presented to Parliament each year, with only documents considered to be of a substantial nature included. Until 2017, the printed series has been provided free of charge to organisations, such as state, publicly funded university and parliamentary libraries making the more significant tabled documents dating from Federation available throughout Australia. The series is a major reference source for information on the role and activities of the Australian Parliament and Government.

The PPS was the only subset of documents that the Parliament was responsible for distributing due to the unique character of the series and the importance of the documents included in it. As information is increasingly available, and expected to be available, online, this inquiry provides a timely opportunity for the PPS itself to be re-examined.

A transition to a purely online PPS provides efficiencies while also providing scope to expand the range of documents included in the series. Instead of the series being a subset of approximately 450 documents of the more than 1,000 tabled annually, most if not all could be included. In the online space the additional marginal unit cost of making these documents available is much less than with hardcopy.

Whilst relaxing the printing standards for hardcopy documents will deliver savings to agencies, there is scope to broaden the standards to require provision in electronic format of all documents presented or deemed to be presented by parliamentary and executive agencies, perhaps requiring a redesignation of the standards as 'publication standards'. These 'publication standards' could also require minimum accessibility standards for electronic documents. The Government is already required to make most documents presented to the Parliament available electronically (including, for example, legislative instruments on the Federal Register of Legislation). The reason for requiring electronic copy for inclusion in the Parliaments' online repository would be similar to that for requiring provision of documents in the ePPS: that is, to maintain optimal access regardless of government website changes.

It should be noted that a larger set of documents may increase the difficulty of locating items. In making an expanded PPS available electronically, the searchability of an online database is of particular and increasing importance. The current interface for the ePPS utilises the Tabled Papers Register within ParlInfo Search on the Australian Parliament House (APH) website. Anecdotally, comments have been received on the low level of useability of the current interface, even from library professionals.

The business case for the ePPS developed by the Departments of the House of Representatives and the Senate described a four stage development approach being:

- Stage 1 – inclusion of PPS documents into the Tabled Papers Register within ParlInfo Search, and hyperlinks from numeric PPS lists on the APH web site to the Register³;
- Stage 2 – development of a web page interface to enable visibility and searchability of the PPS as an entity;
- Stage 3 (optional) – investigate the addition of other tabled papers into the electronic Parliamentary Papers Series system; and
- Stage 4 (optional) – progressive back capture of older PPS documents into the system.

The Presiding Officers' further response to the Joint Committee on Publications' report of the *Inquiry into the development of a digital repository and electronic distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series*⁴ agreed to the basic ePPS being developed as soon as practical

³ This was described as "a short-term solution to give the ePPS greater online presence" and was to be further developed and automated with stage 2 development.

⁴ Parliamentary Joint Committee on Publications (2010) *Inquiry into the development of a digital repository and electronic distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series*. PP No. 160/2010.

with the easy to use web interface to follow and the remaining two stages to be investigated subsequently.⁵

In 2012 stage 2 was estimated to take six months to progress at a cost of \$50-60,000. Implementation of other parliamentary IT projects such as the Table Offices Production System and the APH website understandably delayed stage 2 however it remains to be realised. The move from the printed PPS to exclusively ePPS, which may entail an expanded on-line collection of documents, makes attending to the development of a dedicated searchable ePPS webpage more urgent.

Yours sincerely



David Elder
Clerk of the House

⁵ Further Response of the Presiding Officers to the Report of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Publications: *Inquiry into the development of a digital repository and electronic distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series*, p. 1.