

JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLICATIONS

Inquiry into the development of a digital repository and electronic distribution of the Parliamentary Paper Series

SUBMISSION

SUBMISSION NUMBER: 5

SUBMITTER: Parliamentary Library



date

Ms Sue Blunden
Secretary
Joint Committee on Publications



Dear Ms Blunden,

Inquiry into the Electronic distribution of the Parliamentary Paper Series

1 I am very pleased to provide a submission from the Parliamentary Library to the Joint Committee on Publications Inquiry into the Electronic distribution of the Parliamentary Paper Series.

2 The Parliamentary Papers are an enormously important documentary record of the development of national policy and consideration by the parliament of significant issues. The reports of committees are, for example, extremely thoughtful considered works which take into account extensive public consultation in the development of policy recommendations. The Parliamentary papers also provide a critical resource to enable scrutiny of the work of parliament and development of policy. Access to the papers is essential for an informed citizenry and for engagement of the parliament with Australians.

3 Increasingly, Australians are accessing information such as the parliamentary material online. Finding the papers online is a considerable challenge, as noted by the Australian National Audit report *Online Availability of Government Entities' Documents Tabled in the Australian Parliament* (http://www.anao.gov.au/uploads/documents/2008-09_Audit_Report_37.pdf), with some papers simply not being available in electronic form.

4 Australia has a proud history of publishing and distributing parliamentary and government information. Government information was the earliest material printed in the colony. The *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, first published in 5 March 1803, was Australia's first government publication and newspaper providing information to the then small population. It was basically a weekly official medium for the publication of official notices. Indeed the masthead prominently stated, "Published by Authority".

5 Since then, government and parliamentary information has grown vastly to many thousands of reports and papers each year. For an informed nation, I suggest the following, against your terms of reference.

- (a) **the online availability of documents tabled in the Parliament:**
It would be very beneficial for all documents tabled in Parliament that

are ordered to be printed to be made available through the parliament in electronic form with strategies that would ensure long term access. This would enable Australians to access this great national resource in a single place, without facing barriers of the current environment where some papers are not available electronically and other are extremely difficult to locate. It would also enable these very significant materials to be located together as a documentary record of the Parliament and its consideration of national issues. Such a repository would also eliminate the current problems of agencies changing names and web sites and cleansing their web sites of older material.

- (b) **the short and long-term access to documents included in the PPS:** It is vital that access be on the basis of long term permanent access to ensure that the nations records are available for contemporary and historical purposes. Destroying or deleting historic materials would not be consistent with the philosophy of a strong, informed democracy. Destruction of these resources would limit the ability of citizens to engage effectively in policy development and democratic processes.
- (c) **technological barriers:** I do not believe that there are technological barriers. If the publications were stored electronically by the parliament and made accessible on the web access would be through the web site as well as search engines. Accessibility is, however an important issue. The papers need to be made available in a way that meets accessibility standards and to enable those with print disabilities can read or hear the content of the publications.
- (d) **options for a digital repository and electronic distribution:** I recommend that the document be stored together with the metadata, that is the descriptions of the parliamentary papers such as author, title and parliamentary paper number. I recommend that in addition to storing the material in a ParlInfo repository a special web page be established to enable access to the resources such as that proposed for Hansard in the new Parliament of Australia web site.
- (e) **administration of an electronic PPS:** The administration of a repository needs to support timely publication of document in an efficient manner. It is important that such as service take in existing online publications with a streamlined process.

6 The current paper based system has operated for the past 50 years with collections of parliamentary papers made available to the public through libraries. In practice only those physically located close to a deposit library with knowledge, time and an awareness of the series have benefited from the collections. This is but a very very tiny proportion of the population. Opening up access to these very important documents will enhance access to the parliamentary papers in a way that gives a path from all computers with Internet access as well as through public libraries as they support their patrons use of online resources to a very significant extent. Taking away the physical barriers can increase awareness of the consideration of important reports by the parliament and, indeed, the role of the parliament across the nation.

7 I high recommend the publication of the full text of parliamentary papers through a national repository based in the parliamentary network providing long term access through modern systems supporting full text searching, RSS feeds, alerts and other mechanisms to assist Australians to participate in our great democracy.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Roxanne Missingham". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the "Yours sincerely" text.

Roxanne Missingham
Parliamentary Librarian