

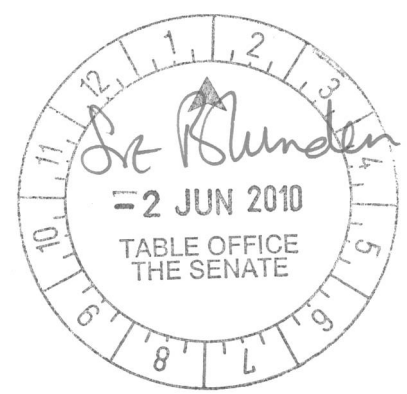
JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLICATIONS

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

SUBMISSION

SUBMISSION NUMBER: 11

SUBMITTER: National Library of Australia



Parliament of Australia

Senate Joint Committee on Publications

Electronic Distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series

Submission from the National Library of Australia

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL



2 June 2010

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Dear Ms Blunden

Electronic Distribution of the Parliamentary Paper Series

During the 2005 Joint Committee on Publications (JCP) Inquiry into the Distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series (PPS), the Library provided a written submission and also appeared at a public hearing on 31 October 2005. Since that time the Library's interest in the distribution of the PPS remains active and strong. Many of the issues raised at the time of the 2005 Inquiry remain relevant today.

The National Library of Australia has a mandate, under the *National Library of Australia Act 1960*, to collect, preserve and provide public access to all of Australia's documentary heritage in published form. The published record of the Parliament of Australia and in particular the PPS is an important information resource for all Australians. The Library strongly encourages the Joint Committee on Publications, during its investigation of the feasibility of an electronic PPS, to consider the provision of access to this information to all Australians in an easy and equitable way, now and into the future.

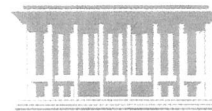
The Library offers the following comments on matters relating to the development of an electronic PPS with particular reference to:

- (a) the online availability of documents tabled in Parliament;
- (b) the short and long-term access to documents included in the PPS;
- (c) technological barriers;
- (d) options for a digital repository and electronic distribution.

Because there is considerable overlap in the Library's response to (b) and (d), these two references have been taken together.

(a) The online availability of documents tabled in Parliament.

The Library strongly supports the online availability of all government information, including documents tabled in Parliament. We agree with the Inquiry into the Distribution of the



Parliamentary Papers Series Report in 2006 “There is no doubt that the establishment of an electronic PPS would be widely supported.”¹

The provision of an electronic PPS is also consistent with the recommendations of the 2009 report of the Government 2.0 Taskforce, *Engage: Getting on with Government 2.0*², in particular:

- Central recommendation: A declaration of open government by the Australian Government;
- Recommendation 6: Make public sector information open, accessible and reusable;
- Recommendation 8: Information publication scheme.

The Library encourages the JCP to consider an electronic PPS in line with the strategies outlined in that report.

However, until there is in place a reliable and universally available system for distribution, access and preservation of such digital publications, there is a significant risk that an electronic PPS would fail to meet the goals of long-term online availability to PPS publications.

**(b) The short and long-term access to documents included in the PPS; and
(d) Options for a digital repository**

For online documents included in the PPS to be accessible over both the short and the long-term, discoverability and accessibility issues, as well as persistent linking and long-term preservation issues need to be addressed.

Discoverability and accessibility

Online access to the documents in the PPS does not in itself ensure that they are readily discoverable or accessible. The creation of a single, regularly updated, entry point or portal for published government documents would greatly enhance their discoverability.

There are two options for providing this:

- The *publications.gov.au* website : The 2006 Inquiry Report³ noted that documents in the PPS could be discovered via the *publications.gov.au* site. This is still the case; however the listing on this site has not been updated since 2007. While the site contains a link to the up-to-date listing on the Parliament of Australia website⁴ direct access to online PPS documents is not provided. The problems with searching the site noted in the Australian Library and Information

¹ Section 4.8 <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/publ/pps/report/chapter4.pdf>

² <http://www.finance.gov.au/publications/gov20taskforcereport/index.html> and the government response at <http://www.finance.gov.au/publications/govresponse20report/doc/Government-Response-to-Gov-2-0-Report.pdf>.

³ Sections 4.41-4.45 <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/publ/pps/report/chapter4.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/publ/PPS.htm>



Association submission to the Inquiry⁵ still remain, making these documents difficult to discover.

- The data.gov.au website: Recommendation 6.10 of *Engage: Getting on with Government 2.0* was to create a central portal, the data.gov.au website, to facilitate access to public sector information. This site is to be used in addition to any other distribution arrangements government agencies wished to pursue. This recommendation was accepted by Government. The Library encourages the JCP to consider the data.gov.au website as an appropriate distribution mechanism for the PPS.

The discovery services offered by the National Library of Australia⁶, in particular Trove⁷, are a reliable method of enabling users to discover and access government information, including PPS documents. Trove is a national discovery service providing integrated access to over 90 million Australian and related resources. Regardless of the option chosen as the entry point for government information, access to PPS documents would be greatly enhanced if the metadata for the electronic PPS was made accessible via Trove. The Library would be pleased to discuss this further with the JCP.

Persistent linking

As the JCP noted in Recommendation 14 of the 2006 Inquiry Report, the use of persistent identifiers and an identifier resolver service are essential for ongoing access to online government publications which may be moved to a new network location, archived or removed from public view over time. It is the Library's policy to include persistent links in its catalogue records for Australian published items when available. The Library also operates a persistent identifier and identifier resolver service for digital objects in its care.

The Library is not aware of current practices of other agencies in managing persistent linking to digital versions of PPS documents published by them.

Ongoing access, preservation and repository options

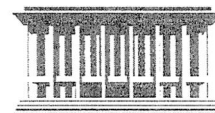
In addition to the short-term access risks already noted, the following long-term risks in providing access to documents in the PPS also exists:

- The likelihood of inconsistent format, metadata and other standards being applied by agencies, making content hard to preserve and manage in a rapidly changing technical environment.
- The possibility of underlying data being lost or corrupted if not stored and managed in ways that ensure its ongoing integrity and security.
- The strong likelihood of access to information being lost as the software available for providing access changes over time.

⁵ <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/publ/pps/subs/sub006.pdf>

⁶ See *Government Publications Resources at the National Library* at <http://www.publications.gov.au/natLibRes.html>

⁷ <http://trove.nla.gov.au>



- Inadequate management of programs required to deal with these risks at the scale and over the timeframes needed.

These risks are not insurmountable, but they require deliberate, informed planning and management to mitigate or avoid them. A program for preservation of an electronic PPS needs to be established, including a digital repository supporting permanent preservation and public access.

While technological options have improved since 2005, and some cost elements have been reduced, there are still significant overheads involved in the successful long-term protection and management of access to electronic information resources such as the PPS.

The Library sees at least four key stakeholders with the potential to play a critical role in ensuring ongoing access to an electronic PPS:

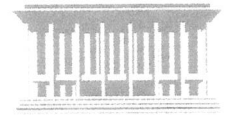
- Government agencies which originate and publish the papers, and which may be able to take either a short-term or long-term responsibility for keeping the materials they publish accessible and usable.
- The Departments of Parliament which play a central role in coordinating and administering the PPS, and which may be able to take ongoing responsibility for various aspects of an electronic PPS, ranging from setting standards, aggregating metadata and providing links to the content, through to implementing and managing a preservation repository which provides a central access point for users.
- AGIMO or another agency with a whole-of-government information management role such as the Office of the Information Commissioner.
- The National Library of Australia which has a responsibility for collecting and providing access to Australian publications, and which already collects many of the PPS documents in electronic form through its web archiving activities. Given certain conditions, the Library could collect PPS documents more comprehensively and systematically, and manage them as a collection for current and ongoing access.

It is possible for all of these players to achieve the goals of an electronic PPS, but the Library believes the risks to ongoing access are likely to be greater if it is left to individual agencies to manage long-term access and preservation. The range of agencies involved in producing PPS documents is broad and covers a wide range of technical capacities, competing business priorities, timeframes for administrative change, and compliance with standards.

The Library recommends that the best chance for ongoing PPS effectiveness would lie with either a central agency such as AGIMO, or the Parliamentary Departments, setting up an appropriately designed digital repository in which to store, manage, preserve and administer access to a consolidated PPS. Under such a scenario, the Library could play an important role in mirroring the consolidated content as a backup in case of loss and an alternate mechanism for access.

Alternatively, the Library could take the role of primary preservation repository, either through its own direct collecting activities, or on deposit of material coordinated by a central agency or the Parliamentary Departments with the authority to set standards for agency compliance.

While the Library has been developing the programs needed for long-term preservation, technology changes over the past five years mean there are significant systems and infrastructure



capability and budget issues needing to be addressed before adequate preservation programs could be put in place for a repository of PPS documents at the Library. The Library would be happy to discuss these issues further with the Committee.

Extension of Legal Deposit to digital materials

The National Library of Australia needs to have the right to collect, ensure access to and preserve electronic publications of all Australian government agencies.

Extension of the legal deposit provisions within the *Copyright Act 1968* to digital materials was Recommendation 18 of the 2006 Inquiry Report, and was the only recommendation of the JPC which the Government undertook to review. In the ongoing absence of any legislative change, the Library is actively working with AGIMO to enable a whole of government approach to online government publications being collected, made accessible and preserved in a streamlined way in *PANDORA: Australia's Web Archive*, without requiring individual permission for each title to be archived.

(c) Technological barriers.

In an era of the Internet and ever-expanding online content, direct and immediate access to government information is fundamental to a well-informed society. Although household (and business) access to the Internet has continued to increase since the time of the 2005 Inquiry⁸, access is by no means universal or unproblematic. It is likely that some Australians still experience significant barriers to accessing information in digital form. Reading complex and lengthy documents such as those in the PPS, and the costs to the public needing to print them present ongoing challenges. The Library urges the JCP to take this into account in its consideration of moving to an electronic PPS.

The Library would be willing to discuss further with the Committee any of the issues raised in this submission.

Yours sincerely

Jan Fullerton

⁸ 8146.0 - Household Use of Information Technology, Australia, 2008-09, <http://abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/8146.0/>; 8129.0 - Business Use of Information Technology, 2007-08, [http://abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/8129.0,](http://abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/8129.0/)