



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLICATIONS

Reference: Distribution of the parliamentary papers series

MONDAY, 31 OCTOBER 2005

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**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
PUBLICATIONS**

Monday, 31 October 2005

Members: Mrs Draper (*Chair*), Mr Adams (*Deputy Chair*), Mr Baker, Mr Baldwin, Ms Corcoran, Mr Hayes and Mrs Hull

Members in attendance: Senator Watson and Mr Adams, Ms Corcoran and Mrs Draper

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

The distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series (PPS), with particular reference to:

- The potential impact of changes to the distribution of the PPS made by the Presiding Officers, namely the tightening of eligibility guidelines and the cessation of blister packs to commence on 1 January 2006;
- The provision of the PPS in a digital format, either as an alternative or an adjunct to the hard copy series;
- The feasibility of a subscription service, either in digital or hard copy form; and
- The possibility of partial or full cost recovery for the series.

WITNESSES

**GATENBY, Ms Pamela Jane, Assistant Director-General, Collection Management Division,
National Library of Australia 10**

**HOLDEN, Ms Kym Lynette, Executive Convenor, Australian Government Libraries
Information Network 1**

SMITH, Ms Janet, Executive Member, Australian Government Libraries Information Network..... 1

Committee met at 11.21 am

HOLDEN, Ms Kym Lynette, Executive Convenor, Australian Government Libraries Information Network

SMITH, Ms Janet, Executive Member, Australian Government Libraries Information Network

CHAIR (Mrs Draper)—I welcome representatives of the Australian Government Libraries Information Network to give evidence. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that public hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House and the Senate themselves. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. Are there any corrections or amendments you would like to make to your submission?

Ms Holden—No.

CHAIR—Do you wish to make a statement in relation to the submission, or would you care to make some introductory remarks?

Ms Holden—A bit of both is what I have prepared, if that is fine?

CHAIR—Yes, please.

Ms Holden—AGLIN, or FLIN as it was originally called, which was the Federal Libraries Information Network, was formed in 1993 after discussions in the 1980s, early 1990s, on the need for a body to act as an umbrella for Commonwealth government libraries. At the end of 2003, the name was changed to AGLIN to represent contemporary terminology and better position the network for the future. AGLIN membership is open to all Australian government libraries and information services. Among its aims are to represent the interests and concerns of members in wider government forums; to develop and implement cooperative schemes and resource sharing activities; to promote improved access to information by agencies and their staff; the cost-effective procurement of library materials; and to foster and facilitate the dissemination of Australian government publications to the wider community. As you can see, all of these are relevant to the current inquiry and explain our interest in the matter.

As you will be aware, this issue has been discussed by your committee previously. In 1996, following a similar request from your committee, we lodged a submission. We advocated then that the series is a whole-of-government cost-effective service. Government libraries provide a cost-effective means of making information about government available through government agencies, through the series, and distribution channels for government publications are not reliable. The internet is no replacement for printed papers. That was 1996 and, as we all know, those things still ring true today.

AGLIN is particularly concerned about the tightening of eligibility guidelines to exclude government agency libraries from distribution of the papers. Agency staff need access to information about government whenever they are at work. They need it at their workplaces, and

they often require urgent access to documents covering extended historical periods. This can be outside normal business hours, but the need is there to provide accurate and reliable information to the Australian government. They cannot wait for an inter-library loan or to be told they must visit the National Library to see it.

Government libraries do not collect in a vacuum. The purpose of their collections is to support their agencies in the development and delivery of government services. Government relies on its agencies to provide timely and accurate information, including a review of past policies and programs. The parliamentary papers are a vital source of that information. The provision of parliamentary papers at present provides government libraries with an automatic and assured delivery of government reports that would otherwise take considerable staff time to discover and acquire. Resource constraints within government agencies means that library staff do not have the time to track down and request copies of these publications from all the agencies.

The discovery task has been made even more complex in recent years with the closure of AGPS and the cessation of Australian government publications. Even with the shortcomings of both of these, they provided some backup for discovery purposes. The government publications web site has not replaced these services; it is far from comprehensive and it is difficult to search effectively. The Parliamentary Library's index to the series is a good discovery tool, but it is somewhat after the event. It still leaves the problem of acquisition of each of the items. Additionally, by the time the index appears, stocks are no longer guaranteed, and the time to acquire individual publications is disproportionate.

AGLIN supports the availability of the PPS in a digital form, but only as an adjunct to the print version until these issues are resolved. Australian government publications are for all Australians. Many of the reports are lengthy, difficult to comprehend on-line, time consuming and difficult to print out. I do not think shifting the cost of obtaining a print copy is a solution. The bulk of publications are already available on agency web sites, but there are a few problems with that. They are not identified as being part of the series; they are unlikely to be available in the long term.

We refer you to the digital amnesia seminar that was sponsored by the National Library and the National Archives, and I remember meeting Senator Watson at that time. That highlighted the issues of the disappearing government web content. Internet access is not always assured to library staff; there are many departments that do not have internet access for all of their staff. Again, their becoming digital is not 100 per cent of the solution.

Activities that would improve the situation include parliament hosting a web site devoted to the listing and providing access to the series; papers being identified reliably as belonging to the series; and a central program of preservation of digital versions of the papers. Until these are in place—and it has been demonstrated that they can provide a comprehensive and reliable access over time—the print series will continue to be an essential record of government and must continue to be made available to government.

There are doubtless steps that can be taken to streamline and improve the service in the meantime. Some of those that we suggest are: ensuring that only government libraries that want the papers are sent them; having a distribution similar to the deposit libraries scheme but with a PPS identifier added to copies; allowing libraries to nominate the parts of the series that they

require—the whole series, annual reports only or annual reports and budget papers—and having electronic notification of new reports, combined with a supply and print option. It may be possible to introduce a subscription service for the print copies, but it should be at such a level that it does not discriminate against already poorly resourced government libraries.

Although our concern is the supply of the PPS series to the Australian government agency libraries, we are also concerned about public access to the series. This should be maintained through state and university libraries. It is difficult to comprehend, however, that recipients of the blister packs are offered the same service that is being withdrawn from government libraries. We recommend that the decision be reconsidered in light of the considerable value the series adds to the work of government libraries. Thank you for the opportunity of coming and talking today.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. Are there any questions?

Ms CORCORAN—Thank you very much for your very clear submission and presentation this morning. I want to talk a little about the point you make about the index being a good discovery tool but somewhat after the event. Perhaps you can explain that to me. I am a newcomer to all of this; how does that work?

Ms Smith—The Parliamentary Library compiles an index to parliamentary papers, but it does not do it until the end of the year. Even then, it is generally somewhat into the next year before it is available. If it is suggested that government libraries could use that as a way of tracking down the previous year's papers, you are not guaranteed that they are all still available at that time.

Ms CORCORAN—So that could be 12 months after the event?

Ms Smith—Yes.

Ms CORCORAN—Is it a calendar year or a financial year?

Ms Smith—It is a calendar year.

Senator WATSON—You mentioned the level of the fees not being too high. What sort of figure did you have in mind?

Ms Holden—We had not looked at a particular cost to this that was sustainable. We had not surveyed the libraries as far as a cost that they would—

Senator WATSON—What do you think would be a reasonable fee—\$5, \$10?

Ms Holden—As in per copy?

Senator WATSON—Yes. Because that is a consideration—

Ms Holden—Yes, it is a consideration, and yes, that would make libraries consider which they acquire, and in some cases that would be a shame because it would break up the series. You never know—I work for the Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources and I think the last

election was the first time we have stayed as that entity. Previous times parts were split and changed, so you do not know your future focus that you will be looking back on. I can think of an instance last year when the National Measurement Institute came into being, which comes under our department. We had to look back on part of CSIRO, the National Measurement Laboratory, to gather information on how it came into being and all that was involved in that. Without the parliamentary papers series I would not have been able to do that research, and I will not know in 2004 about something that was done previously and of a decision made to cost-cut a particular portion of it. Some time in the future we may have responsibility for that portion, where today we might not have that responsibility. So it would be a shame to force libraries to consider only getting a portion of it because that is within their framework today, where that may change tomorrow. So those considerations, I think, make it a little hard.

Senator WATSON—I have three other questions. Treasury has made a suggestion, but you are not prepared to give me a figure yet?

Ms Holden—We have not surveyed the libraries concerned as to what—

Senator WATSON—Could you do that, because I think it could be helpful?

Ms Holden—Yes, we can certainly do that, within the main libraries.

Senator WATSON—We have a submission from May Priddle, the Manager of Information and Records from Treasury, and she makes an interesting point about introducing an email alerting service for the parliamentary papers series. She feels that there would be great value and benefit to both the public and government institutions and agencies with a need to monitor this information. Would you like to comment on that?

Ms Holden—I think that is a good idea. We did mention that as well—notification of a new paper that is coming out or a new series. But then again, if you are using it to then say which ones you want out of that, as I said previously, not knowing in the future what you are going to need to collect makes that difficult. In Treasury's case, they are probably fairly wide ranging in what they want because they have an all encompassing need, whereas with individual government departments that can be a little bit difficult. Yes, it is good to have an email notification. It depends on what your next step is, whether you then have to choose if you want it or not, or whether you can have access to the full thing.

Ms Smith—Perhaps I could add to that. In my role I am responsible for the production of our reports, and it would be some time in advance of that email alert going out that I have to decide how many to print, so it would be a bit of an added burden to me at that point, possibly, because I do not know how many copies of our reports would be required—if it is optional for people to take them.

Senator WATSON—Do you think the Presiding Officers are being a little bit too hard in terms of what I believe are our responsibilities to upholding democracy so that the public have the widest opportunity of accessing information that is available to the parliament? I just have a perception, and I would like your views on whether, as a democratic institution, we should have responsibility for disseminating information that forms part of a parliamentary papers series.

Ms Holden—Yes, absolutely, and I think the libraries play a part in that, whether it be a government department library or a state or a regional library—they all play a part in disseminating that information.

Senator WATSON—On the other hand, there is a suggestion from the clerks of the House of Representatives about the duplication of the distribution lists for the PPS, LDS and the Parliamentary Library arrangement with state parliamentary departments. It is overlapping significantly. Do you think there is scope for reduction or rationalisation of the distribution or the administration? The suggestion was put as to whether this could be achieved through a single overarching system which is centrally administered. That was an interesting concept that I would like to share with you.

Ms Holden—I would think one of the suggestions is checking with libraries as to which of the government department libraries still want the parliamentary papers series. If there are libraries—like mine, for instance—that do use it heavily, I think they should still be able to get it. There are some libraries that might find that they do not use it a lot and may opt out of it, so that may reduce the number of libraries to which you are sending it.

Senator WATSON—But the issue is really a central overarching system which is centrally administered, which is a different concept, is it not?

Ms Holden—Yes, it is.

Ms Smith—There is also scope perhaps for rolling into consideration the deposit copies for all Australian government publications that go essentially to the state libraries, the National Library and the university libraries.

Senator WATSON—The distribution network has quite a lot of arms.

Ms Smith—Yes, there are.

Senator WATSON—The suggestion is that they will all be put together under a central—

Ms Smith—Which is really the role that AGPS used to play.

Senator WATSON—Yes. There does seem to me to be some need to have something of a more central nature.

Ms Smith—Yes.

Mr ADAMS—Where someone can go and know that they can find everything that has come out of this paper series.

Senator WATSON—In relation to the PPS in digital form, either as an alternative or an adjunct to the hard copies, again from the House of Representatives what has not been provided to date is a consolidated annual set of PPS documents in digital form.

Ms Holden—I think every publication is in digital form currently. If it is an annual report, it is put up on a department's web site, being in a central place and someone having a central responsibility for it. Until there is a central agency that has control of those electronic forms, and until bringing them together into one place is proven to be reliable, that is where we are saying, 'Yes, we still need print.' But it does make sense to bring that all together into one place, especially if it is going to be digital and linking to the index.

Mr ADAMS—I think you have just given us one of our recommendations.

Ms Smith—You might like to pop in there 'timely' as well.

Mr ADAMS—Like John, it is the distribution and people's access that I get concerned about. You also mentioned the shifting cost. It is also a shifting of time; the cost is also in people. We find as MPs and senators that departments and committees cut back on giving us hard copies of meetings, and you have to print them off yourself, but that is yours or your staff's time. I guess it is the same with you.

Ms Holden—Yes.

Mr ADAMS—So this is actually a cost shifting from the parliamentary budget to government agencies?

Ms Smith—Yes, that is right.

Senator WATSON—I put forward earlier that I think that responsibility really should, in the first place, be with the parliament because, in a democratic operation, we have to be responsible for that, surely, rather than give it to somebody else.

Mr ADAMS—I think taking it on board we have closed the government bookshops because of the digital electronic transfer of information. You have raised these very good points and that, to get the paper series and have access to it as a whole, there is still a problem—there is still the issue?

Ms Smith—Yes.

Mr ADAMS—You feel there has to be a centralised process.

Ms Holden—It makes sense to have a centralised process; it makes sense for that to be with parliament. With the entity that parliament is, responsibility for the parliamentary papers series will stay there. As I said in terms of our department, the individual departments that may have produced something have changed over time; their focus has changed, so they will not necessarily have the same focus in the future. Whereas with the joint publications providing that access as time goes on is an important part of that.

Mr ADAMS—Would you say that, without the series coming out of here in hard copy at the moment, it just makes it so much more difficult for anybody seeking the information?

Ms Holden—Absolutely, because a lot of those are not large print runs or on their own for what was needed for the parliamentary papers series. It is a way of getting that publication that sometimes can be difficult, and certainly not timely in other ways.

Ms CORCORAN—Just for my own clarification—I probably should know this already—I am assuming that you represent libraries that exist inside Australian government departments?

Ms Holden—Yes, we do.

Ms CORCORAN—So am I correct in thinking that the majority of those libraries would be either here in Canberra or in capital cities—that you would not have a lot of libraries stuck out the back of Bourke?

Ms Holden—There are some.

Ms CORCORAN—Not that that diminishes—

Ms Holden—No, that is right. There are some Commonwealth ones in Townsville. The Defence Science and Technology Organisation have libraries in various parts around Australia.

Mr ADAMS—The Antarctic Division would have one in Hobart.

Ms Holden—We have not had much to do with them, but I imagine—

Ms Smith—They do have one there.

Ms Holden—They do have one there, but the ones that have been active—South Australia, Melbourne—we do. There are some, yes. Townsville has been fairly active.

Ms CORCORAN—One of my concerns is that we do not disadvantage libraries or people who are trying to use this papers series who do not have good access to the internet. That possibly is not such an issue for you, in practical terms; it might be in terms of theory, but not in practical terms.

Ms Holden—But there are also some government departments—for instance, I know Customs does not have internet on the desktop—that do not, for normal staff, have internet on the desktop, which means access to an electronic version of a paper can sometimes be difficult. It means going somewhere where there is access to the internet if you need to view it digitally, whereas if you had the paper copy in the library, that is fine.

Ms CORCORAN—So it is still a trip down the corridor to the library, presumably?

Ms Smith—Yes. The cost factor is an issue.

Ms CORCORAN—That is a good point; thank you.

Mr ADAMS—The question that came up at our last meeting was also what we do not publish, and that is another issue that we need to make sure of. We have discovered that there were several papers that did not get out into the public. This can be a department wanting to hide something, a minister wanting to hide something—it would not matter which party was in power; but it is a general observation—or not wanting to publish too widely something that is unpopular, but that is not good for the democratic process.

Ms Holden—No. I think we have all come across it sometimes—something we thought was in the parliamentary papers series but, when we searched for it, it could not be found.

Mr ADAMS—Do you feel that is a problem?

Ms Holden—Yes, it has been a problem.

Mr ADAMS—For the distribution of information?

Ms Holden—Yes, absolutely.

CHAIR—There are a few pages, obviously, as the member for Lyons has pointed out, that are not published. I think one of the explanations that we received for that was that some of them were a bit unwieldy, so it is something that we can look at. In view of the comments that have been made, my committee secretary has quite rightly suggested that we should ask you whether or not your members are aware that there are now annual lists of all of the parliamentary papers series documents available online via the committee's web page. Would a version of this document with links to the papers on the agency web sites be helpful?

Ms Holden—It would be helpful but, again, you are going to run into the problem of them staying on that department's web site. If they disappear, that is a dead link. Who will archive those publications and provide permanent linking?

Mr ADAMS—So it is those that disappear and there is nobody keeping records of those things?

Ms Holden—That is right. There is a new annual report this year, so why do we need last year's up there: various things like that.

Ms Smith—Particularly when agencies do change their names. You might find last year's, and it is quite possible that they are still on the internet somewhere, but it is a bit of a task then to track them down. I think the National Library has been doing some work into that.

Ms Holden—Pam will go into that a bit more shortly.

Mr ADAMS—I think it is an issue that we probably need to really look at as a committee now, because I think we have responsibility for the information to go to archives and be put into a form so that it can go to archives. I think there are opportunities when things can get lost under the modern electronic process; we need to have someone checking that.

Ms Holden—Yes.

CHAIR—I thank you very much for your very interesting submission and comments today.

Ms Holden—Thank you.

[11.49 am]

GATENBY, Ms Pamela Jane, Assistant Director-General, Collection Management Division, National Library of Australia

CHAIR—I now call the representative of the National Library of Australia to give evidence. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that public hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House and Senate themselves. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. Are there any corrections or amendments you would like to make to your submission?

Ms Gatenby—No.

CHAIR—Do you wish to make a statement in relation to the submission or would you care to make some introductory remarks?

Ms Gatenby—I would like to make some introductory remarks. The collection management division has responsibility for the collecting and distribution of Australian publications, both print and electronic. The Library welcomes this inquiry into the distribution of parliamentary papers series, and also we are glad that we are able to give some input to the process.

Information published by parliament is an extremely important form of information for all Australians, hence we have always taken our responsibility with collecting and distributing this information very seriously. We would like to urge the joint committee to give a high priority to consideration of all the issues associated with access to this information, whether it ends up being distributed electronically and/or in print or only in print. We feel that the key consideration is access, and this is at the core of decision making in this area. We consider that access should be made easy, it should be free of charge and it should be for the long term.

Access to information of parliament should not be seen as meeting just an immediate need; it should be available for the long term, for future generations of Australians. We consider that the existing Library infrastructure is able to fulfil a lot of these requirements. The National Library, for example, hosts a service called Libraries Australia, which is an online union catalogue that lists the holdings of over 1,000 Australian libraries, and through that system libraries and their clients can know what is held in the library system. Also, through the national document delivery service, people are able to borrow copies of publications or request reproductions of parts of publications.

In considering the possibility of distribution of the parliamentary papers series in digital form, before any change is made, the Library would urge the committee to ensure a long-term and reliable arrangement is in place that does guarantee ongoing public access to the information. A lot is said about online access to information. We believe that there is still a huge way to go in Australia with regard to managing access to this information that is in online form, but also in taking responsibility for looking after it into the future. There are practices in place now that are

not sustainable practices and will not ensure that information that is distributed electronically remains available electronically into the future.

An approach that we would like to propose to the joint committee for your consideration is for the National Library to become the distributor of the parliamentary papers series, if it were to be distributed electronically, through our PANDORA archive. PANDORA is the name of a digital archiving repository and service that we set up in 1996, and since that time we have been routinely collecting Australian online publications for permanent access by the public, and many of those publications are already government reports and publications. We have the means and the knowledge, but we would need to be resourced for such an undertaking if we were to take this on, on top of what we are already doing.

As to the terms of reference regarding the blister packs, we do not have any objection to the discontinuation of blister packs. We consider that we can certainly continue to collect, print and bind the series based on the single issues that we already collect, so that is not a major concern for us. I guess the major concern is this future possibility of going electronic. We would urge, probably as a transition, that we continue to distribute in print as well as electronic, if electronic is a serious consideration, because many Australians still do not have the required infrastructure or necessary IT skills to be able to access the information readily and easily. It is not just a matter of having a computer but, as you would know, many of the reports are very lengthy and complex, and it is quite difficult, if not impossible, to read them online, and it is very expensive for people to print them off. So it would be passing a cost on to the user if we were to do that. I think that is all I would like to say at this point.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Pamela. Are there any questions?

Mr ADAMS—Does the National Library presently receive a hard copy of the series?

Ms Gatenby—Yes, we get the single hard copies and the blister pack, and we use the issues that come in the pack to bind, so we end up with a bound version for each year. But we do discard the single issues that remain after that process.

Mr ADAMS—What will you do without the blister pack?

Ms Gatenby—We would use the single issues that we receive as they are published to bind, so we would just accumulate them over a 12-month period and do an annual binding of them. We would end up with a bound copy, but no single issues.

Mr ADAMS—Do you have all of them, going right back to the beginning of the nation?

Ms Gatenby—We have very good coverage, but not exhaustive. We know there are a couple of issues missing, if we go right back. We do the best we can to ensure that every issue is sent to the Library, and we monitor that from the numbering of the series so we can keep a record of that.

Mr ADAMS—I want to explore with you your comments about unsustainability in recording information that is available online now or in digital form, that in the long term is unsustainable, and we have some work to do in that area as a nation. I think this committee does as well,

because we have a responsibility to archive what is published here by parliament. Could you elaborate a little bit on that? What work is going on? Are you conferencing; have there been conferences, and what is the world doing?

Ms Gatenby—Yes. The National Library of Australia and the National Archives of Australia have been major players in this area of electronic online publishing and collecting and preserving. So we are fairly confident that we are at the forefront of what is happening internationally. As to the big issues that we confront in Australia, and talking about government agencies in particular, they have not yet embraced what is required to manage on an ongoing basis and to preserve what they are putting on their web sites. So the imperative is to get information out there quickly, and they are very good at doing that. Probably 90 per cent of publishing is now online in the government sector, but we require much more compliance with good practice procedures, and they include things like assigning a persistent identifier to every single publication or piece of information you issue on your web site. A persistent identifier is a number—it can take any form—but it guarantees that if you move that piece of information to somewhere else on your web site, the user can always find it, can always track to it, because it has this constant number. That numbering system is not widely used in the government yet.

Another problem is that information changes rapidly. A document can take one form one day and take a different form the next day. To overcome that, we need better control of versions, so that a version that might have originally been issued is preserved and kept, and subsequent versions are all kept as well.

Mr ADAMS—Sure, so draft 1, draft 2.

Ms Gatenby—Yes, that is right, so you keep a record of the publication history.

Ms CORCORAN—You used the words ‘different forms’; did you mean different versions of a document?

Ms Gatenby—Yes, versions—different versions of the online form, so what you see one day might be different the next day because changes have been made to a document that have overridden the original document, which is fine, as long as you can go back to and see the original document somewhere. Best practice requires agencies to keep all of the versions of an online document and keep them readily accessible to people—

Ms CORCORAN—So would those versions have been printed? Would there be necessarily hard copies of them in the system?

Ms Gatenby—Sometimes, but not necessarily. Another big issue is what we call metadata, describing the documents so that people are able to know what is being issued on web sites. The traditional role of libraries, particularly the National Library, is to provide this bibliographic finding service, and that is what we do through the Libraries Australia service I mentioned.

Mr ADAMS—That is one of your new roles as libraries?

Ms Gatenby—Yes, definitely, it is a core role for libraries. But many government agencies do not assign basic descriptive elements to their online resources; so, unless libraries are able to

know about all of these resources and catalogue all of these resources, it is very hard for the public to even start exploring and finding out what exists. You need descriptive data, names of an organisation, names of a body and subject terms to be able to do a search using Google or whatever online. Archives have played a very strong role in this area: they have developed policies, processes, procedures, given training courses and they have packages of information. A big issue is just compliance, and it is quite difficult. It is not that people do not have the will; it is just a very complex area of dissemination. It represents a big overhead for people as well.

The National Library has established this archive called PANDORA in 1996, and we do select what we deem to be important or significant Australian online publications, and we actually copy them, with the permission of the creator or the publisher, and download them into the archive. We fully describe them, we give the cataloguing description, the metadata, and we have a public interface which is freely accessible through the internet so that anyone who has internet access can get into the PANDORA archive, find things and use them. Very few, about one per cent, might have restrictions. The bulk of it is freely accessible and useable by everyone. So we developed that infrastructure in house and it has been picked up and used by a couple of national libraries around the world, and it fits into our other information technology infrastructure that we use to make information available.

Mr ADAMS—Did you say you have 90 per cent of information—

CHAIR—Publishing online, I think.

Ms Gatenby—Yes, but I would say government agencies now are issuing online about 90 per cent of everything they issue, but a lot of that could well be still in print as well—so dual publishing. We know that increasingly, certainly in the Commonwealth, agencies are now going online only, and they are not issuing things in print as well.

Mr ADAMS—Are you finding that is a problem for finding information long term?

Ms Gatenby—Yes, I do, because unless you have very good rigorous data management practices in place, when that information loses its appeal and its currency, it will be removed or else put in a digital store that is not accessible by the public.

Mr ADAMS—The annual report could be taken off, and if it is not in written form it is lost.

Ms Gatenby—Yes. If you were to rely only on the agency that was issuing or distributing and no-one else in the system had copies, I think it is a very big risk.

Ms CORCORAN—Who are your customers mainly?

Ms Gatenby—For our PANDORA service?

Ms CORCORAN—Yes.

Ms Gatenby—We conduct surveys of our users and we know that they are widespread and they are very difficult to define. We are used by schools—the education system uses us quite a lot. We are used by overseas agencies. It is hard to define exactly what category they fall into,

but overseas libraries do use our archive. We are used by people that call themselves 'researchers'—doing independent private research. So they tend to fall into categories of education, private research, general public, and other libraries.

Senator WATSON—The Presiding Officers believe that the PPS costs now outweigh the benefits. Would you like to comment on that?

Ms Gatenby—I guess it depends on what they deem to be the benefits. I can certainly see and sympathise that the costs are quite considerable because the way in which they are now distributed does date back many years, and it fulfilled a need when it was first implemented. As I suggested, we get single bound copies; we then get the blister packs. We bind the blister pack and we throw out the single copies, as we do not want to retain both. I certainly think that the information as such has huge national benefit and importance, but I do think it could be distributed more efficiently—but taking into account the various needs and circumstances people are in in being able to access the information.

Senator WATSON—And you are prepared to do that distribution from the National Library perspective?

Ms Gatenby—We could consider doing the electronic distribution, not the print. We could never do the print distribution. The electronic would be a cost, an overhead, for us which we would have to cover.

Senator WATSON—What would that cost be?

Ms Gatenby—It is hard to say. I think we are looking at around 600 titles a year based on the last couple of years, and currently we have a team of five people. From memory, we archive about 900 titles a year. Our operation is quite labour intensive because of the way we do it and are able to do it. I imagine we would be mainly looking at staff costs, and it could be—this is guessing—in the order of \$200,000. But then we have ongoing computer storage costs, and I would need to look into that aspect.

Senator WATSON—What would be the advantage of transferring part of the operation to the National Library, as you recommended?

Ms Gatenby—The advantage would be that we do have a commitment to providing ongoing persistent access to Australian online information, and we do have the knowledge and experience to do that. The future for everyone around the world is completely unknown as to whether in 200 years we will have been able to ensure that the technology on which all of this is based can be overcome by doing particular preservation actions. It is still said that paper is the only guaranteed form of preservation, but knowledge and experience is changing daily and research is taking place. We hope to take advantage of that and be at the forefront of future online digital preservation needs.

Senator WATSON—What are the advantages of the National Library really doing it or taking it over?

Ms Gatenby—The advantage would be for those that have online access; it would be accessible from one place. No-one else would need to store it or make it accessible electronically, and that could include the Parliamentary Library itself or the government agencies that originated these reports. They could rely on us as being the sole repository of this stuff. As I have said, it is readily accessible, so anyone—

Senator WATSON—Would there be an overall saving?

Ms Gatenby—For the nation?

Senator WATSON—Yes.

Ms Gatenby—I imagine there would be over distributing it the way it is happening now in print. But one key consideration is that, as I said, some people still do not have ready access to the online, so we would have to consider a way of providing—

Senator WATSON—It is something about 50 per cent, is it not, of the population?

Ms Gatenby—Yes, I believe it is about that. We could overcome that to some extent by permitting print copies to be made and distributed through the library lending system, as currently happens with some of the published versions anyway. A problem the National Library currently has with commercial or general public information is that we do not have legal deposit rights, and that limits our entitlements or our ability to do certain things.

Senator WATSON—That only requires an act of parliament, does it not, to change?

Ms Gatenby—It does, yes. It requires a change to the Copyright Act, which contains the legal deposit provisions.

Senator WATSON—That could be a recommendation.

Ms Gatenby—Yes, it would allow us to—

Senator WATSON—It has been a big issue for you for a long time?

Ms Gatenby—It has been a big issue. We are going through a process currently with our department, the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, to issue an issues paper for public discussion, and they are aiming to issue that in about January or February next year. It is core to successful management and ongoing access to all of this information, because currently we do not have permission to go out and collect what we think is important, if it is in online or electronic form, but we do have that permission for print. So the legal deposit provisions need to be extended to electronic, and that would then give us a much more cost-effective and easily managed way of taking in and providing access to all of this information.

Senator WATSON—An interesting submission came in from Treasury about establishing that email alert. Could you handle that?

Ms Gatenby—When a new title had been released?

Senator WATSON—It sounded attractive when I read their submission.

Ms Gatenby—It implies that you have a list of subscribers to whom you would be sending the alert. It would be a fairly big overhead maintaining such a list, but certainly the technology of distributing the message would not be a major issue. It is just to whom you would be distributing it, how you maintain the addressees on the other end.

Senator WATSON—Should that be free or should people pay for that?

Ms Gatenby—I think it should be free.

Ms CORCORAN—Just for clarification, my understanding is that each publication arrives on your desk twice—once as an individual item and then at the end of the year in a blister pack; is that correct?

Ms Gatenby—Yes, that is right.

Ms CORCORAN—Do you ever get a situation where one item only appears once or is that generally not a problem?

Ms Gatenby—Generally not a problem, but it probably has happened with receipt of single issues. We know there are a couple of gaps in our bound volumes. The blister packs come out around three years after the individual titles are issued but they are always complete. If we realise when we come to bind that we are missing an issue it is often too late to claim it or to try to acquire it.

Ms CORCORAN—How often do you get the blister pack—is it an annual event?

Ms Gatenby—Yes, it is annual, but there is about a three-year lag time.

Ms CORCORAN—As much as that?

Ms Gatenby—Yes, so that is an issue too. We do in the meantime have the single copy, so people can be using those.

CHAIR—There being no further questions, can I thank you, Pamela, on behalf of the committee, the committee members here today—the member for Lyons, Mr Dick Adams; Senator John Watson; the member for Isaacs, Ann Corcoran—and, of course, my committee secretary Jason Sherd. We really appreciate your speaking here today to us and the submission from the Australian National Library.

Ms Gatenby—Thank you for the opportunity.

Committee adjourned at 12.12 pm

