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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLICATIONS

Reference: Distribution of the parliamentary papers series

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**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
PUBLICATIONS**

Monday, 7 November 2005

Members: Mrs Draper (*Chair*), Senator Watson (*Deputy Chair*), Senator Johnston, Marshall, Nash, Polley, Sterle and Wortley and Mr Adams, Mr Baker, Mr Baldwin, Ms Corcoran, Mr Hayes and Mrs Hull

Members in attendance: Senators Nash and Watson, and Mr Adams, Mrs Draper and Mrs Hull

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

EVANS, Mr Harry, Clerk of the Senate, Department of the Senate	1
FERRANDA, Ms Rosa, Director, Legislation and Documents, Table Office, Department of the Senate	1
HARRIS, Mr Ian, Clerk of the House, Department of the House of Representatives.....	8
KHONG, Ms Gaik, Director, Collection Management, Library Resources and Media Services, Department of Parliamentary Services	16
McCLELLAND, Ms Robyn Jessie, Clerk Assistant (Table), Department of the House of Representatives.....	8
MEMBREY, Miss Roslynn, Assistant Secretary, Library Resources and Media Services, Department of Parliamentary Services	16
MISSINGHAM, Ms Roxanne Marsha, Director, Australian Library and Information Association Ltd.....	21
NICHOLSON, Ms Jennefer, Executive Director, Australian Library and Information Association Ltd.....	21
SCOTT, Ms Penelope, Convenor, ALIA Expert Group on Government Publications, Australian Library and Information Association Ltd	21

Committee met at 9.06 am**EVANS, Mr Harry, Clerk of the Senate, Department of the Senate****FERRANDA, Ms Rosa, Director, Legislation and Documents, Table Office, Department of the Senate**

CHAIR (Mrs Draper)—Good morning everybody. Welcome to the Joint Committee on Publications public hearing into the distribution of the parliamentary papers series. I would like to move that today's proceedings be broadcast in accordance with the resolution of the Senate on 13 February 1997. That has been seconded by Mrs Hull. I also move that the submission from the Australian Government Management Office be accepted as evidence and be authorised for publication. That too has been seconded by Mrs Hull. I welcome the witnesses. 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?

Mr Evans—No, thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIR—Would you like to make a statement in relation to the submission or do you care to make some introductory remarks?

Mr Evans—I am happy to run with the submission. The submission suggests a few additional factors that the committee might like to take into consideration in considering the matters that were put to the Presiding Officers back in April. I am happy to run on that basis, Madam Chair.

Senator WATSON—The National Library submitted to us that they could provide a complete distribution in digital form. What is your attitude to such a centralising suggestion from that organisation?

Mr Evans—Are they offering to do all the work involved with preparing the digitised version?

Senator WATSON—They did indicate that they would need considerable additional resources.

Mr Evans—Where are the additional resources coming from?

Senator WATSON—At least it would be a uniform type approach. That is why I was interested in canvassing the idea with you.

Mr Evans—I would be quite happy for them to do the work, certainly. I think that there probably would be a certain amount of work involved in that and, providing there is no argument about where the money is coming from, I do not see any problem with that. That is something that is not done at the moment, so it would be a new function. If they are confident they can get funding for it, I would be happy for the National Library to do that.

Senator WATSON—Would they be the most appropriate group to do it though?

Mr Evans—They have done a lot of work in digitising publications, so I imagine they would perhaps be able to do it more efficiently than we could.

Senator WATSON—In a timely manner?

Mr Evans—I would think so.

Senator WATSON—Did the President seek your advice before making any changes to the PPS?

Mr Evans—Which particular changes are you thinking of—the ones in the submission in April?

Senator WATSON—Yes.

Mr Evans—Any changes that were made following on from that were made as a result of that document. I think that is right.

Ms Ferranda—Yes.

Senator WATSON—Were you happy with those changes?

Mr Evans—As I said, the document put up to the Presiding Officers in April suggested a couple of changes and then some additional things to go to this committee. In our submission to this committee, we suggested a few additional factors that might be taken into consideration in considering any of those things in the April submission. In particular, we have suggested that perhaps government department libraries should be given the option of being able to continue to receive the series and that perhaps we should not axe the blister packs quite so readily. Again, perhaps some people should be given the option of continuing to receive those for binding purposes. They are only useful for binding, of course.

Senator WATSON—Are all Senate committee reports published online?

Mr Evans—I think we could say that they all are, yes.

Senator WATSON—How much time is spent by officers in monitoring agency compliance with the requirements of the PPS? Is it a major job?

Mr Evans—I am not sure whether we spend any time on that.

Ms Ferranda—Jan does.

Mr Evans—Yes. She is one of our publications people.

Ms Ferranda—Ms Chapman, as part of her role as secretary of the Senate Publications Committee, would keep a close eye on that.

Mr ADAMS—The committee has had some concern about the issue of the long-term keeping of documents. The National Library, I think, have been able to get a system which is going to preserve our reports. We record every Senate committee report. But do we have anyone monitoring long-term digital recording? In the long-term—say, four years down the track—can somebody get that report digitally?

Mr Evans—We will have a copy of it. What do you mean when you say ‘get that report digitally’?

Mr ADAMS—We are coming from the position of access for the general public—people’s access to the reports. We have found that, with the papers we deal with as a committee, there are several not available to people from time to time. We think that that is a glitch in the system. It is our responsibility to make sure that people have ongoing access to government publications. If someone is doing some work on something five or 10 years down the track we need, in today’s age, to have a mechanism where they can pick up a paper digitally and utilise it for the long term.

Mr Evans—I think there is a potential problem with digitising publications. I do not think that anybody can guarantee that they will still be available in digital form five or 10 years into the future, because of changes in technology. We have already discovered that things recorded on computers 10 or 15 years ago are now unreadable and unrecoverable, so I do not think that anybody can guarantee that. I think you have to rely as a backstop on libraries around the country having a number of hard copy sets. In 20 years time people will be looking for reports and hard copies will be the only thing available. We have had a project of putting every paper presented to the Senate on microfilm and digitising it and being able to search it. I think we can at least guarantee that the microfilm version will be available. But you cannot rely on digitised versions solely.

Mr ADAMS—I think this is a world issue that libraries are looking at all over the place.

Mr Evans—Yes. That would be a question to put to the National Library. They have had a lot of experience in this: how far can you go in guaranteeing that there will be a digitised version available in the future?

Mr ADAMS—Do you have a figure for the cost to the Department of the Senate of the parliamentary papers?

Mr Evans—I think we included a figure in our original note to the Presiding Officers. It costs us about \$50,000. It varies from year to year.

Mr ADAMS—I guess there is a cost for the House of Representatives as well. Do you know if that is about the same?

Mr Evans—Yes, probably about the same—although it would vary.

Mr Ferranda—It might be a little bit higher, I think.

Mr ADAMS—Is there a figure for the savings from getting rid of the blister pack?

Mr Ferranda—I would not say negligible, but the savings certainly would not be substantial, because of the fact that there will still be administrative costs behind it. They would obviously be substantial if you totally did away with the series. There are only small incremental savings in terms of reducing the number of recipients.

Mr ADAMS—So we really need to get this right before we do away with things?

Mr Ferranda—Yes.

Mrs HULL—Mr Evans, could you explain exactly how the blister pack works and what you do with them when you get them?

Mr Evans—As I said, they are only useful for binding. They are copies of the parliamentary papers series which are not cut down to size. So they are ready to be sent off to a binder to bind into volumes. We bind them and keep a bound set. They are easy to keep track of and harder to lose in hard copy. Presumably those libraries that receive the blister packs also use them for binding; they are no use for anything else but binding. I hope that institutions would not say, 'Yes, we'll continue to have them,' and then just toss them out. I hope they are binding them. That is why we have suggested writing to these places and saying, 'Do you use your blister pack for binding and do you want to keep it?' Binding is fairly expensive and they would be paying a fair amount to have them bound. The thing to do is to ascertain whether they are serious about continuing to get them and bind them.

Mrs HULL—So the \$50,000 is for binding?

Mr Evans—No.

Mr Ferranda—No. That is administrative costs—the costs that the two chamber departments bear in terms of administering the parliamentary papers series: the packaging and postage that is paid by the two departments for our contractor to do this and general admin costs to do with managing the series. The binding cost would be—I am going back in memory, because we have not had a set bound now for several years; we are a bit behind with getting a full set for a calendar year—roughly \$5,000.

Mr Evans—A year?

Mr Ferranda—There are about 40 volumes and they cost a couple of hundred each.

Mr Evans—This is only one set, of course?

Mr Ferranda—Yes. I would have to check that figure for you. I am happy to take it on notice to give you our last figure for the cost of binding our set. The House of Representatives bear the cost of the binding their set, and the Parliamentary Library pays for its set to be bound as well.

They are the only three sets that we know of that are definitely bound. The others get sent out to the various recipients and they then go and organise their own binding.

Mrs HULL—I think I am with you: we need to look at investigating whether or not people would prefer to have a digital copy before we look at dismantling this system. I am with your recommendations.

Mr Evans—The problem with asking people whether they want to continue to receive something free is that they will say yes.

Mrs HULL—They may not—I do not.

Mr Evans—So, as I said, I hope people would not continue to receive the binding set and then toss it out because it are not of any use for anything else. But I think we could word the letter that goes out to these institutions to make it clear that we are not offering this as a free service—for nothing—and that they should continue to receive them only if they genuinely are using them.

Senator NASH—Harry, how many institutions do they go to?

Mr Evans—Do you mean the blister packs?

Senator NASH—Yes.

Mr Evans—Some 34.

Ms Ferranda—Plus the three sets for the parliament.

Mr ADAMS—Are these institutions that really use the information and have a lot of people drawing on them? That is the issue.

CHAIR—Yes. Mr Evans, you noted in your submission and in a recent remark that perhaps we should offer some sort of subscription based on other than everything being offered for free. But there have been some submissions from various libraries saying that they would not be able to offset the cost. What idea did you have as to subscription fees?

Mr Evans—I do not know that we have really thought about them. Have we thought of a figure?

Ms Ferranda—Not an exact figure, other than in the sense that we would still expect agencies and departments to provide the copies free. Our suggestion was more that it was to recover some of the administrative costs that are involved in processing the parliamentary papers series. In our submission we mention that the two chamber departments have a legislation subscription service that CanPrint manages for us. That subscription service is based on the contractor paying for the copies that are provided, but the proportion of revenue that comes back to the two departments is not very large because of the fact that the contractor is paying for the printing. In this situation we would not be talking about the contractor paying for the printing. The subscription charge for the legislation service is \$752 a year, so we are not talking about a

really large amount, but there would have to be costings done to see what sort of charge would be appropriate. I cannot imagine it being a really enormous charge. We are not talking about the printing; we are talking just about the administration, the postage, the packing and those sorts of things.

Mr Evans—Unless there is such a huge demand for it! You would then have to add to the number of copies to be printed.

Ms Ferranda—That is right.

Mr Evans—What is envisaged is where institutions that already get them think that they would like to pay for another set.

Ms Ferranda—In addition to their free set, rather than in place of it.

Mrs HULL—Mr Evans, when documents are tabled out of sitting, they get emailed to all of the members and senators. Is there a way in which this could be utilised for libraries and alert services for all tabled documents?

Mr Evans—They get put on the database. They get loaded on the database.

Ms Ferranda—When documents are presented out of session, for committee reports there is a link to the committee report web pages. As to an external document, my understanding is that it is not the document itself but a link to where the document is on the respective agency's web page—if they have it available electronically, because not all documents are necessarily available electronically. So we are not actually emailing the reports out; we are just emailing out links to where the reports are when they are presented out of session.

Mrs HULL—So do you think it could be a possibility—if the documents are then in electronic form—that we would have all documents in electronic form?

Ms Ferranda—We do not actually have them in electronic form. All we have is a link to them—a link to where they appear somewhere else electronically on the agency's web page, rather than them actually being on our web page. The only ones that would be on the parliament's web pages would be the committee reports, which are only a small subset of the reports in the parliamentary papers series each year.

Mr Evans—The difficulty is not having them available electronically. When you are talking about the parliamentary papers series as a set of hard copies, you are really talking about long-term preservation. I do not think immediate availability is really a problem. One way or another, people can get to things that are tabled electronically. That is not really the problem. As I say, it would be reasonably easy to provide that to institutions in receipt of the hard copies. I am sure they already know how to get to things electronically early on without waiting for their parliamentary paper copies. The hard copies are really for the purposes of long-term preservation and access.

Senator NASH—Mr Evans, do you have any indication of how many of the institutions would take up a subscription model, or is that something to be looked at?

Mr Evans—We do not. That is why we suggested we test it to see what sort of a market there would be. We have had a few little nibbles, I suppose you could say, of people who might be interested, but until we test it we would not really know. I do not think it would be terribly large. In our submission we suggested that we might even be able to cover it with the extra copies that get printed already. But we would have to try it and find out.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for your evidence this morning.

[9.27 am]

HARRIS, Mr Ian, Clerk of the House, Department of the House of Representatives

McCLELLAND, Ms Robyn Jessie, Clerk Assistant (Table), Department of the House of Representatives

CHAIR—I now welcome representatives from the Department of the House of Representatives. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Mr Harris—The submission that came to the committee came in my name.

Ms McClelland—Essentially I am the SES officer overseeing the area that administers the parliamentary papers.

CHAIR—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 the parliament. Are there any corrections or amendments you would like to your submission?

Mr Harris—Just one minor alteration, if we could. On page 3, under the heading, ‘Terms of reference: potential impact of changes ...’ there is one full paragraph and then there is a line starting with ‘From 2006’. I would like to alter that to read: ‘For parliamentary papers dated from 2006’. I think you will probably see the implication in the suggested change.

CHAIR—Thank you. Would you like to make any statements or introductory remarks?

Mr Harris—Apart from saying I felt it appropriate to lower the chair a bit because I tend to prefer a slightly lower profile than the previous occupant of it, I will say that I welcome the opportunity to talk with the committee and welcome the committee’s inquiry. It has been something I have personally wanted to see for a little while. I should also say that the submission was forwarded to the committee in my name and, as in many things, it was a corporate matter. I am saying that not to escape responsibility but simply to give credit where credit is due. Staff of my department, essentially Robyn McClelland, headed up the project team and put together the submission. Robyn and others were aware of my general attitude, but I am very grateful to the people for putting together this submission. The reason I say that it is my submission but that it was essentially prepared by others is to compliment the submission because I think it is the most wide reaching of all of the submissions given to the committee. I have had the opportunity to read the other submissions authorised for publication, and I believe the submission prepared by Robyn, for submission in my name, actually is more wide ranging and tackles the matter as a matter of principle and does not nibble away at little, minor points.

In the submission I have addressed the issue of distribution of the parliamentary papers series in the broader context and I would like to explain the reason. Seven years ago, the committee inquired into the future of the series in response to a request for advice by the Presiding Officers

on a proposal to discontinue it, which first of all came when the parliament was required to identify \$10 million of savings after the 1996 election. It was told by both sides of politics that \$10 million of savings would be discoverable somewhere in the parliament's estimates. At that time the committee recommended that the series should continue in its present form until there was a viable replacement, either an electronic or printed form or both, but the proposals for the replacement should be explored further. I am glad that that exploration is now taking place.

During the past seven years, the degree of overlap between the parliamentary papers series and substantially parallel arrangements for the dissemination of Commonwealth publications has increased. During that period also, the availability of electronic documents has increased very significantly. The case for looking closely at the distribution of Commonwealth documents and for questioning current arrangements has grown considerably over the period, as outlined in the submission.

A number of the other submissions more or less say the time is not quite right for total digital exploration. One distribution in particular is from the state librarian of the State Library of Victoria, who says that it is premature for the PPS to be provided in digital form only. They then go on to quote from ABS figures about the amount of penetration of the internet into homes and say it is not quite high enough. But, to be really honest, I think the State Library of Victoria did not say how the citizens of Tallangatta or somewhere like that access the holdings of the State Library of Victoria, so I think that sort of approach might have been a little deeper and a little more honest.

I suggest that it is timely that the committee acknowledge just how much more accessible such information is and how much duplication is involved. This is where we have been coming from: the duplication and the unnecessary double handling. I also suggest that the committee consider, even apart from the issue of cost, whether we should accept the principle that it is the parliament's responsibility to disseminate executive documents because they constitute a major component in the series. If the series is to be maintained, I recommend that the chamber departments trial a subscription based service on a partial cost recovery basis and we monitor that and see how it goes. An issue that would need to be resolved—and this has been the case for some time—is the timely provision of documents by author bodies. As to provision of a consolidated set of annual series documents in digital form, I indicate in the submission that, without evidence of unmet demand, the department's inclination would be not to pursue the provision of such a product at this stage for the reasons outlined in the submission. I am sorry I have talked for so long but I thank you for the opportunity to do so.

Mrs HULL—Congratulations, Mr Harris and Ms McClelland—it is a fabulous submission and one that you would certainly expect from the House of Representatives Clerk's office, I think! Mr Evans stated that he thought that it would have been prudent to put out a bit of a survey to determine whether people do still want to have hard copies or that we conduct a basic trial to ask whether it is desirable to go to digital. You are very strong on this and, certainly judging by the submission, you have put a lot of thought into it. Do you think that would be more advisable rather than offering immediately a small cost recovery service and then monitoring to see how it flows from there?

Mr Harris—I think that is a very good question. I did hear the tail end of the Clerk of the Senate's evidence and I have also read in his submission of the possibility that a subscription

service could be met from copies already supplied. At any stage I would welcome Ms McClelland saying that she will complement remarks made by me. In some instances that may mean that she gives a slightly different interpretation. I am very comfortable with that because she is at the coalface.

I think we have suggested that we trial using a user-pays system. I am very much aware that, whenever you get into user-pays things, often if people drop off the demand you make it dearer for those who remain behind. A user-pays system has to be approached very carefully. But I think we could survey those on the list to ascertain demand for a subscription service and include those who will be removed from 2006 onwards. Those who remain on the list could be invited to receive an additional subscription in addition to the current free distribution or to continue receiving the service for a fee.

Ms McClelland—I think the committee has already heard and Mrs Hull made a comment about the difficulties of asking people whether they want to have a free service. I think it is a difficult question to ask because the inclination is for people to say that they wish to continue to receive a free service. Essentially, unless you ask, ‘Are you prepared to receive the service for a fee and the alternative is that you do not get it?’ you do not really get a strong test of the demand for the service.

Senator WATSON—What sort of fee were you looking at? Harry Evans was talking about purely an administrative fee to cover packaging and postage and those sorts of things. What sort of fee do you envisage?

Ms McClelland—In the submission we did have a small look at this. I think our view would also be that you would be covering the administrative costs of the chamber departments only. That does in fact represent only a small proportion of cost of the service because the printing costs for the documents themselves are met by the author bodies. If you take the administrative costs of the order of \$130,000, as we put in the submission—and we indicated that we would need to check that with our Senate colleagues; they gave a figure today of \$50,000, which means that it is \$115,000—and if you do your sums, if there are 50 subscribers, 50 into \$130,000 is about \$2,600. That is to fully recover that cost. For 25 subscribers it is a fee of \$5,200.

My feeling is that those figures are probably a bit steep in terms of how libraries might respond to those sorts of figures. An option might be to survey—I know this sounds like the wrong way around, perhaps—to ask people, if they are interested in the service, what sort of fee they would be prepared to pay. Again, you are in a situation where you are asking something where obviously the temptation would be to say, ‘We’re only prepared to pay a very small fee.’ They are not enormous sums but on the other hand they are possibly a little more expensive than a library might be prepared to bear.

Mr Harris—Could I add that we were not coming at this from a financial point of view. We believe totally in the widest dissemination possible of the information presented to the legislature. We were very keen to see if we could find ways to eliminate the duplication and the double-handling, if that were at all possible.

Mr ADAMS—This is the issue that I was going to deal with. The issue is making the papers available to anybody in our democracy who wants them. It is about making sure that they are

available. In relation to digital services, we have evidence about the difficulty of monitoring long-term digital services and of keeping things in the system. For example, an agency may take its annual report off the system to put the next one on, and therefore you have lost the last one. At the moment we do not have any overall monitoring process, and I should imagine that the recommendations of this report will have to cover that. The cost at present is a very small cost, isn't it? We heard from the Senate that their cost is minimal. Would yours be the same, Mr Harris?

Mr Harris—I think their cost is slightly less than ours, but both costs put together, even in the field of expenditure of the parliament, let alone public expenditure, is not a big figure. I am not sure that recipients of digital copies do not have the ability to make their own digital record of, let us say, an annual report before it drops off the site.

Mr ADAMS—I assume they do. But it is having someone to monitor that process to make sure it is occurring. You are a bit critical of people not meeting their obligations by getting onto agencies that do not get onto the service. What would you suggest we do to those agencies? Should we cut half their allocation?

Mr Harris—That is a good question. The Australian Government Information Management Office has a responsibility in that regard, and I think the committee has previously recommended that letters come from the ministers when submitting late returns. But late lodgment has been a problem ever since I can remember. It should not be such a problem, I think, in the provision of digital information. That should be able to be achieved much more quickly.

Ms McClelland—I will pick up on that. In its 1997 report, the recommendation of the committee on agencies who default on their obligations to provide online electronic copies of parliamentary papers was:

Where agencies do not produce these documents electronically, the reason for not so doing should be advised to the Minister in the letter of transmittal accompanying the document.

The government's response to that recommendation in the 1997 report was to say something along the lines of: 'We will look at the guidelines for annual reports.' I am not aware that that recommendation has been implemented, but it certainly raises it to ministerial level when these online copies are not provided.

Mr ADAMS—But you would say that we have not achieved anything from 1997?

Ms McClelland—I think there has been a great deal done from 1997 actually. The government's online strategy has required that all agencies make electronic copies available for all documents tabled in the parliament from June 2000. As we say in our submission, we do not monitor this—and neither does any agency, to our knowledge—but certainly our very strong impression is that the scale of electronic publication by agencies is now very extensive. Certainly for all major agencies it would be a matter of routine, as it is for the parliament. Our documents, our parliamentary committee reports, have been going up online from the 38th Parliament onwards. From the 38th Parliament onwards, which was April 1996, only a small minority of reports were not published online, and from the 39th Parliament all reports have been published online. And they have stayed up; we have not taken them down. Submissions

stay up as well, and for submissions we might need to look at some sort of archiving arrangements. But, for reports, there is now quite a lengthy history. Of course, that is not long-term digital access. As has been mentioned, there is an issue of long-term access to digital documents.

Mr ADAMS—Have you thought about monitoring, say, that every House of Representatives committee report is online? Could you tell me now that everything from the last five years or the last two parliaments that has been reported on is online and accessible? Is there anyone monitoring that, from a department point of view?

Mr Harris—I believe that it all is online. It is archived. If you go into a committee's web site you will get current inquiries and possibly those of the previous parliament.

Mr ADAMS—I take it that is a different matter from archiving in the long term. That is an issue that we have started to deal with.

Mr Harris—But I think we have a pretty good archival arrangement too. It is provided, essentially, by the Department of Parliamentary Services, I think. I have become aware that at the Australian National University the school of Pacific economics, I think, have produced the last 20 years of their bulletin on a CD-ROM, which is searchable. It is an Adobe product. You can put a query in and search much more efficiently than a person can by going through the paper copies. We are involved through an association called the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments, which is made up of people from national parliaments. We have just paid for the last 20 years of our bulletin to go on the web site in a searchable form. It did not cost a great deal. I think it cost about SwF3,000 to SwF4,000. That sort of technology helps users in a much better way than hard copy does.

Mr ADAMS—The National Library gave us evidence that there are processes where every document becomes a number or a digital identifier or whatever. The recovery of those papers in the long term is therefore much more acceptable. That is a library process, I guess, that is to be or has been developed. We have explored the issue of agencies not complying. Do you have anything to add about occasions when a government agency does not enter the process, other than, as the original report said, bringing it up to a ministerial level if they do not comply and the minister having to write a letter?

Mr Harris—I think the excuses available now are much fewer than in the hot-metal typesetting days. Nowadays, a flick of a switch sends the text and the diagrams off to a printer. I honestly cannot see why it would not be much easier now than it was in times gone by.

Mr ADAMS—There has been some criticism of the distributor of parliamentary paper series—CanPrint Communications. What is the process of selecting the distributor? Who monitors their performance?

Mr Harris—I believe the CanPrint contract was recently renewed and that that was done on the basis of a tender process.

Ms McClelland—I think the CanPrint print contract was essentially more of a roll-over of the responsibilities of the Australian Government Publishing Service when CanPrint purchased

AGPS many years ago. So, in terms of the responsibilities of AGPS, they were taken over by CanPrint. Essentially, CanPrint took over the distribution of the parliamentary paper series in that context and has continued to do so. A few years ago, there were some price increases from CanPrint. At that stage, we considered going to a tender process but on balance we did not at the time.

Mr Harris—That may be my mistake; I thought that we did explore the possibility of doing some market testing. But that was five years ago, was it?

Ms McClelland—That is my understanding.

Mr Harris—Okay. It is marvellous how time flies. We do know that there has been some criticism of them. Their main role is to get the copies from the author bodies and send them to addressees, and they also compile the blister packs. I understand that there were a few issues with CanPrint a year-and-a-half to two years ago when it changed its warehousing arrangements, so there is monitoring of their performance. My personal view is that CanPrint do the best job they possibly can. Rather than just being the merchant in the field I think they are very sympathetic to the parliament's requirements and do their best for us.

Mr ADAMS—It might just have been issues with changing the warehouse that caused problems.

Mr Harris—I think that might have caused problems.

Mr ADAMS—I am interested in who is monitoring them. They have a responsibility to get the papers from the agencies—or the agencies have the responsibility to send the papers to them, I guess. Who monitors the agencies? Who has the overall view? Should somebody have that responsibility?

Mr Harris—Government documents are currently part of the function of the Australian Government Information Management Office. Other documents that the committee recommends for publication are essentially the responsibility of our secretariat.

Ms McClelland—CanPrint is involved in two things. It is involved in all the library deposit publications, which are in fact all the major documents. It is responsible for the distribution of those to this list of libraries. It is also separately involved in the parliamentary papers series, which is where we come in. The criticism of CanPrint in the submissions, from my brief scanning of those submissions, was largely in relation to some libraries not receiving some of the library deposit publications. As you say, it is largely the role of CanPrint to receive copies from the author bodies and it is the responsibility of the author bodies to provide them. CanPrint informs the chamber departments on a monthly basis of reports that have come in and the chamber departments follow up outstanding reports.

The House of Representatives and the Senate have divided the agencies amongst themselves alphabetically: the Senate is responsible for agencies in the first half of the alphabet, A to M, and we are responsible for N to Z. The department spends time each month following up on outstanding reports. We might not follow them up instantly because we give agencies a little bit of leeway but in the main the bulk of reports are provided fairly promptly. Copies are provided

on tabling and you get this large stock of documents and out they go to CanPrint. It is the minority that cause the problem. As we say in our submission, we still have reports outstanding for the 2003 series as well as the 2004 series and, of course, the 2005 series is still going on. It is the small minority of reports that really delays everything and it means that the blister packs, for example, go out long after the event.

Mr ADAMS—There may be an excuse for an agency rarely or occasionally being late but if an agency is letting the process down on a regular basis there needs to be some focus on bringing that to the attention of the parliament.

Ms McClelland—It has been the practice of the committee in the past to refer to defaulting agencies in reports. The recent one I saw was for 2001 and in fact it said that there were no outstanding defaulting agencies, which I found somewhat surprising. So you might have a positive message coming forward in terms of there being no outstanding defaulting agencies. If that is the case, there must have been a lot of work done behind the scenes to get to that stage.

Mr Harris—If we could encourage in departments and authorities the same sort of sensitivity as they have to adverse audit comments or something like that, we might be closer to the arrangement. The House of Representatives did very well getting the N to Zs. There are probably fewer down at the tail end of the alphabet to chase up.

Mr ADAMS—There is probably a prize, Mr Harris, for these agencies.

Mrs HULL—In point 3.2 on page 12 of your submission, you recognise that there is not a reliability of preservation and accessibility of digital records. On page 7 you spoke about the 1997 inquiry and indicated that there needed to be a working party formed to examine the cost and comprehensiveness of the proposed scheme of the LDS. We do not want to prohibit or restrict information about the workings of the parliament and the way in which the parliamentary process works. If we recognise that we have not proceeded to put everything on the digital service yet and that at this point it is unknown as to whether or not it can be long term, would it be better if this committee were to look at the 1997 inquiry that suggested that, rather than making decisions now on the future of the PPS, a working party should be formed to look at extending the LDS as a possible and more concise alternative that would save all the departments time, energy and money?

Mr Harris—I think it is a good suggestion for the committee to accept an ongoing monitoring role, let us say, for technological and other developments. I think that our submission essentially said that the CD-ROM format is a form of digitalisation about which we are not quite sure of the long-term preservation and accessibility. I am not sure if there are other digitalised formats that satisfy the preservation and accessibility needs. I think that search engines can be applied to CD-ROMs now, so even that might have improved in more recent times. I only have a layman's anecdotal understanding with my own little things that I do at home, but I think that somebody has said that a CD-ROM has a much shorter lifetime than a non-renewable or re-recordable DVD format. DVDs cost about \$1 each if you buy them retail, so there may be avenues there. Perhaps the committee could accept an ongoing role to monitor the technological developments from people a bit more astute than me like Ms McClelland, for example.

Mrs HULL—Ms McClelland, should we be looking at determining the benefits of expanding the LDS?

Ms McClelland—I think it is a sensible thing to do. The LDS has got a somewhat more restricted distribution, but only slightly. There is a great deal of overlap in the distribution lists. The LDS has all the major documents submitted to the parliament go out to the LDS list of recipients, whereas the PPS is a subset that goes out to another group, if you like, or a substantially overlapping group. It seems to me that you have these two substantially parallel arrangements in place. They are separately administered. I think it has reached the stage now with the tremendous availability of these documents—once upon a time, these documents were not available—that you really need to start to question why you have these parallel arrangements in place.

Mrs HULL—Thank you for being so comprehensive in this submission, because it does give us a much better understanding of what has happened in the past. You have been really precise with your statistics, and it is very helpful because—not being here in 1997—I was not aware that there was a committee inquiry that recommended that this working party proceed to determine this. It seems to me to be a very obvious thing for this committee, before we made any further recommendation, to have a look at the way in which the LDS applies as a parallel, and then work out whether or not we can, as this committee has suggested previously, examine the extension of this LDS, which might cover all problems.

Senator WATSON—You welcome this inquiry because, while I think you thought that 1997 was a little bit too early, now is the time to move forward. In terms of moving forward, what are the two things you would expect this committee to at least pick up on? We have had suggestions that maybe we need a little bit more time. You are a bit more avant-garde; in what area would you be disappointed if we did not move forward?

Mr Harris—I can start and then pass to Ms McClelland. I think I would have to say that my thinking has changed since 1997. I think in 1997 I was questioning the ongoing provision of the service, and my attitude has changed since then. I know it is part of our heritage and it is something that is over 100 years old—and something that has lasted that long you do not just take an axe to. I would say that I now have a commitment to recommend the continuation of the whole process, but rationalised and eliminating any unnecessary duplication. Have I given you time to think of two things?

Ms McClelland—I welcome the committee taking a fairly broad perspective on this issue, because I think it warrants it, given the complex arrangements that are in place. You can simply say, ‘Well, the PPS should continue and libraries therefore need to continue receiving it,’ but I think it would be better to look more broadly, because there are multiple arrangements in place. A free service is very easy to continue to receive. Over the seven years, the distribution of the PPS has been cut back very significantly. There have not been many adverse reactions to that.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Mr Ian Harris and Ms Robyn McClelland from the Department of the House of Representatives, particularly for your very comprehensive and substantial submission. It has been very much appreciated by the committee.

[10.03 am]

KHONG, Ms Gaik, Director, Collection Management, Library Resources and Media Services, Department of Parliamentary Services

MEMBREY, Miss Roslynn, Assistant Secretary, Library Resources and Media Services, Department of Parliamentary Services

CHAIR—Good morning, and welcome to the inquiry. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Miss Membrey—Our responsibilities are to build up the information resources in the Parliamentary Library, and to provide information, analysis and advice to members and senators when they request it.

Ms Khong—My role is to oversee the management of collection, as my title implies, which includes organising the parliamentary publications we receive.

CHAIR—Although the committee does not require you to give evidence on oath, I advise you that public hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the parliament itself. 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?

Miss Membrey—None.

CHAIR—I now invite to make some introductory comments in relation to your submission.

Miss Membrey—After listening to the previous witnesses, we librarians come from a slightly different perspective than the clerks of the two chambers. We look at the parliamentary papers series as being an extremely valuable information resource for us. They are used almost daily by various members of our staff, so we have to ensure, as we said in our submission, that we have complete sets—and often duplicates of some sets—and hard copy is at present more often used than electronic versions.

Senator WATSON—You might like to comment on some of the other submissions where you may feel that what they have said could impact on the discharge of your responsibilities as the library to the parliament.

Miss Membrey—As the library to the parliament, we are quite comfortable with the process that is in place now. As I said, we receive all the parliamentary papers that are tabled, and they are an extremely valuable resource for us. We would be severely inconvenienced if hard copies disappeared off the face of the earth in the near future. Having said that, we think it is timely now to start looking more closely at providing digital versions, but a lot of work has to be done on the architecture, searchability and so on before that could replace the hard copies. I am not here to represent other libraries but, from reading the submissions from other libraries, the same

theme comes through to me—that is, the parliamentary papers series is a valuable resource and there is room to move towards digitisation.

Miss Membrey—Do you want to add anything to that, Gaik?

Ms Khong—It is all very well to have a digital copy, but the question remains how permanent and accessible those links are. I think that is the crux of the problem.

Senator WATSON—Which organisation could best provide that digital service? The National Library have suggested they could do it with additional resources.

Miss Membrey—We also mentioned that the House of Representatives Table Office currently prepares a running list of parliamentary papers. It would be great if that too were made public because, quite often, there are inquiries for paper No. 60 of 2004 and that is all the person knows about it. You cannot find paper No. 60 of 2004 in the publications web site of the federal government or anywhere else unless you can find information. Publishing the running list from the House of Representatives Table Office would give members of the public much wider and better access to the parliamentary papers series.

Senator WATSON—But who should do that digital work? A lot of extra resources are required to do it.

Miss Membrey—The House of Representatives currently does the running list for its own internal purposes. To make that public is probably not a major task.

Ms Khong—It has just recently been made public.

Miss Membrey—There you go! We say in our submission that we would be happy to be involved in any working party or discussions or organisations that want to work out how to provide a digital service for the parliamentary papers series.

Senator WATSON—Will any of the recommendations that have been put forward, particularly by the House of Representatives, have a detrimental impact on your ability to deliver?

Miss Membrey—It would not have a detrimental impact on us as the parliamentary library in this organisation, but it could have an impact on other libraries. Blister packs, for example, are more important to libraries outside this organisation than they are to us, so it could have an impact on those. The suggestion that subscriptions should be paid would have an impact, particularly on smaller government department libraries which do not have large budgets and cannot afford subscriptions at the rate of, as Robyn said, \$2,600 a year. That is probably out of the question for most small government departments.

Mrs HULL—I have just looked at your submission. I noticed that you were here when the Clerk of the House of Representatives gave evidence. Their submission was very good and intensely supportive of looking at new areas. You said that the House of Representatives have a numbered system, and in the submission you indicated that the ability to access any of the PPS is often unreliable because the individual agent papers are scattered over agency web sites. So

would it be in our interests—and you obviously heard the questions earlier—to look at the LDS in concert with what we are doing now and at whether or not we have a full running series, a numbered series, of the PPS rather than applying them to individual web sites all over the place? I am with you: it is very difficult to access those. Should we look at determining whether we could have far more efficient and streamlined access to the LDS and the parliamentary papers series, with a fully numbered list so that it is more accessible and easy for all people to gauge before we look at discontinuing it or putting in a fee for service?

Miss Membrey—I think that is what we were referring to in paragraph 8 where we said that there is a running list with numbered tabled papers, which we find useful in our library, and we wonder how librarians in other organisations get by without those lists, because it is a useful running list. But you cannot rely on just those numbers; you have to have a fully searchable web site. If you are looking for some obscure detail on states grants for education services or something, you have to be able to search for that as well. So extending the LDS or making the LDS a tighter, more directed scheme is probably a good idea. It is worth investigating further and inviting comments from those libraries that participate.

In reading the House of Representatives submission, I was interested that there is apparently some overlap between the LDS and our distribution service, for example. We take 21 copies of every tabled paper and accept responsibility for getting those out to all the other parliamentary libraries. I think there is some work to be done to cut back on that duplication.

Mrs HULL—I found it very interesting as well to look at the submission of the Clerk of the House of Representatives because it certainly clarified some of the areas. Perhaps this has been a very good exercise because it may have clarified things a little for you as well. In essence, with your knowledge of the LDS and the PPS, what would we need to be looking at to ensure that they encompass all of the capacity that you think is required in order to service your members and senators in addition to the states and the territories?

Miss Membrey—Harry Evans, the Clerk of the Senate, made a really good point, and that is to survey those libraries to see which need them and which keep them, whether find them useful or whether they are selective. The parliamentary papers series are very bulky documents and libraries frequently run out of space to store things. I am pretty sure that, for example, small government department libraries would keep only those papers which were of direct relevance to their purposes and would probably discard the rest. A survey which tries to find out exactly which papers are of use to various libraries and which papers are going to be stored permanently would be useful. We mentioned in our submission that we accept responsibility for keeping at least one permanent set of the parliamentary papers series from 1901 right through, and we will continue to do that. So, for example, if libraries miss copies from 1933 or whenever, they know that they could always come to us and we would be able to provide them with copies. Just getting down to the nub of exactly why other libraries require those papers and how they use them might help us to refine the service in some way.

Mrs HULL—And maybe too the extent of the overlapping. Maybe you could ask whether they receive them from the LDS and the PPS and define a concise questionnaire that works out just how much overlapping is taking place and which of those areas they look at are more valuable to their requirements and how perhaps they could see it being combined so that they

could get all of the requirements through one system rather than duplicating them many times over.

Miss Membrey—I think that would require some kind of cooperation between us and the Clerk or his staff in the House of Representatives and that is not going to be difficult to arrange.

Mr ADAMS—You identified problems with CanPrint's distribution. Are you happy with that now? Did you make any comments about that?

Ms Khong—As far as I know, the arrangements have not changed. We really rely on other sources for getting the table papers and not on the CanPrint distribution service, because there are problems.

Miss Membrey—There are problems. Other libraries—and Robyn McClelland talked about this as well—have indicated that there are gaps in the series and often the papers arrive quite late. That does cause problems for other libraries. I am not entirely sure that it is CanPrint's fault, having said that.

Mr ADAMS—But you feel that it really comes back to that, and we seem to be getting this from different submissions. Nobody is having an overall view. There is no monitoring process taking place to make sure that we are picking up problems. Would you suggest that that would be—

Miss Membrey—I think that that is an excellent idea. I assumed, probably incorrectly, that the House of Representatives did that work. The Clerk of the House was talking about the work of the Australian Government Information Management Office which, I think I am correct in saying, has a web site called www.publications.gov.au, which needs a bit more work on it yet. I do not know of anybody that makes sure absolutely that everything that needs to be tabled or made available is made available. The old library deposit scheme did that for the major libraries and that would follow through but it is not a common occurrence now.

Mr ADAMS—And going towards electronic processes, there are still problems in how we are going to keep them in terms of history? The National Library gave us some good information in their submission to us. Do you see that is a problem? How do you see the Parliamentary Library dealing with that? Have you had much experience in that area

Miss Membrey—Gaik has probably had more direct experience than I have.

Mr ADAMS—This is recording digital for the long term. For example, one department has its annual report come down and it takes off last year's copy. Maybe they keep one copy internally for their own use but there is a problem for the general public having access to the report.

Ms Khong—We are well aware of reports disappearing from the internet and for that reason we have an internal repository which we use to capture all major government reports. But it is a duplication of effort obviously.

Mr ADAMS—You do that because there have been reports missed and you have not been able to access them for people?

Ms Khong—It is not so much in relation to the parliamentary papers series. If we simply put the link to the web site of the agency that link is not reliable necessarily. That is why we take the trouble to download the report into our own server and have it internally as well.

Miss Membrey—The National Library's PANDORA does a similar thing. It is a public service, whereas ours is internal and only for members of parliament.

CHAIR—I do have a question, and it is about something that Kay Hull brought up before in relation to overlap, duplication and those sorts of things. According to your submission, you rely heavily on other copies of documents rather than the parliamentary papers series copies, bearing in mind what you said at the beginning, which is that they are an important record. Would it be correct to say that you would not be affected too much if you did not receive a copy of the PPS?

Miss Membrey—We rely on the bound copies of the PPS to be our historical collection that we referred to in paragraph 3 of our submission, where we said:

A secondary objective ... is to provide a complete record of the publications of the Parliament.

We rely on the loose copies, which we receive almost as soon as they are tabled, for access by our information and research specialists, who may be required to provide information to senators and members.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for coming here this morning and presenting your submission to the committee.

[10.29 am]

MISSINGHAM, Ms Roxanne Marsha, Director, Australian Library and Information Association Ltd

NICHOLSON, Ms Jennefer, Executive Director, Australian Library and Information Association Ltd

SCOTT, Ms Penelope, Convenor, ALIA Expert Group on Government Publications, Australian Library and Information Association Ltd

CHAIR—Welcome. 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. 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 Nicholson—No.

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

Ms Nicholson—Yes, I would like to make some introductory remarks. The association is the professional organisation for the library and information services sector in Australia. It has very wide representation across all sectors of library and information services. We have a role in empowering the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services to the nation. We do this through leadership, advocacy and mutual support. Here are some of the key points we would like to make. As a matter of principle and equity, free access to the parliamentary papers series by all Australians needs to be retained as an essential component of a democratic society. Australian libraries are the main provider of access to government information. They do this as a core information service role to the community. There are over 10 million users of public, state and national libraries every year. In New South Wales, a public library study found that libraries increasingly are used for access to Australian government information and service delivery. The library services provided include access to web sites and staff assistance. The final full report on that survey is just coming down and we can provide to you the two-page summary of that particular report on e-government.

ALIA has also done a recent survey of public libraries as part of the work we are doing with the digital content working group of the National Broadband Strategy Implementation Group. That has found that government web sites comprise approximately 10 per cent of electronic data accessed by the public. We also feel that while the publications in the parliamentary papers series are published by individual agencies and many are on the web, their long-term access is far from assured. This has been pointed out in the findings of the Digital Amnesia seminar that was held this year. We were very pleased that Senator Watson was able to be part of that seminar.

Mr ADAMS—He's a star.

Ms Nicholson—We also believe that, to ensure Australians have access to parliamentary papers, public, state, national and other libraries need ready access to information on material in the parliamentary papers series which they can easily integrate into their services—for example, into their catalogues. They need assurance that the resources will continue to be available, currently possible with the print collection but not yet possible with the electronic publications, and also training and support, of course, to enable them to deliver a good service to the public. The ABS LEP model is a very good example of that sort of program, which obviously relates to ABS information. Those issues are really at the core of our position and leading forward in our recommendations. We believe that at the moment the proposed changes are pre-emptive and, if implemented, we will be at risk of losing the wider access by Australians to the official record and also the audit trail, although a complete record will be available through the National Library, but not more widely available.

We do make some recommendations. We believe that access for all Australians would be improved if the following were implemented. Under our general recommendations, we believe that a mandate for material to be available in digital form should be made. AGIMO is the responsible body for government publishing policy. It needs to develop this policy in consultation with libraries and ensure its implementation across government. Principles on government information access could be included in this policy. Also, copyright legislation could be extended to include electronic resources and legal deposit. We suggest that there be a review by this committee in two years of the committee's recommendations.

In the digital environment there are a number of options that the committee could recommend. The use of the PANDORA archive has been suggested by the National Library of Australia and we would certainly support that. There are other alternatives such as setting up a government repository or using the ParInfo repository. Again, there needs to be consultation with the library sector on the development of any of these or other options. A fundamental requirement of access to parliamentary papers is for libraries to have reliable and timely access.

Regarding the subscriptions and the partial cost recovery et cetera, we would really prefer that resources and effort go into finding the longer-term solutions rather than have a focus on an interim arrangement such as the cost recovery, particularly as there are moves by a number of agencies and more widely to make more information more freely available on the web. ABS and AGSO are examples of this.

Mrs HULL—You have provided us with a very informative submission. My concern with going to a digital format is that, as you and others have indicated, it is not secure—there are not secure sites at the moment with respect to having a digital format. You say that it is essential that the digital copy of the paper is the official tabled copy. What would you think would be the best process? If you could have a perfect process to ensure, firstly, that it is secure; secondly, that it is the official tabled copy; and, thirdly, that it is not duplication but has a capacity to fulfil what the current LDS and PPS do, what would it be?

Ms Missingham—The National Library's PANDORA repository is probably a good example in a way. It is not secure in the sense that material on it is not limited to any particular sector, but it is secure in the sense that, when the National Library, for example, makes a decision to put material into its digital repository—and the PANDORA is a collaborative digital repository that includes all of the state libraries contributing data as well—a decision is made and a list is

created of resources. Those lists are harvested from those web sites and put into the National Library's repository. In the National Library's repository no-one can change them except for the person who has the super or administrator equivalent access in the National Library. An individual cannot get into the system externally. If the material changes on the web site that it is harvested from, the National Library can reharvest and label it as the next version. So there is a degree of version control that is given. Rather than focusing just on security, the focus is on making sure that material continues to be harvested. If a report changes—and this particularly applies, I think, to community groups rather than government publications—and they issue new parts or revise some of their web sites, those can then be harvested and put into the National Library's repository.

Mrs HULL—So you think that the best system to look at would be to have everything in a numbered system? You have also indicated in your submission that it does create difficulty when agencies have these papers on their web sites. The agency might change web sites and they might shut down or close or whatever. Then it is very difficult to access and some of these things are lost. Do you think that having a numbered list of the parliamentary papers system would be a good place to start with this system that you have?

Ms Missingham—Yes, there are a number of other examples of repositories, but by putting them all centrally into a single repository, it means that, exactly as you said, you avoid the vagaries of administrative agencies changing their web sites. If a department merges, sometimes all of the old materials from those individual agencies are deleted as no longer being relevant. If it is all stored in a central repository with a numbered system so that it is very clear to identify and there is information about new publications, it can be a very efficient way to manage resources.

Mr ADAMS—Is that the emerging process in the world for recording digital information for historical purposes and for the long term?

Ms Missingham—Yes, the concept of repositories has really kicked off very significantly in the last three years. The department of education has funded the universities, for example, to set up two major repository projects—the Australian Partnership for Sustainable Repositories which is running out of the Australian National University, which is developing standards and guidelines, and the ARROW project, which is based at Monash University and uses a particular repository software across a range of universities. So there is the concept of having stable repositories where resources are managed, particularly for things like changes in standards. The National Library, for example, tries to store material so that it can be perceived as it was originally. So if HTML changes, if versions of PDF change or if versions of other software change the National Library makes sure that those resources are transitioned so that they can be seen as they were originally meant to be seen rather than appearing as gobbledygook. The repository architecture enables you to store material and to manage it as a whole so that individuals do not always have to do that and that material is not lost as tends to happen these days.

Mrs HULL—What if any are the negatives associated with the system that you describe?

Ms Missingham—Rather than a negative, the complexity is that you have to have agreements with people or a framework so that material is deposited. In the university sector, it is voluntary

and people are putting in preprints, conference papers and research material. But a lot of work has to go into it because, generally speaking, they do not have a framework or a requirement that their researchers deposit in that sort of resource base. This means that there is a cost to it in order to establish it as well, both a business cost of setting up relationships to ensure that material is deposited and a cost in setting up the software. This is where sometimes it is advantageous to think about how you could utilise existing repositories where the additional costs of adding additional resources may not be as significant as setting up one from scratch.

Senator WATSON—You wrote to the Clerk Assistant of the House of Representatives and said in that letter that the PPS had lost some of its usefulness in 2001 when the blister pack systems were introduced. In what way because people seem to think that is a comprehensive record? It is a little bit late. I would like your comments on that.

Ms Scott—What I was referring to when I said that was that it lost its usefulness in the timely delivery of the papers to libraries. I think in the submission from the Clerk of the House of Representatives, he says that is recognised as a problem because sometimes it takes two years for the papers in the blister packs to get to the libraries. That is where the lack of timeliness is the problem but not the receipt. The receipt of the papers in the blister packs is very useful so that they can be bound for the complete record in libraries, which will stay there forever. So we still need that system, but it was the timely receipt that was the problem.

Senator WATSON—I think we have all recognised the timely receipt is a problem, I just wanted to make sure there was nothing else. The National Library of Australia says it keeps its loose copies of the PPS until a collated set is bound and then it discards the loose copies. Is that a common practice with other libraries?

Ms Scott—I work in the State Library of Victoria and it is not a common practice there. I would say it is probably not a common practice. Libraries would receive and keep all material and not discard as a common practice.

Senator WATSON—A number of other people have suggested a parliamentary web site for the parliamentary papers series. Who do you see as the logical agency to administer that?

Ms Scott—I think that sort of question would need to be discussed further. It is not for us to say who should administer it or what sort of system it should be. We know that the parliament does have a system in operation—ParInfo—so perhaps that could be looked at—

Senator WATSON—Be expanded?

Ms Scott—to expand to take over this role, or there could be other library systems which could be looked at.

Senator WATSON—In terms of the distribution of digital, the National Library have put forward the idea that, with additional resources, they could handle it. Would they would be the most appropriate organisation to handle the digitised form?

Ms Missingham—They have been running a digital repository since 1996 and it is a very significant one. I am biased, but it has been very successful.

Mr ADAMS—Is that PANDORA?

Ms Missingham—Yes.

Senator WATSON—How many additional resources would you need to run it?

Ms Missingham—I do not know. You would you have to ask Pam Gatenby.

Ms Nicholson—We would generally recommend that the existing infrastructures be looked at first before moving ahead to set up something new.

Senator WATSON—Fair enough.

Mr ADAMS—The National Library does record the history of these papers. It took that over when it started in the 1920s. I think the parliamentary papers and documents from the colonial era are stored with National Library.

Ms Missingham—With the National Library, yes. We have individual records for the majority of the material that is in the parliamentary papers series, we have that historically, and make that available through the catalogue and also through Libraries Australia. Libraries Australia is a service that we offer where you can find the material that is held in state libraries, university libraries, public libraries and the National Library. It is currently a subscription service but we will be launching a free interface at the end of February which we hope you would all like to come to. That is a very good service because it enables any individual Australian to find printed collections as well as the digital collections all in one space and they can see if it is held in their local public library, state library or wherever.

Mr ADAMS—So this is an index process, a software, that you are talking about, is it?

Ms Missingham—People catalogue the material and then put it into this central database.

Mr ADAMS—So we go right back to the beginning of the government of Australia or the governing of Australia, from when the Governor of New South Wales used to write to the colonial office? We have advanced a little bit since then in our democratic process, but we do have that history, don't we?

Ms Missingham—We certainly do. All those books and papers are catalogued and available through all of those services. Not every library has completely catalogued its collection, but we have done the majority.

Mr ADAMS—One of the issues that has emerged is that agencies are a bit lax in getting their papers into the system. That is why the blister packs are late and other things can be late and there are missing papers. Can you give us some evidence in relation to this being a problem in that there may be somebody who is trying to seek information that just is not there?

Ms Scott—To give an example of an inquiry into the budget papers for example, I know that they are available online but if we want to see the actual printed copies, the official tabled paper,

rather than the online version, it may take a year or more to appear in the library and to appear in the bound copy that the library makes.

CHAIR—In view of the fact that we have that problem, how do you suggest we address that? We cannot take people out and thump them! What can we do against the agencies who default in their obligations to provide the hard copies and online electronic copies of the parliamentary papers, and who do you see as having the role to try and enforce that so that we can get the PPS delivered in a timely manner?

Ms Missingham—Perhaps the most important thing would be to move more rapidly to a digital repository, because then we would all be able to access materials quite immediately because the process would be much smoother.

Ms Nicholson—There have been some issues identified with CanPrint which I think we have made some reference to that could be looked at. We believe that those go right across the library sector.

Senator WATSON—For the record, could you highlight the advantages of that? Obviously there are a lot of things in its favour. What are all the advantages of moving to a digital repository immediately?

Ms Missingham—I will identify the advantages from different approaches. For the publishing agency, the advantage is that they do not have to produce so many copies in print. They can have a print run tailored precisely to their demands and they can supply just the electronic copy, which they have already, so it becomes a great efficiency from their point of view. From the point of view of the management of the parliamentary papers, it means that you do not physically have to have all those copies rehandled, packaged up and sent out to people, so it can be much more efficient. From the point of view of the libraries and the Australians who are able to access those resources, it means that you can have very timely access to those resources, rather than the cases that Penny has talked about, and you can have an information flow so that material can be recorded, for example, in public library catalogues. And public libraries can highlight them to their communities, as well as members and senators being able to access the lists much more efficiently and, hopefully, in a much more timely fashion. As well, they can promote inquiries, reports or publications that they think are very relevant to their community, put those in their newsletters and know that their community will be able to access them in a very timely fashion, both from their public library and from their internet connections.

Senator WATSON—That seems sensible.

Ms Nicholson—Another aspect of that is that libraries need to know that these papers have been issued and the numbers in the series. One of the problems with the print series at the moment is with knowing that it has been tabled and what its number is, and then trying to find a copy of it. If it were clearly identified in a repository what the series number was et cetera then libraries could know straightaway that it was available.

Mrs HULL—You speak about a single authoritative source of parliamentary papers. Bearing in mind that we have spoken about PANDORA and a whole host of things, what technical steps

are needed to realise a single authoritative source that can best deliver not just to libraries but also to every organisation, including parliamentary members and senators?

Ms Missingham—The architecture that is at the National Library for PANDORA would support it, but there would need to be additional memory space. There would need to be processes established so that the material could be acquired in digital form from the publishing departments and agencies. So there are work flows that would need to be established. There is hardware that would need to be acquired, but not necessarily software. There would be a need to specify, if it were to sit as a separate repository, the exact nature of it as well as any outputs from that repository such as, for example, lists of new titles.

Mrs HULL—I believe that a numbering system for parliamentary papers has recently become widely available in the House of Representatives. If you had a numbering system for all parliamentary papers, how would that physically work when everyone was preparing them at different places, stages and times? Would they all get fed into a single repository system that would number them and then send them back to the particular departments or agencies or whatever? Could you explain how that might work?

Ms Missingham—I think it probably depends on the metadata flow—the descriptive data about the item, its title and any notes, and the parliamentary paper number is a note field, generally speaking, in the records that we can have within our catalogues. In addition to the item physically transferring to a repository, usually metadata associated with it transfers, which gives subject headings, information about the date it was published and what agency was responsible for it. You can either send metadata with the publication, which would include the parliamentary paper number, or that could be added at the time the digital object was put into the repository, with someone at the National Library adding that information to the record about that digital item.

Ms Scott—I suppose the number would be given by the parliament first and then that information would be fed back into this repository system.

Mrs HULL—When you are talking about metadata, are government standards for metadata currently satisfactory to achieve that? I mean to your knowledge; I am not expecting you to be an expert on that.

Ms Missingham—The government metadata standard is a framework approach. It lists 15 elements which we use to put records into the Libraries Australia service that I talked about. It is adequate for that, provided that people are doing the right thing and there is monitoring and training so that staff are recording the right information.

Mrs HULL—If we wanted to have this repository system and we needed additional hardware and whatever, our metadata standards would be sufficient at this time to be able to achieve that outcome.

Ms Missingham—I think the standard is sufficient; you just need to have the right person doing the creation of data.

Mrs HULL—Is there a training program available or a training program that everyone has to attend to be able to achieve this?

Ms Missingham—There is a set of manuals. Generally speaking, the metadata that goes into the National Library is PANDORA archived. We have our cataloguers create that. Basically, they are people who are qualified cataloguing librarians.

Mrs HULL—Is there a pro forma or something that you utilise to put this into the system?

Ms Missingham—We have a cataloguing system which has a number of fields that you can fill in. It is a Windows based application. With the Libraries Australia system, we have a web based form as well that can be used for data entry, so there are Windows and web based systems around.

Mrs HULL—I am sorry to keep asking about this but I need to understand it. When you say that it depends who is entering the data and whether there is somebody to make sure that the operator is putting it in correctly, is there a way in which it is identified if an operator is not utilising the system correctly?

Ms Missingham—Generally speaking, each contributing library takes responsibility for the standards. I guess this is where there are a couple of different options that could be used. The PANDORA scheme, the system that the National Library uses at the moment, operates on the basis of library partners identifying material that needs to come in and be preserved. We get a digital copy of the material that is identified, and the National Library or the partner state library does the cataloguing. If the digital object came with the parliamentary paper number, the National Library could take that on as part of the cost of managing the system, which I am sure Pam would give you more information on. That would mean everything would be done to a very consistent and high standard.

Mrs HULL—Thank you very much.

Senator WATSON—If we did the digital repository immediately, would that replace the pamphlet copies or even the blister packs?

Ms Missingham—I think for many libraries it would.

Ms Scott—In theory that is the future, but it is not the present.

Mrs HULL—Why is it not the present?

Ms Scott—The systems have not been put in place for that to happen in a streamlined and secure way.

Ms Missingham—I guess what Penny is saying is that when it is delivered and libraries can be assured that all the material is going into the repository and they are obtaining information on the new material that is added in a timely fashion, they would be happy to give up the parliamentary paper blister pack—but not until then.

Senator WATSON—And the pamphlet copy?

Ms Missingham—Yes.

Ms Nicholson—That is our perfect world.

Senator WATSON—What mechanism could we put in place to make sure that everything was delivered on time in terms of that digital repository?

Ms Missingham—I think that is probably where consultation with the library community in the setting up of the repository would be the best way to proceed.

Senator WATSON—We are looking for some cost savings. That really would be the way to go, wouldn't it? What sort of committee are you talking about and chaired by whom?

Ms Missingham—Possibly chaired by whoever will have the long-term management of the repository.

Senator WATSON—Who do you think that should be?

Ms Missingham—I think the National Library would do a very good job.

Ms Scott—I think we agree with that.

Senator WATSON—You do not know about the money side, though, do you?

Ms Missingham—No. You will have to ask the National Library.

Mrs HULL—It makes sense, really, to do this. There would need to be a further inquiry or working group that would bring the libraries and other stakeholders together. We would need to identify all the stakeholders and bring them together to determine how this repository would work for all of them.

Ms Missingham—AGIMO has a responsibility for making sure that the agencies are providing.

Senator WATSON—Who should coordinate this and make it happen?

Ms Missingham—I guess the question is how you see the role of the committee—whether you would like to have oversight of that through your secretariat as well.

Senator WATSON—Would we have enough authority, do you think?

Mrs HULL—I suspect we would. The problem, as I have just discovered now, is the continuum of the members of the committee. That is the problem that I see. I am just recognising now what took place in an earlier review in 1997. Admittedly, Jason has distributed this paper to me and I have not read that paper because there were a lot of papers to read. My only problem is

the continuation of the committee in order that they have a complete understanding of the basis and the history of it. So it may very well need to be a more structured, formal committee consisting of the Senate, the House, the libraries and the National Library.

Ms Nicholson—AGIMO needs to be involved.

Mrs HULL—Do you see that as a problem? You need to have a continuation of knowledge, don't you? As I said, it is difficult for this committee to have enough continuity to understand the system. I think the most interesting issue is now to determine how it could happen. Do you have any other thoughts on who could or should be involved in the overseeing or monitoring of it?

Ms Nicholson—Certainly we would suggest that, through our expert group of government publications, you are getting access to a wide range of people. So we would certainly be happy to support a representative on that committee.

Senator WATSON—You have to have somebody to drive that, though.

Ms Missingham—I guess that that is the question. If it is funded and an agency is responsible for it then it might be sort of a stakeholder advisory committee rather than being the management committee for the actual service. That would be an alternative that might give it more stability. Then the committee might just need to meet, once the service is established, once every six months to provide advice and any strategic directions. But if the operational project management was done by an agency you might just want regular reporting and consultation.

Ms Nicholson—Certainly this is an issue of great interest to the library sector. The library sector will be driving it either from behind or in front.

CHAIR—Indeed.

Senator WATSON—You can appreciate from the point of view of our committee, not being one of the really prime committees of the parliament, the composition changes quite dramatically from parliament to parliament. So you can have somebody who could come in fairly indifferent or come in and be persuaded by, say, a House of Representatives or by a Senate or whatever it might be. The whole thing just goes on without making any progress. I am just looking for somebody who can drive it over successive parliaments, over changes to governments and that sort of thing.

CHAIR—A change of government is a point we had not considered, because we have not had a continuing chair across successive parliamentary sessions.

Senator WATSON—That has been a problem for us.

Mrs HULL—That is why this committee has to be clear about where it wants this process to go. The discussion this morning has been very valuable because it has concentrated our attention on the fact that the committee needs to determine who should drive such an exercise so that it has ongoing continuity and delivers to the wider community as well.

CHAIR—Are there any other comments or questions?

Ms Nicholson—The National Library is hosting a peak bodies meeting—it is on Monday, 12 December—and that might be another forum where you can come and—

Ms Missingham—What that means is that representatives of all the library sectors—including TAFE libraries, university libraries, state libraries and public libraries—come together. They meet once a year to discuss issues.

Senator WATSON—That is a nasty time for us as parliamentarians.

CHAIR—It is very difficult because we will be just finishing the sitting program and going back to our electorates for the end of the year.

Senator WATSON—We have a lot of electorate issues leading up to Christmas.

Ms Nicholson—If there is an issue you would like to refer to that committee, we would certainly be happy to take that forward to the peak bodies.

CHAIR—Thank you for your appearance before the committee this morning.

Committee adjourned at 11.07 am