



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLICATIONS

Reference: Future of the parliamentary papers series

CANBERRA

Monday, 24 February 1997

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

CANBERRA

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLICATIONS

Members:

Senator Sandy Macdonald (Chair)

Senator Calvert	Mr Cobb
Senator Chapman	Ms Ellis
Senator Jacinta Collins	Mr Richard Evans
Senator Colston	Mr Griffin
Senator Gibbs	Mr Lieberman
Senator McKiernan	Mr Martin
	Mr Mutch

Matter referred:

Future of the parliamentary papers series.

WITNESSES

CLARK, Mr David Francis, Representative, Council of Australian State Libraries, The Library and Information Service of Western Australia, Alexander Library Building, Perth Cultural Centre, Perth, Western Australia 6000	73
EVANS, Mr Harry, Clerk of the Senate, Department of the Senate, Parliament House, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory 2600	78
FERRANDA, Ms Caterina Rosalia, Senior Parliamentary Officer—Legislation and Documents, Department of the Senate, Parliament House, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory 2600	78
LAVER, Mr John Poynton, Member, Executive Committee, Centre for Research in Public Sector Management, University of Canberra, PO Box 1, Belconnen, Australian Capital Territory 2616	49
MILLER, Miss Ann Elizabeth, Government Publications Librarian, La Trobe University, Bundoora, Victoria 3083, and ACLIS, C/- National Library, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory	62
VANDER WYK, Mr John, Clerk Assistant—Table, Department of the Senate, Parliament House, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory 2600	78
WETTENHALL, Professor Roger Llewellyn, Professor of Public Administration, Centre for Research in Public Sector Management, University of Canberra, PO Box 1, Belconnen, Australian Capital Territory 2616	49

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLICATIONS

Future of the parliamentary papers series

CANBERRA

Monday, 24 February 1997

Present

Senator Sandy Macdonald (Chair)

Senator Calvert

Mr Griffin

Senator Gibbs

Mr Lieberman

Senator McKiernan

Mr Mutch

The committee met at 9.36 a.m.

Senator Sandy Macdonald took the chair.

CHAIR—I declare open this second public hearing of the Joint Publications Committee in relation to its reference on the future of the parliamentary papers series. On 27 June 1996, the Presiding Officers wrote to the committee stating that they believed that, in the tight budgetary environment the parliament faces, the continuation of the parliamentary papers series in its current discrete hard copy format could not be sustained. The Presiding Officers had decided, however, that before progressing further they felt it desirable to obtain the advice of the joint committee. To provide this advice, the committee is conducting an inquiry into the future of the series and has scheduled two public hearings, the first of which was held on 10 February.

Today the committee will take evidence from Professor Roger Wettenhall, the Council of State Libraries, the Australian Council of Libraries and Information Services and the Department of the Senate. For the record, this is a public hearing and, as such, members of the public are welcome to attend. However, I should point out that only the witnesses at the table are able to speak to the committee during the formal part of the proceedings.

Before we begin taking evidence, let me also place on record that all witnesses are protected by parliamentary privilege with respect to submissions made to the committee and evidence given before it. Parliamentary privilege means special rights and immunities attached to the parliament or its members and others which are necessary for the discharge of the functions of the parliament without fear of prosecution. Any act of any person which operates to the disadvantage of a witness on account of the evidence given by that witness before any committee of the parliament is treated as a breach of privilege. I welcome our first witnesses.

LAYER, Mr John Poynton, Member, Executive Committee, Centre for Research in Public Sector Management, University of Canberra, PO Box 1, Belconnen, Australian Capital Territory 2616

WETTENHALL, Professor Roger Llewellyn, Professor of Public Administration, Centre for Research in Public Sector Management, University of Canberra, PO Box 1, Belconnen, Australian Capital Territory 2616

Prof. Wettenhall—Mr Brown said I would be welcome if I brought another user of the parliamentary paper series with me and so I have brought Mr John Laver, who is a senior member of our research centre and about to complete his PhD. He has used the series a lot for his research in connection with his study.

CHAIR—Welcome to you both. Professor, do you wish to make an opening statement before the committee proceeds to ask you questions?

Prof. Wettenhall—A short one, Mr Chairman. We understood that there was a proposal to discontinue the parliamentary paper series. I think that as far as the University of Canberra was concerned the advice that such a proposal was being considered came to our library. It did not come to the centre in which we are involved, for example, which is a research centre in public sector management. It does lead me to wonder how widely the information was distributed that this proposal was being considered.

Anyway, I am a considerable user of the series and I therefore felt it was appropriate to make a submission. I think you have a copy of it and I will not read it all, but I will just pick out a few points in the submission.

While, of course, people like me appreciate the new avenues for information dissemination made available by computer technology, we would still want to stress to the committee the high value of the parliamentary papers series, as an organised authoritative reference and indexed record of key government and parliamentary activities. And the loss of this resource, I believe, would be likely to impose significant inefficiencies on the whole research activity in public sector management and, of course, I believe that is very important.

I can tell you that I use the series frequently and colleagues like John Laver do that too. I think it is very important that people like me should let you know how valuable the series is to us. I think that is probably sufficient as an opening statement.

CHAIR—You know that only some documents are designated as part of the parliamentary papers series?

Prof. Wettenhall—Yes.

CHAIR—Do you think the selection of documents made by the parliament for inclusion in the series is appropriate?

Prof. Wettenhall—I could wish more were in it rather than less. I have done a lot of research on government business enterprises, for example, and their annual reports normally are not in the series. So I could wish it were broader in its coverage but I still make much use of what is in the series as it is now and I do not want to criticise the coverage. My purpose is rather to insist on the importance of the series as it is.

CHAIR—What do you find most comforting about it? Is it the fact that you have confidence in its completion, that it is a complete document, that it is easy to access, the fact that it is hard copy? What are the most attractive things that you find about it?

Prof. Wettenhall—All those things. Yes, it is a reliable collection; it is indexed; the index is easy to use.

CHAIR—Free?

Prof. Wettenhall—Yes, I suppose that is my particular case and, as a researcher I want it to be there. But yes, it is well indexed, it is there on the shelf in one place and the numbering means that it is much easier to keep it together as a series. In libraries, books in unnumbered series notoriously get lost or misfiled and that is a constant problem for library users. But the very fact of the numbering of this series is a significant aid to keep it together. It is at the same place on the shelf. You know that there is a broad record of government and parliamentary activity in that place on the library shelf. The fact that it is in the series holds it together. And it is not only the breadth of current interests of government and parliament but it is the long historical series. You can go back.

Only last week, for example, I needed to consult a 1910 royal commission report and it was easy, because it is there. If it was not in such a series, I would have a great deal of trouble locating that document.

CHAIR—It has been put to us that a beefed up library deposit scheme—or the library deposit scheme with a beefed up index—might satisfy the needs of researchers. What do you have to say about that?

Prof. Wettenhall—I am convinced that that would be much more difficult. I emphasise the fact of numbering in the series. I think if you did that so there would be an index but still not numbered libraries would salt that material away all over the place according to their cataloguing procedures.

It would not be together, it would not be compact as it is now. And I reckon it would be easier for a lot of that material to get lost and mislaid, so it would be far less reliable to me, it would take me much longer to get access to anything that is there.

CHAIR—Mr Laver, what is your study that you are embarking on for your PhD?

Mr Laver—I have been doing an examination of the public accounts committee and, for that purpose, the parliamentary papers of not merely the Commonwealth but also of the House of Commons have been quite invaluable. I was thinking a little earlier about how invaluable, and it seems to me that it is difficult to say that the research I have been doing would be impossible if it were not there but I am sure it would be so impracticable that it just would not get done. The public accounts committee has published just over 400 reports since it was established in 1913, and the papers series is the only way that I could think of that anyone could have of knowing where they are, having them accessible, having them organised, and having a commonly accepted and widely known reference. I can refer to PAC report 199 and anybody in the area that wants to know has an authoritative access point.

I have done a similar paper on the public works committee. They have produced something over 750 reports and you can imagine the sheer magnitude of this amount of material. I think you take the point when I say it may not be totally impossible but it would be highly impracticable to try and simply handle that magnitude without an index of this type. It is really absolutely vital to that sort of research.

Indeed, our colleague Professor Halligan is doing a parallel study on parliamentary committees, and I know that he and his crew have made very extensive use. Their coverage is from 1970, and they are looking at the whole range of committees. Again, without a numerical index of the type that we have, that sort of work would probably just not get done. That is the bottom line to it.

Mr LIEBERMAN—Professor, you seem fairly concerned about the technological system of reproducing information. I wonder if you could expand on that a little bit. Perhaps you could say a bit more precisely what improvements and guarantees should be in place before the technological electronic retrieval systems would be acceptable to you?

Prof. Wettenhall—Yes. I am so convinced myself that it is important to have the hard copy on the shelf that I really cannot imagine a positive answer I can give you to that. The technology changes—it is always changing. In my experience, it is much harder to find material. Often it is there and you get it from CD-ROM or Internet. I have had a couple of papers recovered that way in recent times.

They are not faithful copies of the original. The technological process leaves lines out. It distorts things like punctuation. The technology is not such today that you can get a faithful copy of the original. There is that about it. But it is harder to get, harder to access. There is nothing easier than going to a library shelf and finding a whole run of relevant documents brought together.

I guess I should say to you, too, that my wife is a lecturer in business

communication and office technology and understands these computer technology processes better than I do—and she wants them. But she says that you could not replace the hard copy versions by that. You have to have access to the hard copy too because the computer stuff is—well, it is unreliable, it is inaccurate in what it brings out, its permanence is something that I have little confidence in at the moment. The run on the library shelf it is permanent. I can go back and get a 1910 paper if I need it. There is a lot of work to be done before all that is put on computer too so I just have real worries about that.

Mr LIEBERMAN—Thank you for your comments. What about storage problems with the hard copies—are you experiencing any storage problems in your institution?

Prof. Wettenhall—They keep adding new shelf space. At the moment there is space for that. I understand that that is a problem.

Mr Laver—But they would all fit on that wall.

Prof. Wettenhall—Yes.

Mr Laver—The whole of the Commonwealth series—it is not that big.

Mr LIEBERMAN—We should identify the wall the witness was referring to. It was the wall of the committee room.

Mr Laver—I estimate it would be about 30 feet by eight feet of shelving.

Mr LIEBERMAN—And that is all full at the moment, is it?

Mr Laver—Yes, but that is only two stacks of hundreds of stacks in the library. The point I am trying to make is that the total series of Commonwealth parliamentary papers is not that much in terms of shelf space.

Mr LIEBERMAN—The growth of the shelf space to accommodate the hard copies is apparently six linear feet per annum. You think that is a comfortable rate of growth—

Mr Laver—With respect, I am not impressed with six linear feet per annum, whereas if you said 60 linear feet per annum—

Prof. Wettenhall—Our library at the University of Canberra has been expanding the shelves that accommodate the government publications, particularly in this off teaching period—

CHAIR—Probably at six linear feet a day.

Prof. Wettenhall—But it is well worth it, in my view.

Mr LIEBERMAN—What about helping the parliament out? We are in difficulty with budgets, like everyone, and we are trying to find ways of accommodating that without sacrificing the important principle of access in a democracy. Who are your customers? We have a live one here, but who else uses the material?

Prof. Wettenhall—All students do. They would not use them as consistently as a senior research student like John would, but all our students are directed to parliamentary papers. If you are teaching political science or public administration, you want your students to have access to primary documents of this sort and you direct them to them. So students are using them now and the usage builds up when they become senior research students.

Mr LIEBERMAN—Does anyone else use them?

Prof. Wettenhall—Staff and research people use them. We have some people who are full-time researchers in our research centre, so there is a research community that is using them. I would think that journalists probably go to them from time to time.

Mr LIEBERMAN—So there are quite a few people. I am not being unkind to them—the basis of my questioning is to be open and frank and not to ensure that anyone is targeted—but a lot of these people actually earn substantial income from access to those documents, don't they?

Prof. Wettenhall—The students do not—not through access to the material.

Mr LIEBERMAN—Not the students immediately, but others such as journalists and others that access your very valuable resources—

Prof. Wettenhall—Yes, I suppose they do.

Mr LIEBERMAN—What do you think about the potential of sitting down and perhaps getting some fee to help the parliament cope with the costs of reproducing them? Without trapping you and committing you, or committing the university, do you think that is something that would be fertile ground to talk about?

Prof. Wettenhall—I think we all understand that parliament has financial and budgetary difficulties. So do universities. From your point of view I guess it is a reasonable thing to consider. My vice-chancellor would be horrified.

Mr LIEBERMAN—I do not want to put you on the spot, but I want to let you know what I am thinking. We do know that some places are obtaining this information and when assistance is sought, say, by your library to another place to get something from

that other place, you are probably being charged for it. Would that be right?

Prof. Wettenhall—Yes.

Mr LIEBERMAN—Doesn't there appear to be some inconsistency there? You make your information available free and then someone who uses your information and does not pay for it turns around and charges your institution. Do you find that a bit contradictory?

CHAIR—Before you answer, Professor Wettenhall, I have to leave for a short time and I would like to thank you very much for your evidence. Excuse me for leaving early.

Prof. Wettenhall—If you regard everything as purely commercial, then I would agree with you. I, frankly, am a passionate believer in this proposition that there are some things in the public sector that cannot be commercialised, judged and treated on the same basis as private business. I know that there is almost an ideology afoot that runs in the other direction. In the end there have to be some things which government and parliament provide for the community which cannot be judged and measured in those commercial terms. I think I would answer you like that, that providing information about the processes of government and parliament—

ACTING CHAIR (Mr Lieberman)—Thank you. I accept what you are saying. But if it turned out, and I am not saying that that is the case, that some of that free information given by parliament to your library which is used for excellent purposes—there is no question about that—was being used by others to produce income and that those others also charged your institution when you wanted information, do you think that there ought to be, in principle, some exploration of the justice of that? That is the point I am raising with you. Perhaps, Mr Laver, you might like to—

Mr Laver—I would have to agree. When I think of the machinery as to how you might do it, the mind boggles. But the principle seems to me to be sound enough.

ACTING CHAIR—I suppose that as an avid reader of public accounts reports you would have picked up a fair bit of taxpayer money being used sometimes over generously, if I may add that. I do not want to pursue that. I just wanted to add that ingredient to our dialogue because we are under a duty, as members of parliament, to try and canvass all the options. I must say, I am very disappointed about your reference to all the photographs of members in reports. But never mind, I will take that on board and ban the photographs. You can live without them, that is what you are saying?

Prof. Wettenhall—We could live without them.

ACTING CHAIR—Absolutely. I am sure we could.

Mr Laver—I would like to make a comment. We were drawing the comparison with *Hansard*, which is done simply and not on glossy paper. It is done with all the material that we, from our point of view, would ever want. It does seem to me that if you are talking about cost of government public sector publications generally, then there would have to be some very large savings to be made by coming back to a *Hansard* standard of publication and doing away with colour photographs and the very expensive glossy papers, et al.

ACTING CHAIR—That is a very good point that you made.

Mr MUTCH—Professor, I appreciated your spirited defence of the book, but you do say that your major concern is that it is premature to move to a technologically different way of storing. Would you not think that now that your concerns about the loss of information would really be salved by the fact that information would be acquired by the archives office and stored for future reference, and that your hard copies would still be widely disseminated?

Prof. Wettenhall—It is much less convenient for the user. John Laver has been telling you about research that would be so much more difficult to undertake that it probably would not be done. I believe in that sort of research. I think that the convenience factor is extremely important. You are saying that there would still be a hard copy in archives—

Mr MUTCH—The other side of it is: would it not be more convenient for researchers to have, maybe, the indexes or bound copies of indexes—so that you might plead for the retention of indexes. Would it not be much more convenient for a researcher to just ring up the library and say, ‘Can you fax or computer across this particular article,’ rather than having it all on your shelves? I imagine that the weighty volumes of parliamentary index papers would be considerably difficult to accommodate in the small cells that are provided for academics.

Prof. Wettenhall—Yes, but we do not have them. I am not quite with you. I mean, individual academics—

Mr MUTCH—The same thing would apply to libraries. Would it not be more convenient to be able to order at will a particular publication that you desire, which is what you can do these days?

Prof. Wettenhall—Are you saying that the library would not hold it?

Mr MUTCH—It would not need to; it would be on the computer. It would not hold it in hard copy form but it would be held on a computer.

Prof. Wettenhall—It would not satisfy me. I do not have that confidence in the

computer system.

Mr MUTCH—You would still get it in hard copy form.

Prof. Wettenhall—Yes, but it is inaccurate. The computer is distorting stuff that comes to me. I am not getting the original.

Mr Laver—I would like to add to that. Not every student has computers even these days. Computers are expensive. If you want a computer that will adequately handle current CD-ROMs, you are looking at \$4,000-odd. Compare that to Austudy, for instance, or simply to money: for most people, \$4,000 is a tangible sum of money. The computer is only good for two or three years at best. You will have some appreciation of the rapid rate of technological advance which will see software increasingly useless after that stage, as well as the computer itself. By forcing students, in particular, into computers, you are engaging in a massive cost shifting to people who are probably least able out of almost anybody in the community to afford it.

There is another aspect to the technology issue. Despite the fact that computers have been with us for only 20 to 25 years usefully, a lot of the earlier computer records are not accessible anymore directly because the machines upon which they were produced have long since been junked in a heap. If you have access to punched paper tapes or magnetic tapes from that era and you are prepared to spend a lot of money, then you can retrieve data off them. But the rate of pure obsolescence, in terms of data, over that period has made access to some of those extremely difficult.

I am sure there are many people in some public service departments who will give you concrete instances of where they have been searching for material from departmental records from the sixties and seventies. Again, it is not possible to say that it is impossible to get it, but it is very difficult and very expensive. That is a major reservation that I have about computers.

I am not prepared to say that they will never overcome those problems, but the history of them, since their inception, is such that I certainly would not bet a dollar on the current systems. They look great today, but five years ago so did the systems; we laugh at those now and say, 'Whoever thought you could operate on those things?' From that point of view, I think it would be quite imprudent to move away from fairly extensive use of hard copies yet.

Another point about technology is that one can—as I have needed to—go to the National Library and access House of Commons parliamentary papers from the 1860s. You can pick them up and read them. Anybody who is literate can do that and will be able to do it in 100 years time and probably 200 years time. But I would be quite confident that the electronic technology of today will not be accessible in that form.

In England we are still reading government documentation from the 1100s. You need to be versed in the language to understand it, but it is a very permanent record. There is no evidence that the electronic records are going to have anything near that permanence. What is a CD-ROM without a very expensive and highly sophisticated piece of equipment to either put words on a screen to read or noises that you can hear? The written word has a permanence that thousands of years of record testify to.

ACTING CHAIR—My colleagues are saying that there still would be hard copies available which would be accessible either by reproduction and scanning through a system of electronics back to you. Are you suggesting that that type of system is also unsatisfactory?

Mr Laver—I am suggesting that Archives already have problems with some of the earlier electronic records. I think that if you could find an Archives person prepared to talk about that that would not be a secret at all.

The other aspect of that I touched briefly on earlier is that accessing Commonwealth archives is not so bad for we who live in Canberra but if you are operating out of Perth university or Queensland or whatever, it is much more difficult. If you seek to have a library get it for you then that is money. Once again it is cost shifting back to the student body who is, I would suggest, probably least able to—

ACTING CHAIR—Where I come from your great facilities are not available either. The people who are in regional Australia are already—whether they are happy to do it or not—becoming very captive of the electronic potential to access somewhere else hard copies and have them sent back to them through the electronic form.

Mr Laver—Yes, indeed.

ACTING CHAIR—That is obviously something we accept as being inevitable because we know we cannot have your facilities in every spot in Australia.

Mr Laver—The Australian Archives, no, that is—

ACTING CHAIR—It seems to be working. I just want to say that. There is a lot of goodwill and a lot of innovation and a lot of great ideas coming out of that. There is a realisation that, 'We have to get this information to country and regional people. Let us do something about it'. I just want to mention that to you. Have you any comment on that?

Mr Laver—In that case I would shift my ground just slightly and say when doing that let us try and find some way of keeping the cost to the regional user either nil or at least affordable. I am not talking about the corporate user or the commercial user or even a university funded user, I am talking the lay user and the student body in particular.

ACTING CHAIR—That is a fair point.

Prof. Wettenhall—You would have a better collection of records. You talk about regional Australia. There are universities in a number of regional centres. I would like to think the parliamentary papers series is in all those university libraries so that people who need that sort of information, with less trouble than coming to Canberra, can go to the library of a regional university and get access to it.

ACTING CHAIR—I am not sure. Maybe our witnesses to come this morning might enlighten us on some of that.

Mr MUTCH—If you just have a couple of bound volumes at a central depot, why cannot those libraries just ring up and say, ‘Look, send down the particular article that is requested’. What is the problem with that?

Mr Laver—There is a fee attached.

Mr MUTCH—Not necessarily, it depends on who the consumer is.

Mr Laver—If I go to my library and I ask for a book to be borrowed from Perth—

Mr MUTCH—We would still know the exact expense of each individual consumer. That does not mean we have to charge a fee.

Mr Laver—Fine.

Mr MUTCH—It could be a community service obligation?

Mr Laver—Fine.

Mr MUTCH—I think we share your view that it is nice to have a hard copy or two around the place. I lost a lot of material on an original Apple II computer which is probably still hanging around but I do not know how to get it.

ACTING CHAIR—It is much more impressive to read from the bound law reports in front of a jury than to read from a photocopy. It just seems to create an ambience.

Mr MUTCH—I understand what you are saying. If you ask for a report from a newspaper article you get the report and it sometimes does not look like the newspaper article and that is quite annoying. It does not look like the actual article but I am sure these things can be ironed out.

Prof. Wettenhall—It can be distorted, not just the appearance of it but the—

Mr MUTCH—Usually the words are the same.

Prof. Wettenhall—In a document I got off the Internet the other day, lines were missing through it. I could tell where the lines were missing but it is irritating and you wonder what you are missing.

ACTING CHAIR—Yes, I have had that happen to me too.

Senator GIBBS—I would agree with the Professor. Professor, when you have the series in a bound document and it is the primary document, if it is transferred to the computer then it becomes a secondary document, doesn't it?

Prof. Wettenhall—Yes.

Senator GIBBS—Obviously, people who are literate can pick up a book and read it but it means that students have to be up with the latest technology on how to access that on the computer?

Prof. Wettenhall—Yes.

Senator GIBBS—I am very sympathetic towards you in this because my staff can get things. I have been using computers for years but for the last few years I have not. Therefore, when I want to get something off a computer now I cannot get it off and it is so frustrating. I have to yell out to one of my staff, 'How do you do this?', and they just take it out like that. It is the added thing of not only learning and reading, you have got to be up on computer technology. Not everybody can do that, can they?

Prof. Wettenhall—No.

Senator GIBBS—Exactly, and I would agree with you, and they cannot afford to. I know when I was studying I could barely afford to keep myself, let alone buy a computer. So I would agree. I would hope that these series are in every university in Australia, also in the regional ones. I can see what you are getting at with the hard copy. I am totally in agreement with you because this is history.

Prof. Wettenhall—Yes. With that 1910 royal commission report that I needed the other day, perhaps it would eventually have come to me but I would have had to go through many processes of ordering, talking to librarians or whatever. As it is, I can go to a shelf and pick it out. It is just so much easier. I may not have pursued my interest in it and then we would lose historical knowledge.

Senator GIBBS—That is right.

Prof. Wettenhall—It is a certain thing that is happening in the public sector now, that so many people think it is all new, they only started it in the last decade or so. But we have a suspicion that this has been going on for a long time and we want to check back and we want to see what lessons there were. I am talking about contracting out, in fact. I want to see what lessons there were in the earlier experience of it. What can we learn from those lessons? If it were made so difficult for people to go back and do that sort of research, they would not do it. There would be tremendous memory lost. History is the poorer without that.

There is another point that occurs to me and I suppose it is an educator's point, that there is great value in going to a library shelf and browsing. Around this 1910 report, in that volume of parliamentary papers, I found several other things that were of interest which I may follow up and something might come from that. It was only by getting the collection on the shelf, and having direct access to it, not working through librarians and request procedures and so on, that I was able to discover this. Ideally, that is what we want all our students to do, to browse and to learn. It is not only what a lecturer gives them a specific direction to do, it is what they pick up on the side. So much good education comes from that.

ACTING CHAIR—That is what you call surfing in the library?

Prof. Wettenhall—Yes.

Mr MUTCH—Computers have that browsing facility. You can go through the Internet titles.

Senator GIBBS—It is not the same.

Mr MUTCH—With the press of a button—

Senator GIBBS—No, I agree, it is not quite the same to surf a computer as surfing the library shelves. I am a great lover of books and always have been and I have my own little library at home, which I constantly have to weed out because of space. I agree. Sometimes there is one beside and you think, 'Gosh, that is interesting.' Yes. I totally agree, and it is not the same on a computer.

Prof. Wettenhall—No.

Senator GIBBS—It is not the same at all.

Prof. Wettenhall—I simply do not have confidence that computer technology—

Senator GIBBS—No, I do not either, to tell you the truth.

Prof. Wettenhall—Can give you all these advantages that come from it.

Senator GIBBS—I have no confidence in computers.

Prof. Wettenhall—I use it, I do a lot with it, but it is no substitute for that easy access in the library.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much for your very good and stimulating evidence, I must say. We will meet again.

[10.13 a.m.]

MILLER, Miss Ann Elizabeth, Government Publications Librarian, La Trobe University, Bundoora, Victoria 3083, and ACLIS, C/- National Library, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory

ACTING CHAIR—Welcome. What exactly is ACLIS?

Miss Miller—ACLIS is the Australian Council of Libraries Information Service, of which there are about 600 member libraries in Australia. I am representing two organisations.

ACTING CHAIR—Do you wish to make an opening statement before the committee proceeds to ask questions?

Miss Miller—Yes, please. Could I just explain my background very briefly. I have been involved with government publications at La Trobe University for 30 years. I have been a member for 20 years of the ACLIS government publications subcommittee, which has concerned itself with Australian and other government publications, and as such I drafted the ACLIS submission. I have also been a member of AALC, the AGPS ACLIS liaison committee, since its inception, that is about 20 years. I will come back to AALC in due course. I have also been a member of IFLA, which is the International Federation of Library Associations, the IFLA standing committee on government information and official publications.

What I thought I would do by way of introduction is to basically go through the ACLIS submission, pulling in a few bits from the La Trobe one; I will not go through them independently. I realise there has been quite a lot of discussion about duplication, so I will make sure I cover that. I also pull together some notes about electronic access, which I will hand out. You might rather I did not talk to that and you might like to take over.

As government publications librarian at La Trobe, we have a very substantial collection of Australian publications, those other countries and those of international organisations. Amongst the Australian material, there are four really important bits of it. They are the publications for the Australian Bureau of Statistics and three publications coming from parliament: the legislation, *Hansard* and the parliamentary papers. The parliamentary papers are a very important part of the collection.

I did a count, and I have lost the figure for the moment, but on Friday afternoon I did a count of the number of bays they occupy, a bay being three feet wide, five shelves, and there was either 16 or 18—I will clarify that figure presently when I come across it. Those 16 or 18 bays are just worth every bit of space they take up in that library. They would be a top priority. If we had to weed, if we had to put things into storage, other

things would go. The parliamentary papers would stay as being a really critical resource. They are, as I said, a very rich resource, both for current material and historically, in the same way as the British House of Commons papers, the Command papers.

I do not want to be boring but I think two things are just so important that were said by Erwin in the Erwin report back in 1964, paragraphs 212 to 214:

The papers presented to parliament have a particular importance amongst government publications as part of the national record. There is a continuing need for reference to be made to them. A member of parliament or the ordinary citizen should be able to refer to them without difficulty, despite any time lapse since publication.

And then in the 1977 report:

One of the greatest advantages of the parliamentary papers series is its availability in annual bound volumes.

They have been prepared since Federation. The 1977 report also refers specifically to the value of the index.

Switching across to La Trobe but talking about the type of user, they are students, postgraduate students, teaching staff in the disciplines of politics, history, economics, law and sociology. So it is a very wide field.

ACTING CHAIR—Can I just for the record clarify, the La Trobe you are talking about now—

Miss Miller—Bundoora Campus at the moment.

ACTING CHAIR—Bundoora Campus at Melbourne. Thank you.

Miss Miller—The letter which came to the joint committee said:

These days, most important reports receive wide circulation.

I would agree that a lot of important reports receive wide circulation, but what we want is everything. When I say everything, it is, as was decided by the joint committee back in 1977, those items which were tabled in parliament and ordered to be printed. I know that there is a whole lot of material that is not ordered to be printed, and for the most part I am not concerned about that. Correspondence and copies of newspaper articles, I am not fussed about that. There are a couple of things which I would love to see in the parliamentary papers, like Family Law Council monographic reports. But, basically, as it stands I am very satisfied with it, and that is what we would like to continue: what I am calling the complete record. We need the index in paper format.

If we did not have the parliamentary papers series we would, as a library, have dreadful problems getting the full range of material, partly because a lot of the material is not published by AGPS. Some of it is; some of it is not. With the role of AGPS being as uncertain as it is, with the possibility of more and more agencies being untied and free to publish, themselves, as distinct from going through AGPS, that would make it harder for us to obtain the material.

ACTING CHAIR—Could I just interrupt you to clarify that. You are saying that the parliamentary publications are invaluable?

Miss Miller—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—But, if it was to come from AGPS it would not—

Miss Miller—No, if the series should cease and we were on our own to try and identify and acquire this material ourselves, we would have great difficulty.

ACTING CHAIR—You are saying that you know that at the present time AGPS does not get all of the papers from the departments—

Miss Miller—No, it does not get all of the reports. AGPS does not publish everything that is in the parliamentary papers series. I will clarify that a little more a bit later.

ACTING CHAIR—Right, I just wanted to clarify that.

Miss Miller—These are the departmental or agency copies that are published by AGPS. They are theoretically listed in the AGPS catalogues. There was a fortnightly catalogue, and that alerted us to new publications, but unfortunately this listing ceased two years ago. There has been no current listing of AGPS publications for two years. As I said, if AGPS's role should be diminished further then we would have even greater trouble.

I did an analysis of the publications in the parliamentary papers series, which I refer to in the ACLIS submission, page 2, last paragraph, where they are talking about duplication. I went through the index for 1994 and analysed the papers that were tabled and ordered to be printed. Of those, half were published by AGPS and come to us, LaTrobe University, on deposit, but the other half were published by the author agency itself, so we would not have got those through the deposit scheme. We would have had to have chased those individually, agency by agency. There were some very important statutory authorities. There were the various Aboriginal land councils, the Australian Broadcasting Authority, Australian Institute of Criminology, Austel, Australian Wheat Board and the list goes on. It was exactly 50 per cent that were published by AGPS; 50 per cent were published by the author agency.

As I said, we would have great trouble in first, identifying, particularly since the cessation of the Australian National Bibliography published by the National Library as of last December. If we had identified them then the time and cost involved in going from one statutory authority to another to another and getting on mailing lists, following up and pursuing their various monographic reports would be a considerable cost to us. That is referred to as duplication in the letter from the joint committee, but in fact it is non-duplication to a large extent as well.

Moving on, though, to duplication—and I agree that there certainly is duplication—basically we, at La Trobe, all the state and university libraries and the National receive the same thing. We receive, through the deposit scheme, one copy of everything published by AGPS. A short while later, we receive one copy of the parliamentary papers in loose form and, yes, there is that 50 per cent overlap. Subsequently, we receive the blister pack for binding. That is a pristine copy for binding.

I was talking to a colleague on Friday and said, 'If I were asked which of those three I would dispense with, I would find it impossible to make a judgment,' and this colleague from the State Library of Victoria agreed with me. The agency copies, the ones we get directly from AGPS as deposits, we catalogue individually and make available for loan. The parliamentary paper copy, when it comes in, we keep in a numerical sequence, we do not lend it and it is a reference copy. Then when the blister pack comes in, it is double checked to make sure it is correct and it goes off for binding.

If we had to try to bind the issues that came in the second lot—the loose parliamentary papers—the chances of having a complete set would not be good. We would be sure to be missing a couple. A few would not have come to us, we would have claimed but we still probably would not have got them. A few would have vanished because they do vanish, unfortunately. All things vanish from libraries. We would find it very difficult to bind a set from the ones that came to us individually, and also they would have got fairly tatty.

Going back to 1977 and prior to that time, we were receiving bound volumes from the parliament. When we were asked if we could manage without the bound volumes we said, 'Yes, if we can have a set collated by AGPS or at the parliament so that we know it is perfect and not missing issues.' We were certainly prepared to do the actual binding and bear the cost of binding ourselves. That is what has happened since the early 1980s.

Nothing is thrown away. Our loose set that we receive which is very close to being complete is sent to our Albury-Wodonga campus library, and so they are building up a set. In fact, they have not gone to them yet; they are in storage because they have no space. Some years ago parliament was wanting to clear out back sets of bound volumes of parliamentary papers, and we took a set from 1964 up to the late 1970s, I think. We have just held them in storage for someone because parliament could not store them. Because we felt they were so important, we wanted to prevent their destruction. Since then, we

have built on with the loose ones and all of those in due course will go to the Albury-Wodonga campus. That will then be a resource in a country area.

ACTING CHAIR—You are a very shrewd lobbyist, aren't you? I should declare my interests now.

Miss Miller—Aren't I lucky?

ACTING CHAIR—Yes. The La Trobe campus at Albury-Wodonga is in my electorate, of course.

Senator GIBBS—It is a fine campus too, I might add.

Mr MUTCH—You should provide them with computers so they can access all this data direct.

ACTING CHAIR—Not a problem.

Miss Miller—Going back some time—and this is where I bring back AALC, the AGPS-ACLIS Liaison Committee—we did bring up this matter of duplication in the deposit schemes. There was a little subgroup which was looking into permission to discard, actually, because some libraries did not want to keep the multiple copies. Because AGPS said that they could not do customised deposits—it was all or nothing—some libraries felt they were stuck with this. We use everything. We hang onto everything, we do not waste it and we do not discard because we feel this is all invaluable. But I do know that some libraries consider it duplicate in the sense of the word and they do not want it.

The value of the bound volumes is very much one of preservation. They are secure for future readers in the way that individual reports are not. Over the years individual reports get lost, they get stolen and so on. Loose issues are portable. The 1977 report and the Erwin report are both in the parliamentary papers series, and these are the non-parliamentary paper versions.

I bring them with me. The other thing is that the parliamentary paper set is a back-up if we have the loose issues. In January I had someone coming to the library who was not a member of the university and he asked for the annual reports of the Repatriation Commission from the mid-1920s to the late 1930s. So I said, 'Yes, fine', I gave him the call number and I took him to the shelves, and they weren't there. They had just vanished. We had from 1921 to 1959-60 and they had gone.

ACTING CHAIR—The whole lot?

Miss Miller—Yes. They were not in the area. I cannot explain it. It would not

strike me that it was the sort of thing that people would want to make off with, but I cannot explain why. So I went to the consolidated index of the parliamentary papers from 1901-1949 and there they all were by session by session by session. So I took him to the parliamentary papers with the index and said, 'Work your way through, here you are.' As he left he said, 'Thank you so much.' So it is a back-up set as well.

ACTING CHAIR—How did you get the actual documents finally?

Miss Miller—They were in the bound volumes of parliamentary papers.

ACTING CHAIR—But where did you get those from, from your own—

Miss Miller—I am sorry, yes. So we looked for the Repatriation Commission set, it had gone, so then we went to the parliamentary paper set and he just worked through that year by year with the consolidated index.

ACTING CHAIR—I suppose it follows from that, though, Miss Miller, that you had some duplication in your own library.

Miss Miller—Intentionally. For back-up copy and for lending.

ACTING CHAIR—Right.

Miss Miller—In the same way as these are lendable. So we would never lend the parliamentary paper set. It is a reference copy. It is too important to risk going out of the building.

I realise that there are cost considerations and this is why this inquiry is being held, or one of the reasons. As far as we are concerned, you just cannot calculate the value of the parliamentary papers, they are just superb. It is not for me to judge, but I do, and I just think it is worth spending quite a lot of money on.

I also feel that some of the writers of submissions did not know how much was involved, thought it was an enormous amount of money, and were feeling forced to try and make suggestions to save money, and one of these was reducing duplication, and one of these was electronic suggestions.

As far as the two alternative suggestions that were made, still talking about paper version, in terms of distribution, additional papers being tabled in parliament or AGPS distributing, I think that would be a nightmare. I think one of the advantages of the AGPS deposit is that everything they distribute is published by AGPS. They do not have to get it in, it is there published by them. And there always seem to be problems when you are having to get material from outside to a central point. When you have got it in this central point, it is much easier to manage. So I would not feel at all secure using either of those

alternative suggestions.

ACTING CHAIR—But if someone like you were running it, you would feel secure.

Miss Miller—No.

ACTING CHAIR—Because you would know that someone reliable was ensuring the integrity of the system. You are going to dash my hopes now, aren't you, and tell me no.

Miss Miller—Flattery.

ACTING CHAIR—Tell me why.

Miss Miller—Lastly, I pulled together some comments about electronic provision. I am happy to go through it, but maybe you would prefer I was quiet and you ask questions.

Mr MUTCH—Is there anything that is defective in terms of the content of the parliamentary paper series?

Miss Miller—No, except that—

Mr MUTCH—We still choose, don't we; it is not complete. I think you note that it is—

Miss Miller—It is not a full record of everything tabled.

Mr MUTCH—It is not the full record, no.

Miss Miller—I am very satisfied. As I said, there are a couple of extra things that I would love to see in, like the Family Law Council monographic reports. There are some annual reports that do not get into the parliamentary papers, and I am sorry I cannot give you examples off the top of my head.

Mr MUTCH—Wouldn't it be better for research purposes if we could extend the material in the parliamentary papers to make it a complete record and then make that available upon request electronically?

Miss Miller—If that was at the expense of the cessation of bound volumes coming into libraries I would say no, because I think the joint committee in the past has chosen very well their criteria for inclusion. If that was at the expense of the distribution of collated sets or bound volumes or what have you to libraries, I would say no, because that

is minor.

Mr MUTCH—Wouldn't it be better for you to have an index of everything that you can summon at will and downline it to any interested party? Wouldn't that save you an awful lot of space and also make sure that you are able to provide a more complete record?

Miss Miller—We already have an index of everything tabled in parliament, the paper copy. I would not want to save that space. That space is just so well used.

Mr MUTCH—Do you have computers in the library?

Miss Miller—Yes, I have Internet and e-mail on my desk.

Mr MUTCH—You do not think that is user friendly enough yet?

Miss Miller—I just think there are so many difficulties and things that are unsatisfactory and probably would be in the long term. One thing is that typically a researcher, and I am not talking about an undergraduate student at this stage, typically they need to have several documents available simultaneously; they need to be surrounded by several documents. As we said just a few minutes ago, browsing through the index, yes, you could surf the Internet, but if you look at the 1901-1949 consolidated index for the parliamentary papers and you browse in that, you bump into all sorts of things. That is just the most wonderful index—

ACTING CHAIR—It stimulates further research, as the professor was saying earlier.

Miss Miller—Yes.

Mr MUTCH—And in your experience, I mean, we find a lot of people in the family history area, for instance, hardly what we could call academic researchers but very dedicated and very astute, a lot of them, but they seem to be adapting very well to the new technologies. I imagine they could come in, check out the terminal, they will be able to press a button and they can then surround themselves with all of that paper that you require for their intellectual fertility—

Miss Miller—I am afraid I cannot comment. All of our family history people go off to the La Trobe library, in other words the state library. Maybe David will be able to point on that, but that is where the genealogy stuff is, at the state library, so I cannot comment.

Mr MUTCH—In terms of accessibility, wouldn't you agree that most people are now getting familiar with the new forms? Necessity breeds expertise really, doesn't it?

Miss Miller—Yes, but I have listed the advantages—

ACTING CHAIR—We might at this stage, just for the record, identify the supplementary submission the witness has been kind enough to give us which outlines her views on some of the difficulties associated with electronic technology—is that an accurate description?

Miss Miller—I am sorry, there is no heading on it, nothing. It is just notes.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you.

Miss Miller—As far as the Internet, I have listed four advantages, and I consider them real advantages. I have also listed 11 disadvantages, as I see it.

ACTING CHAIR—It is my task to ask the nasty questions. I am not going to embarrass you as far as the university is concerned, because Professor Osborne would not approve, but, in relation to your representation for ACLIS today, it has been suggested that recipients of the parliamentary paper series could be asked to pay a service fee for the series. I think \$1,500 has been suggested. What is the reaction of ACLIS to the suggestion?

Miss Miller—I do not know. When I was doing a costing I came out with a figure much lower than that. I was basing it on I think it was \$200,000 a year. It was my understanding of what was involved. I understood that was prior to the discontinuation of the bound volumes to state and parliamentary libraries. So I came up with a much, much lower figure than that.

ACTING CHAIR—So you are saying that it was an appropriate caveat? You think \$1,500 would be far too high but the principle could be further examined?

Miss Miller—Yes, say \$500, which would be the sort of figure I would interpret from—

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you. That is a very fair observation.

Miss Miller—They might shoot me, of course, but I think it is so important. Other things would have to go.

ACTING CHAIR—Unfortunately, there is a time commitment but I appreciate your comments.

Senator GIBBS—I am very impressed with Miss Miller's presentation. I do not really have much to ask because I am in agreement with keeping a hard copy.

ACTING CHAIR—You mentioned the Albury-Wodonga campus, which is a growing campus and a wonderful initiative. It is true, is it not, that even though you are sending some hard copies up there—and I am sure they are very grateful for that—by and large, most of the students have to access their research from Albury-Wodonga through electronic means because the hard copies are just not in Albury-Wodonga? That I think, in fairness, is what is happening.

Miss Miller—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—I understand their performance is equal to, if not better than, students attending the campus at Bundoora. I understand that; I will give evidence of that now.

Mr MUTCH—We will take your word for it.

ACTING CHAIR—Let us assume that is the case. I am only wanting to put that on the record for the reason that I do think that that is a very interesting manifestation of the use by students, in the same university, of innovative means because they have to. I am not suggesting for one moment that it would not be better for them to have the hard copy but it is certainly an interesting development. Have you a comment on that?

Miss Miller—I would say that Internet delivery is certainly better than nothing. I see the Internet as particularly valuable for currency; for instance, for things like the daily *Hansard*, which we can now read the next morning. It is there on my desk and I can go right in and see what was said in parliament yesterday, for example in relation to the Wik decision. It is terrific, though I must admit I was very disappointed not to discover the evidence that was given a fortnight ago during the Joint Committee on Publications. I would have expected to have found that. I checked on Friday and it was not there. I would have found it interesting to have read it before I came here because of the things I might have pulled out.

ACTING CHAIR—Of course you would have benefited, had you read it, because you would have been able to give an observation.

Mr MUTCH—Heads will roll.

ACTING CHAIR—Yes, we will look into that.

Miss Miller—Certainly there is the potential for universal access throughout Australia, particularly in the rural areas, and worldwide. It is instantaneous and that is terrific. But there are costs involved. Locating a document can be difficult. Files disappear. We had an awful thunderstorm in Melbourne in late January, I think, and our system was going up and down for several days. You would just get started on something and ‘bang’. But you can go to the shelves and, fine, you are there. Small reports are great but another problem is with substantial reports, say 300 pages. For instance, the Aboriginal deaths in

custody material is vast. If that were only available electronically, reading it on a screen would be horrible. Short things are fine, I think up to about 20 pages. Also, larger documents are very slow to pull in, particularly if there are charts involved and that sort of thing. If students, in particular, are having to download it and print it out, you are passing the costs on to them. So there are costs somewhere.

I am also unsure about the security—and I think with reason—of the electronic version at this stage. I talked to our systems person in the library and he said, ‘this should be safe and that should be safe’. I said, ‘Yes, but my impression is that hackers manage to stay one step ahead.’ I am concerned that, if it was only electronic—and I would like to see parallel—how would we know that we had the official version up on the screen, untampered with? If it has come from the AGPS, on paper, it is put into the library and we know that it is the authorised version.

ACTING CHAIR—So you are raising the legal question that needs clarifying?

Miss Miller—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—We have actually asked some of the other witnesses to assist us with legal input. We have not got that yet but that will be in the transcripts that will be available in due course.

Miss Miller—It was not so much the legal; it is being able to be sure that we have got the authoritative version that has not been tampered with somewhere.

ACTING CHAIR—Certified, accredited and all of that.

Miss Miller—Yes. As for the archiving bit, we are nowhere with that. There is no clear-cut whole of government policy, and that was referred to in a number of submissions. Submissions 16 and 46 both referred to that. I just do not feel safe, I guess, with only electronic.

ACTING CHAIR—They are good points, thank you. If there are no other questions, I would like to thank you very much for your excellent efforts and for coming up today from Melbourne to give evidence. It is much appreciated.

Miss Miller—Thank you.

[10.49 a.m.]

CLARK, Mr David Francis, Representative, Council of Australian State Libraries, The Library and Information Service of Western Australia, Alexander Library Building, Perth Cultural Centre, Perth, Western Australia 6000

ACTING CHAIR—I now welcome Mr Clark, the representative of the Council of Australian State Libraries. Do you wish to make an opening statement before the committee proceeds to ask questions?

Mr Clark—Yes, thank you.

ACTING CHAIR—Please proceed.

Mr Clark—In addition to the submission that we have, I would just like to make a few small points. The key one is that we see the parliamentary papers as an important part of the process of making government information available to the public. The community relies on libraries—in particular, state and territory libraries—to obtain and make available the full range of parliamentary papers. The public requires that access to the historical records of government are available as well. So it is very important that this information is available in a format that will stand the test of time.

Ease of use is also an important factor and, as was mentioned earlier, large documents are not easy to use on the computer screen. Small chunks of information—say, an annual report—are perfectly accessible via the Internet, but anything very large can be a terrible nightmare to try and read. Invariably, the user is going to want to print the document, defeating the purpose of having put it on the Internet in the first place.

Also, the format of the material does become a significant problem. If a report has a large number of embedded charts, diagrams or illustrations, the Internet, while able to distribute those, tends to still be a fairly slow and laborious process. Often the formatting disappears, so the context of how the document has been prepared can be lost.

The comprehensiveness of the series is also one of its principal strengths, because we can be certain that the reports of parliament are there and that we have not missed something presented to parliament that was considered important. The distribution of these reports into the state and territory libraries helps ensure that this information is available throughout Australia.

I would also like to pick up the point made earlier in relation to surfing the net—that is, the phrase surfing the libraries. When I went to library school, it was called serendipity. Serendipity was the word we were told, and I think surfing the shelves is probably a better term for the 1990s. Certainly, that is also a very important part of being able to use any information. It is the possibility of finding other material which is of

interest, not because you knew it existed but because you found it by chance.

We should not talk down the value of electronic access though, and we certainly support the work that the Commonwealth has done in putting a lot of information onto the net and making it available by CD-ROM. We see it as certainly a very important part of the process of making information available, and in particular making it available to remote communities.

In some cases, our libraries have to distribute material long distances—say, from Perth to Kununurra. These are distances which, in this corner of the world, we tend not to even try to imagine, but they make servicing remote communities a major task. If we can use anything to make it work better, then that is what we want to do. Unfortunately, there are a lot of problems with using electronic access, through their ease of use and the possibility of preservation.

Also, I would make the point that many libraries and many communities do not have access to the Internet in an easy way. While the technology is becoming better, mobile libraries could, in theory, use mobile phones, satellite dishes and so on. In reality, the whole point of a mobile library is that it drives along, provides a service and then drives off without a high cost to the community. That is why they have, in many cases, installed those services. Mr Acting Chair, I should at this point clarify that I did in fact live in your electorate in Wodonga for five years. I worked as a mobile librarian there. I just mention that to make certain there is no conflict of interest viewed.

The other part of the service which we see as being very important when bringing together the information that is delivered to libraries through the series is that it is done promptly and we know we are going to be getting the information. We are not responding to a request from the user saying, 'We've heard that this report is available. Why haven't you got it? Could you please try and get it,' and then finding that it has been missed and we have to try and search for it. We then find it was published, but by then the print run may have been exhausted and we would not be able to get a copy of it. It is not that we did not want a copy but simply that the agency has distributed them all.

Possibly, there are mechanisms that could be put in place to help overcome that, but we believe the mechanism that is in place does overcome that. There is added cost in any of those processes as well. If we have to spend more time trying to ascertain whether reports have been finished or published, whether we can get them and who to get them from, it increases the cost to the agencies and the time it takes for us to get them, therefore making it harder to provide a service to the community when they want it.

ACTING CHAIR—You are obviously well trained if you came from the north east of Victoria! You may be aware that the Department of the House of Representatives has suggested in its submission that an alternative to the parliamentary papers could be an expanded AGPS library deposit and a free issue scheme using that deposit. That would use

the papers presented to the parliament index instead of the specific parliamentary paper index. Does your council have any views about this?

Mr Clark—Our principal view is that we receive the papers.

ACTING CHAIR—That is the preferred option.

Mr Clark—No, sorry—that we receive the information in the papers. We have stated that we are happy to look at mechanisms to ensure that we do not get as much duplication, and we will, therefore, be willing to look at different options. However, as I said, the current system works. Other systems that are in place to ensure that we get information do not always work quite as well or as promptly. So we would certainly be loath to ditch this one without some firm guarantees that an alternative system did deliver the material which, at present, given that the diversity of publication probably would be difficult.

ACTING CHAIR—I take it from that that you are saying in principle that there may be some opportunity to improve the system, provided the core of it is retained which you ascribe such value to, but that you feel that perhaps a working party of experts from organisations such as your own could help define those areas of improvement and efficiency and give greater certainty to everybody as a result of that.

Mr Clark—Yes, I think I could say that we would see that as a possibility. However, certainly our preferred position is the current arrangement.

ACTING CHAIR—Yes, I understand that. We have had some evidence that some libraries are receiving the free information, making it available to their clients and customers and users, and then on occasions the library is needing information that their customers and users have requested and they are charged for it. Have you had any experience of that?

Mr Clark—Sorry, could you repeat the question.

ACTING CHAIR—Where information that you provide to your users is free but occasionally your libraries, your network, needs access to other people's information which you have not got and you contact those people, some of whom receive free information from your libraries on a regular basis, but when you ask them they charge you for it. It is not a trick question. Are you noticing that happening more and more?

Mr Clark—The arrangement between many libraries is to reimburse the costs of the delivery of material. There is a standard charge between libraries—which not all libraries follow, but by far the majority do—where the cost of obtaining a library item from another library, such as postage costs and handling costs, is reimbursed to the library that supplied the material. So it is not a charge in addition, but it is a cost to the library

making the request.

ACTING CHAIR—It is cost recovery, it is not a profit?

Mr Clark—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—Is a copy of that agreement available?

Mr Clark—I would actually have to refer that to my ACLIS because the policy is actually an ACLIS policy.

ACTING CHAIR—Perhaps I could make a request on behalf of the committee that your organisation endeavour to obtain for us, and send to us, a copy of that arrangement. That would be very helpful. It has been suggested, in one submission to us, that an annual service fee of perhaps \$1,500 could be charged for receipt of the parliamentary paper series. Does your council have a view on that proposal?

Mr Clark—We certainly would not support the introduction of a charge. We feel that government information should be as freely available as possible.

ACTING CHAIR—You would see that as an erosion of that principle, would you?

Mr Clark—Yes, we would see it as an erosion of the principle that the information presented to government, and presented to the government on behalf of the people in order for them to know what is happening in government, should be as freely available as possible.

ACTING CHAIR—The council, in its submission, states that public demand for parliamentary papers is very high or high. Are you aware of any evidence that is statistical or even anecdotal which would substantiate this statement?

Mr Clark—As far as statistical evidence is concerned, because much of it is for reference use it is fairly difficult to do that directly. As far as anecdotal evidence is concerned, I can refer you to the submission from the State Library of New South Wales—I cannot remember what number it is—where they draw attention to the fact that the papers are used. The whole series is used quite extensively. Of course, we all know that the popular reports tend to get the most viewing, like the ones on Aboriginal deaths in custody and drugs in sport—various reports of that nature which obviously also become journalistic beat-up in many cases. In general, the reports receive a large amount of use; some receive a lot more.

ACTING CHAIR—Going back to your previous answer about the interlibrary arrangement of charging a cost recovery fee, which you have sent us some material on:

are there any other clients, customers or users who charge your library when you ask for information?

Mr Clark—No.

ACTING CHAIR—There are no others that you are aware of?

Mr Clark—If we have to purchase information from companies, database networks and so on, we have to pay for all those services. We have to pay for a service from any commercial concern. I should clarify the answer I gave regarding the cost of obtaining material. The state libraries, of course, do not charge any of the public libraries in their respective states for access to material that they have. The charges apply outside the network of a particular library and various libraries have those arrangements, depending on the network that they belong to. But, certainly, the public libraries are perceived as being—and are, depending on the legislative arrangements in different states—part of the state libraries network.

ACTING CHAIR—We will look forward to receiving that document. Thank you very much for coming here, Mr Clark; it is appreciated.

[11.30 a.m.]

EVANS, Mr Harry, Clerk of the Senate, Department of the Senate, Parliament House, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory 2600

FERRANDA, Ms Caterina Rosalia, Senior Parliamentary Officer—Legislation and Documents, Department of the Senate, Parliament House, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory 2600

VANDER WYK, Mr John, Clerk Assistant—Table, Department of the Senate, Parliament House, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory 2600

ACTING CHAIR—Welcome. Do you wish to make an opening statement before the committee proceeds to ask questions?

Mr Evans—I could make a brief statement, Mr Chairman. In our written submission we have stated that we favour the parliamentary papers series continuing until there is something else that will replace it and do the job at less cost. There is nothing that will do the job at less cost at the moment and we think that it is important that it continues until we arrive at that situation.

The parliamentary papers series is a fairly significant means whereby government collectively—meaning all branches of government—but with the cost met by the parliament, of course, endeavours to make information about government available to the public. We think that purpose would suffer if the series were abolished now without anything to replace it. So, at the moment, we favour the series continuing, subject to current and continuing review by this committee to see what may replace it in the future.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you. I would like to ask a couple of general questions. From the evidence and submissions we have had so far, there appears to be a lot of goodwill that indicates that there may be areas in which improvement can occur and that this may help achieve some cost savings. If a working party was set up between the parliament and key users in the Australian community, such as the libraries from the universities, do you think some good would come of that? Do you think there might be some useful assistance given by way of recommendations to improve and streamline the system without destroying the core principles that you spoke about?

Mr Evans—Yes, I believe so. We would be very willing to join in such a working group to review the series. In our submission we have made some suggestions about how the cost of the series could be reduced by reducing the free recipients. Those suggestions are subject to other people's comments and we would certainly be happy to join the sort of working group you have mentioned.

ACTING CHAIR—From some submissions and evidence, I think there has been

some trepidation about the future of the Australian Government Publishing Service and how any change to the AGPS might impinge on the core principle of making information available to the community to strengthen the democracy. I think we are all on common ground in wanting to preserve that as much as possible. It has been suggested informally that perhaps the committee should be asked to consider making a recommendation that any changes of substance that might be recommended be made subject to knowing the outcome of any review of AGPS and its future model and role. Would you like to make a comment on the merit or otherwise of such a suggestion?

Mr Evans—I think that would be very wise, Mr Chairman. We have mentioned that point in our submission—that we do not know what is going to happen with that organisation—and we have said that that is an additional reason for not abolishing the parliamentary papers series now. So that sort of recommendation would be very wise.

ACTING CHAIR—In page 1 of your submission, you refer to ‘guaranteed alternative means of providing the documents’. On page 12, you refer to a possible option, an extension of the AGPS library deposit and free issue schemes. That is, as you will know, the option put to the committee by the Department of the House of Representatives. You identify that this option, if adopted, would mean that there would no longer be a numbered and indexed series. The Department of the House of Representatives has suggested that the local number allocated by the chamber departments could be retained and incorporated in the papers presented to parliament index. I am sorry for the length of the question, but what are your views about this suggestion?

Mr Evans—Perhaps my colleagues would like to comment on that.

Mr Vander Wyk—We see some problems with that proposal in that a numbered series which is a locally numbered series, while it meets the purposes of the two house departments in terms of their internal administration, I do not think would meet the needs of the broader library or university research community in that it would not distinguish between papers which are received by those institutions and papers which are not received by those institutions. Our local numbering system would include a large number of papers that are presented to the houses which are not made into parliamentary papers at the present stage, such as delegated legislation, in particular, and other ad hoc papers which either the houses or this committee deems should not be included in the series.

It would be very difficult for libraries and universities to know which papers in that numbered series they should be receiving. It would also be difficult for them to relate the papers they do receive to that series and for it to provide continuity from year to year in terms of searching for papers. I am not quite sure how the system would work, but I would suspect that it would just be an allocation of a number to each paper as it is presented. Therefore the number allocated to a particular document would vary from year to year.

Another problem I see is that a number of papers are tabled in one house or the other but not both. It would be very difficult to create a single numbered series that would suit the needs of both chamber departments. And if you had two numbered series—one for the Senate and one for the House—it would make things for the external users unnecessarily complex.

About the only benefit I would see of such a numbering system, in terms of the broader community, is that it would give the broader community, I suppose, an alternative means of identifying all the papers tabled in parliament but without distinguishing the more important ones that are presently distributed through the parliamentary papers series.

ACTING CHAIR—Beside that analysis of the potential problem, do you think there would be a way to resolve that by, again, forming a working party between the experts of both houses and some outside people to have input into it—the user group? It seems to me that what you just said then seems more of a challenge to, rather than a total rejection of, the concept. What you are saying is that it would need to have a lot of work done to overcome some inherent problems that you see in it.

Mr Evans—We would certainly be willing to join in a look at it, Mr Chairman, to see if the problems could be overcome.

ACTING CHAIR—A sort of without prejudice type commitment?

Mr Evans—Yes. But, as I said, the bottom line is: will it do the same job at less cost? The problem that libraries see is not so much knowing that a document exists and knowing what number it might have attached to it, but actually getting the copy of it to the user. You have to bear that in mind.

ACTING CHAIR—Yes, that was mentioned by our witnesses. And the electronic means is obviously not very attractive at this stage?

Mr Evans—It is certainly not up to scratch at this stage.

ACTING CHAIR—Of course, you have heard of the discussion earlier today—perhaps you did not—about the existing impediments to getting the core information to people in regional Australia. That is part of the present system, is it not, that it does not get to them easily?

Mr Evans—Yes, absolutely.

ACTING CHAIR—We have to address that issue as well, do we not?

Mr Evans—Absolutely. Even now, it is difficult for people out in the regions of Australia to get access to these things. The ones who are clever get access to it by ringing

up the Senate Table Office. If they sound particularly convincing they get a free copy sent to them, but I would not like that to be advertised too widely.

ACTING CHAIR—Is that part of a confidential submission?

Mr Evans—We regard this as part of our obligation of informing the public. If somebody rings me up and says, ‘There is this report but I have not been able to get hold of it and I really need it,’ and it is for some serious purpose, we will send them a copy and that becomes a cost on us. If everybody did that, we would be very embarrassed. But it happens at the moment. If the parliamentary papers series were abolished, it would happen a lot more. The word would get around that the Senate Table Office is a bit of a soft touch, that you can get hold of something through them.

ACTING CHAIR—They might even start approaching the offices of the members of parliament.

Mr Evans—They could indeed, yes.

ACTING CHAIR—That is not to suggest that you tell them that when they ring.

Mr Evans—Never!

ACTING CHAIR—Members of parliament often get requests for these things. Who would miss out on free issue if the AGPS library deposit and free issue scheme were used instead of parliamentary papers? You can take it on notice if you want.

Ms Ferranda—From memory, the primary recipients currently under the library deposit and free issue schemes are the state libraries, the university libraries and the parliamentary libraries. The free issue does not encompass any of the overseas exchange libraries that are currently provided with copies through the parliamentary papers series distribution. There are a number of government departments that currently receive copies pursuant to a recommendation of this committee in the Erwin report, and a number of other government instrumentalities. For instance, we make several copies available to the Australian Archives. There is a range of organisations that currently receive it through the parliamentary papers series but would not, unless those schemes were enlarged to cover them, and do not receive it under the LDS and the free issue scheme. If the schemes were enlarged, you would end up with an almost de facto parliamentary papers series.

ACTING CHAIR—Yes. There is some evidence of almost seething resentment at the suggestion that some of the free information that the parliament makes available to achieve that core objective is sent out. The recipients use it in good faith but when they need information from people who are getting the free service they then get charged for that information. I have probably oversimplified the issue but, in essence, that is what some evidence suggests. What do you think about that?

Ms Ferranda—Given the nature of the recipients, I do not think that much charging goes on. Certainly a lobbyist firm or a law firm may well purchase a standing order to the parliamentary papers series through AGPS. They are paying for them. If they then turn around and prepare documents or analyses based on those, they have paid for it. But, currently, the recipients on the free distribution list for the parliamentary papers series are libraries, government departments, the Australian Archives and a number of overseas exchange libraries. There are no individual recipients that receive it free. The only recipients that that category would cover would be commercial firms who would be paying for a standing order to the parliamentary papers series.

ACTING CHAIR—Yes, I understand that. The point I am trying to make—I am sure I did not make it clear enough—is that people going to the libraries who are presently in receipt of the free system are apparently obtaining free access to that information, and much more information from those excellent libraries, but when the libraries need information themselves, and they ask those people for it, it is readily available but at a charge. I just wanted to develop your views on that manifestation.

Ms Ferranda—I cannot say that we have actually come across that situation at all.

Mr Evans—Not with the parliamentary papers series. We have certainly come across it in other areas. We are aware that a lot of information that we give out free is retailed at a cost by the people who are in receipt of it. My colleagues quite often say to me, ‘We should charge these people for this information because they are charging clients.’ Quite a lot of that goes on. It is a broader problem than the parliamentary papers series.

ACTING CHAIR—Yes, I suppose it is a part of the democratic process that dissemination of information is then used to create other worthwhile enterprises.

Mr Evans—In some cases there is no value added at all. The information is simply passed on, particularly by law firms and lobbyists, who have been mentioned. It is a problem but perhaps not with the parliamentary papers series.

Ms Ferranda—Certainly, as far as legislation goes, we, as does the House of Representatives Table Office, charge a service fee to a number of legal publishers who obtain a copy of a bill once it has been assented to by the Governor-General. We charge them an annual service fee that is commensurate with the amount of time and effort put in by the officers concerned in preparing this documentation. The House of Representatives, because they process a much larger volume of legislation, has a slightly larger fee than ours but I think ours is in the vicinity of \$1,000 per year. I am not sure how much the House of Representatives charges at the moment.

ACTING CHAIR—I think the committee would be assisted if your department could let us have some further details in a supplementary written submission of the fees

that are charged, the structure, the income you are getting from them and the type of client that uses them.

Ms Ferranda—It is a very small clientele. I think there are about four or five.

ACTING CHAIR—That is another reason why it might be important that you give us a document so that we keep it in perspective. It might be seen as fertile ground for more income in due course.

Senator McKIERNAN—I have a question on the matter of the syndrome of user pays. If there were to be a charge on the parliamentary paper series to those who now receive it free, have you any suggestions how many would willingly pay that charge?

Mr Evans—That is very difficult to assess. I think the theory of the series is that the recipients of it are themselves public institutions who have a duty and a function of informing the public. We do not charge them because they are themselves public institutions in the business of informing the public. The problem that the Chair just mentioned adds another level of difficulty to that. But, basically, I think that is the theory of the series and that it should remain until something less costly can replace it.

Senator McKIERNAN—But we are in this inquiry because of cash flow.

Mr Evans—Exactly.

Senator McKIERNAN—The government wants to cut down on expenditure. The alternative of cutting down on expenditure is to raise revenue. One of the ways that we might be able to raise revenue is by imposing a charge. One of the things that is going through my mind is whether the recipients would want to pay their way?

Mr Evans—That is always the problem with charging for something. You do not know how elastic the demand is or how much revenue you would get. There are people who pay for the series already. In our submission we have suggested that some other types of organisations, who are not paying at the moment, perhaps should be paying. I do not know whether we could give you any indication of how much additional revenue might be raised.

Ms Ferranda—It would be a bit hard to predict, given that we do not know what fee would be suggested. In terms of the legal publishers' fee that we charge, before we started charging, there were about eight organisations receiving the assent prints of bills. After we started charging that went down to four. One cannot really extrapolate from that but there would always be some who would not have the funds or who would decide that now they have to pay for it they do not really need it. There would be some who would drop off the distribution list. But, as Mr Evans said, it is hard to predict how elastic the demand is.

ACTING CHAIR—Let me go back to the very positive response you made to my leading question about the possibility of a working party. I take it your willingness to consider that concept is based on a recognition that there are some ways of improving the present system. Is that right?

Mr Evans—Indeed, yes.

ACTING CHAIR—Can you expand on that a little bit? Can you give us some flags of where you think some of the improvements could come?

Mr Evans—We mentioned in our submission some of the steps that could be taken. Perhaps my colleague would like to summarise them.

Mr Vander Wyk—In terms of the current arrangements, that is probably the chief area where there may be some room to achieve some economies. There is some overlap between the Parliamentary Papers Series and the two schemes operated by AGPS. The fact that there are two or three schemes operating may also lead to a little bit of confusion in the broader community. I am not sure about that. If there were some work done on minimising that confusion, I think that would be a useful outcome from such a working group.

It would also give us a chance to gauge the extent to which the current recipients of the Parliamentary Papers Series want the series to continue and some of that will come through in the hearings of this committee, but a working group might be able to further pursue the extent to which the library and the university communities want the series to continue and whether they would be prepared to consider some sort of charge, which may help to minimise our costs in continuing to produce the series. I think they would probably be the main areas. Rosa, is there anything you want to add?

Ms Ferranda—In examining the current distribution list in preparation for the submission, it was obvious that there were some organisations on there that did not have a very wide area of dissemination, shall we say. Obviously, organisations like state and parliamentary libraries and university libraries cater for a very large group of people in making that information available, but there are a number of small organisations on there that perhaps the committee should look at rationalising the distribution to, and tightening up the criteria, the guidelines, by which someone can be placed on the distribution list for the free papers.

Senator GIBBS—I notice that we provide foreign embassies with copies.

Ms Ferranda—They are one of the categories that I think should be—

Senator GIBBS—Yes, I see this in your submission here. Surely we should charge the embassies. It is very important that the libraries and universities—any source where

this information is actually being given to the public—is very important, but I fail to see how giving this to a foreign embassy is going to benefit anybody, apart from that embassy.

Ms Ferranda—The category of foreign embassy is actually established under the current guidelines so we, as one of the departments administering the parliamentary papers series, cannot unilaterally decide to exclude that category, but it would be up to the committee to decide whether or not to do so, or whether to charge them for it.

It is also a bit unclear as to exactly what information the parliament receives in return. For instance, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade may be receiving reciprocal information in reciprocal posts. We do not have enough information on that to be able to judge, but certainly it is an area that could be examined.

Senator McKIERNAN—I suppose in assessing whether we should put a charge on the embassies, we ought to balance the factor that we, in turn, benefit by getting information from the embassies. I know on some committees we get a lot of information from the embassies. If we were to impose a charge on them, it is possible—possibly even stronger than that—that they in turn, when we are looking for information from them, could impose a charge on the information that we get. That is something we would have to take into account and consider when we are making a recommendation along those lines.

Mr Evans—My colleague was just making the point that we do not know how much Australia is getting in return for that—other people would have to tell you how much we get in return for that arrangement.

Senator GIBBS—Yes, it is something to be looked at.

Senator CALVERT—How much would they use the service? You do not just send them the papers?

Ms Ferranda—Yes, they are on the distribution list, so they automatically receive a pamphlet copy.

Senator CALVERT—A lot of the stuff they probably would not want anyway.

Ms Ferranda—It is a bit hard to judge. We do not know whether they send it to their home base or keep it on hand here.

ACTING CHAIR—They probably would not want to tell you either.

Senator CALVERT—Probably like the French—when I was in Paris a couple of years ago I made a comment that I was very interested in one of the publications they put

out and I have been receiving a great heap of stuff for months. It is all in French and I keep saying, 'I do not want it,' but they keep on sending it.

We are talking about saving money. Once the guidelines are established for what you print, what you do not print, and all the rest of it, do you see any need for a Joint Committee on Publications? We would meet and just say, 'Yes, yes, yes,' bang and gone.

Mr Evans—Theoretically you could get to that situation, where the guidelines are all established. But, at the moment, it is useful for this body to be in existence, doing the sort of job it is doing now—undertaking this review.

Senator CALVERT—Yes. But once this investigation is completed and everything is sorted out the way it should be, if these documents have to be officially signed off by a committee would it be worth looking at those duties being carried by some other joint committee as part of their agenda?

Mr Evans—It is possible. I do not know that there is much saving of time or saving of anything to be achieved by that. The committee could exist and be there to conduct this sort of function from time to time, as it is needed. I do not know that actually taking it out of the standing orders would achieve any great saving of anything.

Mr Vander Wyk—I would like to add a postscript to that. In terms of what may be happening in respect of AGPS in the next year or so and the effect that may have on the *Charter of Publishing and Printing Responsibilities*, which is in part an agreement between the Presiding Officers and the executive government on the role of the AGPS in disseminating information, it is probably important for this committee to keep a fairly close eye on what may be happening in the commercialisation of AGPS to make sure its community obligations are still met under any new arrangements. I think the committee does legitimately have a strong interest in that area.

Senator CALVERT—I take the point, and I remember very well one particular case where we had an input into the actual quality of annual reports. There were some changes made as a result of that which saved quite a deal of money, because some of the departments were really just using the annual reports as a propaganda exercise and it was costing a fortune.

Mr Evans—I think the committee should remain in existence to do that sort of job from time to time.

ACTING CHAIR—Mr Vander Wyk, implicit in what you have said in relation to AGPS is that, at the present time, it provides to the parliament a service in disseminating and recording of parliamentary papers which, if a change to AGPS occurs, needs to be borne in mind by this committee—

Mr Vander Wyk—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—because it may be necessary to factor in any such change and its implications in any recommendations we might make as to the future.

Mr Vander Wyk—Yes—in respect both of parliamentary papers and of the broader issue of disseminating parliamentary information in the public domain.

ACTING CHAIR—Has there been an attempt to quantify in dollar terms the cost per year of what AGPS provides with respect to the parliamentary papers? Is it \$200,000, \$300,000?

Ms Ferranda—They do charge us for postage and packaging and some of the distribution costs. They do not currently charge us for storage costs. On the other hand, we do provide them with 25 free copies of every parliamentary paper which they then sell in the bookshops or on standing order, and they keep those funds. So there is a bit of a quid pro quo. In terms of the actual costs that are borne by AGPS, they certainly have not given us any indication of the costs that they incur over and above that which we pay them, because they charge us for the postage and packaging and any extra printing that needs to be done. There are a number of reports, for instance, for which the Senate and the House of Representatives pay for the printing, because we are only supplied with a very limited number, and they do get made into parliamentary papers.

ACTING CHAIR—So an AGPS commercialised model would undoubtedly be looking at factoring in some charging system for what they provide. We in turn would need to know a bit more about that and what benefits they get from us so we could factor it in as well.

Ms Ferranda—Because we would start charging—

ACTING CHAIR—Yes, that is the point I was raising earlier with respect to the others. It might be appropriate for us to start charging those who charge us.

Ms Ferranda—If I could just use the example of the Senate committee reports. They are all published in-house in the Senate printing unit nowadays. At the time of printing, the printing supervisor contacts the AGPS bookshop division and tells them what the subject of the report is and how long it is and asks whether they want any run on copies for the bookshops. If they do, they actually get charged for those copies of the books. So we charge them for the committee reports, but when the report comes out as a parliamentary paper, they still get their 25 free copies. There have been a number that they have taken quite a large quantity of—including some recent quite controversial reports, such as the report on the workplace relations bill and the Telstra bill.

ACTING CHAIR—Have we got evidence of the charges we make for those? I

think we need that in our evidence.

Mr Evans—We will include them in the detailed statement that we have to do for you.

ACTING CHAIR—That is much appreciated. We had better know that, I think.

Senator McKIERNAN—I just want to talk about privilege and how it may be impacted upon if the Parliamentary Papers Series was ceased. Would there be any impact on the privilege that is attached to a paper that has been ordered by the House to be printed?

Mr Evans—At the moment, the Senate has a rule that anything that is tabled in the Senate is automatically authorised to be published, so it attracts the absolute parliamentary privilege under the Parliamentary Privileges Act. Also, at the moment the order to print has the same effect as an authority to publish, so it gives the publication of it absolute privilege as well.

The House of Representatives does not have a similar standing order saying that anything tabled in the House is automatically authorised to be published, so there could be a gap where things tabled in the House in effect do not get any authorisation to be published. That would be something that would have to be looked at if the series disappeared. There could be a little gap there through which some things could get and they would not possess parliamentary privilege.

As long as they are tabled in the Senate, they are right. But things that are not tabled in the Senate may not be covered, depending on what happens with them. You would have to watch that potential gap in the application of any recommendation that you make.

Senator McKIERNAN—It is a question that probably should go back to the House of Representatives people now. It was not something that I recall addressing to them when we took evidence from them a couple of weeks ago, so maybe it would be worthwhile having something on the record on that particular matter from the Department of the House of Representatives.

ACTING CHAIR—The House of Representatives have been asked to provide us with legal advice on their view of the implications of any changes that are based on their model in their submission. If I remember rightly, we also asked them to touch on the question of copyright as well as parliamentary privilege. I imagine they will consult with the Senate in preparing the legal advice that we are waiting on. That is right; I have had it confirmed. So there will be a very weighty legal opinion coming our way soon.

Mr Evans—I am sure they will consult with us about that. If there is an authority

to publish a document which is tabled, there is no problem. With the Senate, everything that is tabled has an authorisation to publish. With the House of Representatives, that is not so, so there could be a problem with things tabled in the House and not in the Senate.

Senator McKIERNAN—When we had the House of Representatives people in front of us, we talked about the savings they might make by virtue of a new regime coming in. Have you calculated what the savings to the Senate might be if the Presiding Officers' suggestions were taken up?

Mr Evans—They would be of a lesser order.

Mr Vander Wyk—Yes, I think at the moment the cost to us of administering the parliamentary paper series is in the order of about \$60,000. There is also a small component of staff time involved which is fairly minimal. It may be \$8,000 or \$10,000 I think. Is that about the ballpark?

Ms Ferranda—Yes.

Mr Vander Wyk—So we are looking perhaps at about \$60,000 to \$70,000. But then, to counterbalance that, I think that whatever other scheme was introduced would have costs to us in that other scheme as well, so I do not think that would be a net saving. If another scheme was introduced, or the library deposit scheme was taken up, I think that would involve us in some administrative work and perhaps some significantly increased inquiry work and that would offset, to some extent, any savings that we might achieve.

Senator McKIERNAN—So we are not going to resolve the budget deficit by taking this decision?

Mr Evans—I do not think so, no.

Senator McKIERNAN—But at the same time we could be doing a lot of public relations damage out there in the community by blocking off that free access to information.

Mr Evans—Yes, I think so. I think the task of informing the public would be less well done if the series were not there—if it were abolished at this stage.

ACTING CHAIR—Unless a better system was evolved—

Mr Evans—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—And negotiated, which could be part of a working party project. The challenge of 'Equal to, if not better than,' as someone said. Are there any other questions? As there are no other questions, I would like to thank the witnesses for

their attendance today. I wish you well and I hope you have a happy week. There are no further witnesses scheduled today, so I declare this meeting closed and we will meet again at a date to be fixed.

Committee adjourned at 12.06 p.m.