



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLICATIONS

Reference: Future of the parliamentary papers series

CANBERRA

Monday, 10 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

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Present

Senator Sandy Macdonald (Chair)

Senator Jacinta Collins

Ms Ellis

Senator Colston

Mr Richard Evans

Senator Gibbs

Mr Lieberman

Senator McKiernan

Senator Short

The committee met at 9.03 a.m.

Senator Sandy Macdonald took the chair.

CHAIR—I declare open this public meeting of the Joint Standing Committee on Publications. On 27 July 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 was 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—for today and 24 February. Today the committee will take evidence from the Department of the House of Representatives, the Australian Government Publishing Service, the Federal Libraries Information Network and the Department of the Parliamentary Library.

For the record, this is a public hearing and 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, I 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 that special rights and immunities attach 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 by 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.

BARLIN, Mr Lyn, Clerk of the House of Representatives, Department of the House of Representatives, Parliament House, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory

CAMERON, Mrs Colleen, Acting Assistant Director—Legislation and Records, Department of the House of Representatives, Parliament House, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory

PENDER, Mr James William, Clerk Assistant—Table, Department of the House of Representatives, Parliament House, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory

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

Mr Barlin—Yes, just briefly, Mr Chairman. Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to appear. I should make it clear right from the start that we in the House of Representatives fully support the fundamental objectives of the Erwin committee of 1964. That is, that adequate copies of a paper are available to all persons who wish to have a copy of that paper, and that a paper should be available to be bound into volumes and preserved in a convenient and accessible form as a permanent record.

I make that clear from the start because our submission proposes the abolition of the parliamentary papers series as such, and I do not want there to be any misunderstanding as to what our intentions are. We are proposing the abolition of the parliamentary papers series, but we are proposing an extension of another document distribution system which will be just as efficient, just as effective, and save us a lot of money. We believe that it is appropriate to look at the objectives that were set out in the Erwin committee report so that we can achieve them in a more timely, efficient and cost-effective means.

We propose the abolition of the parliamentary papers series and a continued reliance on a strengthened library deposit scheme, through legislation if necessary. We propose that all recipients receive all tabled papers in a more timely fashion than they presently do; that the House sequential numbering system be extended to apply to all tabled papers and that this numbering system be used in the current index to the papers presented to parliament which we in the House of Representatives, with assistance from the Senate, prepare; and that the existing index to papers presented to the parliament continue to be supplied to all deposit libraries free of charge.

The benefits of our proposals, we believe, will be substantial cost savings to the House of Representatives, in the order of about \$100,000. There will be savings as well to the Senate—and they can speak for themselves about how much is involved there. There will be savings to AGPS and author departments or bodies. It will free up our administrative resources within the House of Representatives so that they can better attend to the needs of members in other ways. We believe that a single sequential numbering and

indexing system encompassing all tabled papers, as distinct from just those that are printed in the parliamentary papers series, would be a far better way to go, and that a single sequential numbering and indexing system, if used by deposit libraries, will result in a consistent system throughout all deposit libraries and within the parliament itself.

I should make it clear that we do not propose at this stage that there be an electronic alternative to the parliamentary paper series. We do not propose the abolition of hard copies of tabled papers. We do not propose the abolition of the index to papers presented to the parliament. We do not propose the abolition of the library deposit scheme. In fact, as you have seen from our submission, we are proposing an extension of that as an alternative. We do not propose any reduction in the number of papers tabled or a reduction in the number of the stock of each paper tabled.

Finally, we question whether the parliament should continue to be involved in the dissemination of executive government departments' papers and whether this should be a responsibility of executive government departments rather than that of the parliament. I hope that summarises our submission and I make it clear to you, Mr Chairman, and other members of the committee that I am not expert in this. I have Jim Pender and Colleen Cameron here who are more intimately involved and we would be very happy to try and answer your questions.

CHAIR—I might start off with the questioning. From what you said and from what is in your submission, current identification numbers are used by the chamber departments to provide an index for the papers tabled by parliament or in parliament. How would this index be updated and disseminated for use outside parliament?

Mr Barlin—Perhaps I might ask Mr Pender to go into the detail of that.

Mr Pender—The index is currently prepared and circulated every six months. It is prepared in the Department of the House of Representatives and it is an index to all papers presented to the parliament. We subsequently pass that index to the Senate. They include any journals entries, page references and the like. As I said, that is circulated every six months. That goes to the recipients of all papers at the moment and it will continue to do so under our proposal. It goes to all parliamentary paper recipients. It goes to all those on the library deposit scheme and it goes to all those on the free distribution list of pamphlet copies of parliamentary papers.

Ms Cameron—I know that if this was to be implemented, libraries would have some concern about the gap between receiving the papers that were tabled and actually receiving the index that they would be able to use to accession those documents. So part of our thinking is that we can also supply that index on a much more regular basis through electronic means. In fact, AGPS has offered to put our *Index to Papers Presented* to Parliament up on the Internet, but we would still continue to provide hard copy as well.

CHAIR—But the library deposit scheme takes documents that are not in blister pack form, do they not? There are many, many more documents that go into the library deposit scheme than the blister pack form which is a parliamentary paper series?

Ms Cameron—That is right, exactly. It would be a much more comprehensive collection, in fact.

CHAIR—The proposal begs the question about the future of this publications committee because you state quite accurately that the parliamentary papers series does not include all tabled documents. The Houses often through this committee now make judgements about which documents are of sufficient significance to be produced in large numbers, indexed and preserved in posterity as they are in the parliamentary papers series. If parliament does not exercise this judgement, who will?

Ms Cameron—Does it need to be exercised? The parliament, through its chambers, is assuming that only those documents that they order to be printed are important to the majority of the Australian public. Now that is an assumption and it may be true. But there would be a number of documents that are tabled in parliament that this committee or the chambers do not order to be printed which would probably have just as much interest out in the community and perhaps more. We do not know that. With our proposal it would encompass all of those and then it would not be just a matter of the libraries receiving in a series those that the parliament felt were appropriate to be disseminated.

CHAIR—So it would not be a question of the same guidelines applying that all documents would meet the requirements of the library deposit scheme?

Ms Cameron—They currently do.

Mr Pender—The committee itself has other functions in terms of standards setting and things of that nature too. It is not a regular, ongoing function as is the determining of which papers should be included in the parliamentary paper series, but it is still a function of the committee.

CHAIR—Will the Houses order documents to be printed or will they all be printed?

Ms Cameron—Standing orders will need to be looked at in that respect.

Mr Barlin—At the present time, there are a lot of papers tabled in both Houses which do not find their way into one or other of the schemes. We are talking about instruments under delegated legislation or whatever. Of the substantial papers—if I could put it that way—tabled in the House, about 47 per cent of them find themselves by one means or another into the parliamentary paper series.

For example, in 1993 there were 832 substantial papers tabled in one or other House and of those 457 found their way into the parliamentary papers series. In 1994, the figure was 916, of which 484 became parliamentary papers. In 1995, the figure was 970, of which 497 became parliamentary papers and last year, the figure was 792, of which 421 became parliamentary papers. Over the four-year total, out of 3,510 papers 1,859 became parliamentary papers and that is approximately 47 per cent of those substantial papers.

CHAIR—It has been suggested in the Presiding Officers' letter to the committee that the dissemination of documents by electronic media will be a factor in the discontinuation of the parliamentary papers scheme. In paragraph 7.2, the department does not seem to be arguing that electronic publishing of itself would be a compelling reason for discontinuance. Is that a fair interpretation of that statement in your submission?

Mr Barlin—It is our understanding that libraries and other recipients do not yet feel sufficiently confident of the electronic versions of these reports. I am sure it will not be long before that will occur. But at the present time, my understanding—and Colleen Cameron and Jim Pender can add to this in some way—is that they do not feel confident that the electronic version is good enough and they still want to receive hard copies. Do you want to add to that?

Mr Pender—No, I think that is quite specific.

CHAIR—You have raised the question of costs in your submission. I understand that electronic publishing could result in savings—and I can understand that—at least to the providers of information which is us. But will costs be greatly reduced overall if hard copy is retained?

Mr Barlin—The approximate annual cost to the House of Representatives at the present time is \$97,725. That is to the House of Representatives alone. That is for our half share of the labelling and packaging for the parliamentary papers series, which is \$42,500. The other \$42,500 is met by the Senate. That is the only other cost that the Senate shares with us.

Through period ticketing and checking procedures the cost is \$13,750. The cost of three bound volumes is \$27,975 and the distribution of the volumes is \$13,500, making the actual straight direct cost to us \$97,725. To that of course we have to add our staff costs, that is the proportion of the cost of our staff who are involved in the administration of this, quite apart from the very substantial cost that AGPS must face in relation to the administration of the scheme. Our estimate from our point of view is that that costs us an additional \$20,000-odd of the share of a person's work. So from the House of Representatives' point of view alone, we are talking about a saving of about \$120,000-plus. Perhaps I should get Mr Pender to add to that, if he wishes.

Mr Pender—That is still preserving the hard copy. That is not taking into account

electronic production of reports and papers.

CHAIR—What is your view about users who are prepared to pay for the service because they know that the Bond University pay for their access to the parliamentary papers series? Do you have some comment about that?

Mr Pender—There is available a subscription service through AGPS to the parliamentary papers series, and there are some recipients. I am not sure of the exact cost, but AGPS would be able to tell you how much that subscription costs. I personally am a little cynical about people offering to pay for these things. We have found in the past that, when we decided to ask people to pay for a service that we had been giving free, those people disappeared and we certainly got no money for that particular service.

Mr LIEBERMAN—Maybe they did not need it.

Mr Pender—That is the question you have to ask, and it is a question I would ask in relation to parliamentary papers as well.

Mr LIEBERMAN—Good morning. This was a good submission, a challenging one. One thing worries me, though. If I understand it, you are saying that all documents tabled would be published under your system; whereas, at the moment, documents are selectively published, depending on the committee's recommendations. You are saying, 'Why not publish them all in the new forms.' Is that right?

Ms Cameron—Not so much in new forms. As they are published now, they are currently being supplied to library deposit recipients—that is happening already. So it is just an extension of that rather than a new form, if you like.

Mr LIEBERMAN—Right. Would you be comfortable, if your package were adopted, with a proviso that the parliamentary committee system, notwithstanding, should always have a reserve power from time to time to order the tabling and publication of any other documents not otherwise identified in the standard documents to be published?

Mr Barlin—What sort of document would you envisage?

Mr LIEBERMAN—As you said, you wonder whether documents produced by executive government are appropriate to be included.

Mr Barlin—But they are required at the present time to be tabled—

Mr LIEBERMAN—I know.

Mr Barlin—They are required by statute and they are already printed in hard copy and are tabled. The department should make copies of their annual report, or whatever it

may be, available to AGPS for distribution to recipients of the parliamentary papers. They are already being printed. I would have no difficulty if a committee of this nature retained that power, but I am finding it a little difficult to think of a paper that might fall into that category, Mr Lieberman.

Mr LIEBERMAN—Yes; I understand that. I suppose I am being cautious with reform, in that maybe the unknown should be protected with an acknowledged reserve power in the reform package so that the democratic principle of the parliament having the advice of a specialist committee always available to it, if the specialist committee wants to recommend that additional documents be included, is retained. That is the thesis I am putting.

Mr Pender—I think I understand what you are saying, Mr Lieberman. In fact, the original charter of the printing committee, as it was then, was to fill the gap—so to speak—in papers that were not published by author bodies and circulated to the general community. The actual printing committee used to say what should be printed, and so ordered it to be printed. Subsequently, it was distributed as a parliamentary paper and did meet those community needs, and I can see no reason why that should not continue in the future. If hypothetically that audit report that was published by the government was not actually tabled in parliament, if one copy only had been made available to the parliament, then it would have been appropriate for the publications committee, if they felt that way inclined, to order that document to be printed; and that would have been subsequently printed and circulated to the community. I concede the need for that continuing, although I cannot see that, in this day and age, there would be too many reports that would fall within that category.

Mr LIEBERMAN—But you would be comfortable with a reserve power, notwithstanding?

Mr Barlin—Quite so, Mr Lieberman: no difficulty whatsoever.

Mr LIEBERMAN—All right. The second point, I want to elaborate on a little, without going into too many legal complexities. Would the reform package you are putting forward give protection of privilege, as presently applies? Or might there be a need—as I think the Government Printing Office has foreshadowed—to ensure that legal advice is obtained to adequately protect and safeguard matters of privilege, et cetera, or to modify the laws in relation to it? If you are not addressed on this, it does not matter; I will pursue it with the Government Printing Office.

Ms Cameron—It is something we would need to look at, and we would also look at the standing orders and how they would relate to it.

Mr LIEBERMAN—Could you take that on board? It may be, with the chairman's permission, appropriate for a supplementary submission on the legal aspects, from at least

the House of Representatives's point of view, on the protection guidelines: what we are trying to achieve at the moment with respect to present rules of privilege—copyright, and all that; and what, if anything, might need to be changed if the package that you put forward is adopted. It may be that we do not have to change it.

Mr Barlin—I would like to have a look at that, Mr Lieberman, because—as you rightly point out—if a document is ordered to be printed under the provisions of the Parliamentary Papers Act, it is quite privileged. And, of course, there is a school of thought that the Parliamentary Privileges Act confers privilege on tabled documents. But I would prefer, if I may, Mr Chairman, to take that question on notice to make sure that we are not saying something that we should think about a bit more.

Mr LIEBERMAN—I am passionately interested, as I am sure most of us are, in looking at the areas of duplication of process in any activity that is funded by the taxpayer. Parliament is funded by the taxpayer, so we are not immune from the interest that I have. What areas of duplication exist between the Senate and the House of Representatives in respect of the present systems our committee has: tabling, recording, indexing and the like? Are there any areas where, even if you left the present system intact, there would be some areas of duplication that could be looked at? If you would like to take that on board for a supplementary, again I would be happy about that.

Ms Cameron—Are you are talking about administrative duplication?

Mr LIEBERMAN—Administrative, printing of documents, indexing, supplementary indexes and the like. For example, in some organisations, if you have different divisions publishing different publications—say that it is an operating manual for complex machinery which you might be manufacturing—there is always a centralised system in a good organisation that ensures that each department's specifications and upgradings of specifications are merged into one, before any publication is ever issued. Do you understand the concept that I am talking about?

Mr Pender—Yes.

Mr LIEBERMAN—We have got a Senate and a House of Representatives: I am cracking the egg open and I am wanting to know what is going on. Okay?

Mr Pender—I do not think you need to have too many fears in regard to duplication between the two house departments. We have for many years now—at least as long as I have ever been employed in the place—worked quite well together. It is probably to the Senate's advantage in that regard, in that we have been responsible ultimately for the production of all the parliamentary papers indexes and all the papers indexes. We also have always been responsible for the binding, or the blister packs now, of parliamentary papers. We always produced the contents pages and the indexes that are associated with those publications. The actual production of the parliamentary papers

themselves has always been a shared cost. There have been different formulae applied over the years, but it has always been a shared cost, fifty-fifty between the Senate and House departments, on the actual printing costs that are associated with the production of the parliamentary papers.

Mr LIEBERMAN—So I can rest easy?

Mr Pender—On that particular one, yes. In terms of the distribution of the papers, one of the things that we do cover in our submission is that a number of schemes operate and that there is some duplication within those schemes.

Mr LIEBERMAN—I am troubled by the fact that there is evidence in the submissions over a period of years that, through no fault of anyone, there has been a substantial delay in preparing and publishing indexes. I cannot understand that because in preparing and publishing indexes, I thought that as each document is created and tabled a record would be made when that happens. Why cannot that record be automatically incorporated in a running index which is constantly updated? That would mean that at any one moment, at any second of any day, there is always an up-to-date record of all documents, instead of leaving it in a basket to be done later so to speak and then months later say, ‘Gosh! We had better catch up and do it.’

Ms Cameron—Are you talking about indexed papers presented to parliament? That is actually updated on an ongoing basis. We have an officer in the house who updates that very regularly.

Mr LIEBERMAN—As it happens?

Ms Cameron—It cannot always happen as it happens because that officer is busy looking after other duties, but certainly at the end of a two-week sitting period that officer would sit down and put in the papers, along with the parliamentary paper numbers—the numbers that belong to the series, if you like.

But that does happen on a fairly ongoing basis—as quickly as we possibly can, given the restraint of resources. That certainly does happen on an ongoing basis, but we cannot print it and supply it on an ongoing basis because it becomes quite a chunky document very quickly. At the end of a parliament, it is like this. With the one we have running currently, if we were to print and supply that to the 2,700-odd people that we supply it to, that would be extremely big money, so we do it at periods.

Mr LIEBERMAN—Understood. The first thing coming out of your response—and thank you for that—is that there appears not to be an electronic automatic insertion of new information.

Ms Cameron—No, not at the moment. It could be very easily done.

Mr LIEBERMAN—What I would be asking, Mr Chairman—with your permission—is that that be examined to see what it would cost to introduce that so that we could have that as a possible reform.

Ms Cameron—Could I also add as far as that is concerned that the House of Representatives has recently implemented a new piece of technology which actually produces that index via technology, via a program, whereas previous to that the House officer was sitting there and actually keying things in. It was a word processing document, whereas now it is actually generated via a computer program. So we have achieved efficiencies there already.

Mr LIEBERMAN—Good. We can elaborate on that at a supplemental. The concept I had in mind—and of course I understand we do not want to be reproducing this on a daily basis—was that there would be access through electronic means.

Ms Cameron—Yes, we would like that to happen.

Mr LIEBERMAN—Which could be accessed every day and would be brought up to date every day automatically, so people would read this and then update themselves with the electronic means and that would overcome some of the problems.

Ms Cameron—Every day may not be reasonable, but certainly weekly because, if the PP series is abolished, if the recipients of the library deposit schemes receive these reports, there will be about a week's delay anyway.

Mr LIEBERMAN—Yes.

Ms Cameron—So having that a few days or maybe a week behind is not going to cause any accessioning problems for the libraries if they use our system via that index.

Mr LIEBERMAN—Because of your understandable caution, which I share, about running into an electronic system immediately and doing away with hard copy and the like, from the advice and research you have done to date, would you be able to say that it would be fair enough for a committee such as ours if we accepted your recommendation to not go fully electronic, but that, however, we came forward with a recommendation that the imperative of doing it would be driven by a policy that says, 'However, at the end of two years it is recommended that the parliament examine replacing the system with electronic, provided a review at that time confirms that we should.'

I am saying that for the reason that I do not want to be provocative, but it seems to me that we have to drive electronic development with a clear message of, 'We want to do it' rather than saying, 'Gee, it's not proven yet, so we might look at it one day but we may not.'

Would you be relaxed and comfortable, therefore, if our committee was to consider recommending that we do go to electronic, subject to another review in a fixed period of time—say, two years? Have you got any view about two years? Do you think that is feasible or not?

Mr Pender—Certainly, our friends from AGPS have been toying with electronic publication proposals. I am sure when they give evidence before the committee you will be able to get more information from them. I understand that last year AGPS produced a CD-ROM with about 10 annual reports on it. This year they are hoping to produce a CD-ROM with just about every department and principal agency's annual report on it.

We have always encouraged and been cooperative with AGPS in their schemes to produce those documents by that means and we have been fully supportive of it. So the concept that you are putting forward would be no problem to us. In fact, we would see that that is the way we are heading. I also know, just anecdotally, that a number of author bodies would be very happy to have their annual reports on the Internet, and some of them do it themselves now.

Mr LIEBERMAN—One of the imperatives of our democratic parliamentary system is that the public should have reasonable access to official documents and the like. Any reforms that we dabble with have to obviously have that as the centrepiece. Are there any provisions in the copyright law at the moment if we adopted your package that might need some modification? Can we be sure that if we adopt your system the ordinary citizen will not be deprived of ready access to a copy and would not be subjected to an unreasonable cost? Furthermore, would people involved in the recording processes that people would have to access to get a copy in years to come, be entitled to reproduce copies without breach of copyright so as to ensure that there is maximum access? It is a complex question.

Ms Cameron—I do not think we can answer that particular copyright question. I think we need to get advice on that, but certainly as far as the Copyright Act is concerned with library deposit, the Copyright Act has a clause in it about the legal deposit system. That says that one copy of every publication in Australia is deposited with the National Library and that is the end of that as far as that piece of legislation is concerned.

We do have concerns that if we were to go with the House of Representatives' option there would be a number of government agencies that simply would not supply the appropriate number of copies to cover the library deposit scheme. That may have to happen through legislation. It is certainly something that I think is worthy of legislation. The House feels that a permanent record of government and parliamentary activity throughout the library system is important to Australian society and therefore worthy of legislation. That may have to happen.

PM&C may be able to do it without legislation. They may be able to instruct

government agencies that when they supply their tabling copies they also supply so many copies for the library deposit scheme and that is part and parcel of the tabling provision.

It is up to the committee to look at that more deeply. Certainly those two things would be available but we do feel that there is a problem with agencies that do not publish through AGPS supplying their library deposit copies. They do not have any problems supplying their tabling copies, but we probably would need to strengthen it in the area of them supplying to AGPS, or whatever dissemination agency was decided on.

Currently, AGPS has the appropriate infrastructure, so we would assume it would be them. But outside publishers supplying to them so that they could then fulfil their requirements under the library deposit scheme definitely needs to be looked at and strengthened. That is something that we have covered in our submission.

Mr LIEBERMAN—You obviously support the concept that all taxpayer funded agencies, parliaments and the like, producing documents for the official public record be required to adopt a sensible, intelligent, standardised system of database recording that is available on floppy, et cetera, to be sent to whichever agencies are going to be responsible—

Ms Cameron—Not at the moment but eventually, hopefully, it would happen.

Mr LIEBERMAN—So that you do not get to have the right to introduce documents into the parliament unless you have done it. Since you are doing it for yourself, why not do it at the same time. Do you go along with that concept as a non-revolutionary reasonable mandatory regulation?

Ms Cameron—Nothing is impossible.

Mr LIEBERMAN—I rest my case, Mr Chairman.

Senator McKIERNAN—Following through from Ms Cameron's response to Mr Lieberman's questions about the availability of documentation on the public record, if the committee were to go along the lines that have been suggested by the Presiding Officers and abolish the parliamentary paper, we then would have to legislate. I am trying to get an understanding of your response. There would be an expectation in the parliament of legislation to ensure that those papers continued to be available to the public in the future. There is no sense to the taxpayer in doing that, though, is there? It is really a transferring of what the taxpayer is paying from the Department of the House of Representatives and the Senate to the relevant department outside.

Ms Cameron—There would be savings if we were to rationalise the three systems that are currently in process. We have the free issue scheme, the library deposit and the pamphlet copy—the free distribution scheme, if you like, of the parliamentary papers

series. There is enormous duplication, so for author bodies, if we were to merge those schemes and just have one scheme running and that would be the library deposit scheme, we estimate that the author bodies could cut their run-on copies, if you like, by some 200 copies. There is a distinct saving to author bodies if you do that.

Certainly there is the cost of parliament making legislation and I know that. I have been a bills officer myself, so I know what sort of money is involved in that. That is just the initial cost. The advantages of having legislation in place is that there would then be compulsion on those agencies. They would have to meet their responsibility as far as the community historical record of government is concerned. At the moment there is nothing, not even the parliamentary papers series. As AGPS will tell you, there are a number of agencies that even still will not provide it to them even under the threat of the parliamentary paper series. AGPS have to photocopy them at the cost of the Department of the House of Representatives.

Legislation in that area would give agencies the appropriate responsibility. It may not have to be legislation; it could be a directive from Prime Minister and Cabinet. That may be strong enough. It could be some education of these agencies, making them realise what their responsibilities in these areas are. It could be a number of things. It is certainly worthy of legislation. It is important enough to legislate on.

Senator McKIERNAN—If we go down the path that has been suggested—

Ms Cameron—If we go down that path. But even if we do not go down that path there is still no compulsion on agencies to supply, even for the purpose of the parliamentary paper series. There are a number of agencies that still do not supply for that, and AGPS have to spend an enormous amount of money in communication to get hold of them. If they do not get hold of them they have to photocopy something for inclusion and that is expensive, too. That system is not perfect either.

Senator McKIERNAN—If this Presiding Officers' proposal were put into operation, the Department of the House of Representatives—where you are coming from—would be saving in the region of \$140,000 per annum?

Mr Barlin—\$120,000-plus.

Senator McKIERNAN—\$120,000-plus. It is actually chickenfeed when one considers what Senate estimates committees have to scrutinise.

Mr Barlin—It is not chickenfeed to the Department of the House of Representatives at the moment, Senator, I can assure you.

Senator McKIERNAN—When one considers though, this proposal has elicited over 50 submissions from members of the general public and the community that receives them, it does seem to be out of proportion to what the savings could be. There might have

been better ways of addressing this problem.

Could I just ask you a question in relation to that \$120,000 savings? The initiatives as mentioned in 4.1 of your submission on page four by the Presiding Officers on that auspicious day last year, my birthday—what savings has that brought to your department, if any?

Mr Pender—In the vicinity of \$100,000 per annum.

Senator McKIERNAN—So what we are about now is only about \$20,000?

Mr Barlin—No. By reducing the number of bound volumes, which has occurred, and by supplying those other recipients with blister packs, there was a \$100,000 savings. That is additional to our proposal now, which will save us \$120,000 plus.

Senator McKIERNAN—So overall there will be a savings of over a quarter of a million dollars if the proposal goes ahead?

Mr Barlin—We have already saved about \$100,000. This is a proposal to save an additional \$120,000 for us. We believe there will be savings, as Colleen Cameron has said, to AGPS and to all the departments on top of the savings to us. There will be savings to the Senate of at least \$42,500, maybe more. If you add it all together, you are talking about a sizeable lump of money.

We believe that, by extending the library deposit scheme, eliminating the parliamentary papers series and this further complicated free issue list—there are three systems operating—and bringing them altogether, there will be substantial savings overall with no less information available to the public, which was the concern Mr Lieberman expressed. The documents will still be available, provided all the departments make them available for distribution. That is where the question of legislation arises. There will be substantial savings and nobody will be any worse off.

Ms Cameron—In fact, they may be better off. They may have a more comprehensive collection than they currently have.

Mr Barlin—There will also be an indexing system that will number all papers tabled in the House, not just those 47 per cent that find themselves into the parliamentary papers series now. There can be a comprehensive numbering system for all principal papers tabled in the House. Everybody will have that same number and it will not be confined only to the PPS.

Senator McKIERNAN—Mr Pender mentioned the CD-ROM initiative that AGPS have put in place, and they are building another database on that now. From your perspective within the Department of the House of Representatives, would you be prepared

to rely on that system now as it stands to access documents? What I am asking in short is whether what we have got now is what is being proposed on an efficiency list.

Mr Pender—The limited number of annual reports that are actually on the CD-ROM are very accessible and very easy to use in terms of research purposes and the like. I would imagine it would be a boon for estimates inquiries to be able to access all that information from one source.

But I would not have complete confidence in the system as yet because it is not complete. I think there were only 10 annual reports actually on that CD-ROM last year. As I said, I think AGPS are hoping to have all executive department reports, parliamentary department reports and principal authorities like the tax office on the current one, but I am not sure of the status of that at this stage.

Senator McKIERNAN—Thank you.

Senator COLSTON—I just have a couple of questions. There have been some suggestions that certain savings would be made by the House of Representatives. Is Finance going to look at that and say to the House of Representatives, ‘You have saved \$100,000 so you need \$100,000 less next year’?

Mr Barlin—They may do that as they seem to do those sorts of things. I cannot answer that, but I would expect that, if we were saving \$97,725 in direct costs, they would probably have a look at our rather limited budget and cut it a bit more.

Senator COLSTON—It just seems to me that what the parliamentary departments or the Commonwealth is doing at the moment is subsidising libraries throughout the country by providing them with free copies. If you offer somebody something for free, they say, ‘Yes, we need it.’ Has there ever been any suggestion that a charge would be made for the documents which are sent out to libraries?

Mr Pender—Not to my knowledge, no.

Senator JACINTA COLLINS—Just picking up on Mr Pender’s earlier response to a question, I would have to agree completely that I would not want to have to rely on even the intra-Senate CD-ROM system. The Black Rod’s page was naked last night; it is certainly not complete. In comments about alternative technologies and that they may be more sufficiently advanced at this point as compared to when it was last addressed, are you able to inform us of how much closer we are to getting access in our offices to the Internet?

Mr Barlin—Is the question about how close we are to having Internet available to senators and members?

Senator JACINTA COLLINS—Yes, let alone members of the public getting access to it.

Mr Barlin—It is a very current issue. You may not know that the House of Representatives is confined to six kiosks at the moment. They are located in the Leader of the Opposition's suite, the Government Whip's suite, the government members' typing pool and the opposition's suite. We have two others for the whole of the House of Representatives. I hope I am not breaching any confidentiality but we, along with the Senate, are putting up a new policy proposal to the Department of Finance seeking funds for the provision of Internet services, desktop access for senators and members. Unfortunately, the amount that we seek is just below the threshold that departments are supposed to absorb before they can go for additional funds. The prospect of getting the additional funding may be a bit doubtful. Any assistance that senators and members can add to our case to help us get the extra funds would be very much appreciated.

Mr LIEBERMAN—I second the recommendation and perhaps we will save some money.

Senator JACINTA COLLINS—Perhaps Finance might be encouraged to think we may be more receptive to proposals such as this if we had the access to the technologies we need.

Mr LIEBERMAN—That would come under the heading of self-interest though.

Senator JACINTA COLLINS—Not necessarily.

Mr Barlin—It is a very unsatisfactory situation and one that is causing us embarrassment but that is the current situation.

Senator JACINTA COLLINS—Yes. I picked up on it on the basis that you made the comment in your submission that these technologies may be sufficiently advanced. If we indicate that they are nowhere near advanced enough, even for members and senators, I ponder over how advanced they are in terms of access for members of the general public.

Ms ELLIS—What consultation, if any, occurred with users of the current system, in terms of the receipt of the parliamentary papers series, when the new proposal was put up for consideration?

Mr Pender—Over a number of years, we have corresponded with recipients of parliamentary papers, usually with bad news, in our endeavours to try to cut back on expenses and the like. I do not have any written evidence but, generally, most people, most libraries that are the recipients, are supportive of getting the papers, and free I might add. Certainly, from telephone conversations and the like, they have said that they would

in some cases prefer electronic copy but that at the moment they are happy with getting the series as it is free.

Also, one disadvantage that some librarians have mentioned to me in passing is that shelf space is becoming a very important point in terms of the storage of these volumes. They are not getting any smaller. That is a volume of parliamentary papers there from 1937 and that was one of a series of nine. We are now producing about 41 volumes of approximately the same size and they are taking up a substantial amount of shelf space.

Ms Cameron—About 6½ metres of shelf space per year.

Mr Pender—So while they are happy to get the copies and everything, they are finding the storage and some of the practical considerations a bit of a bind.

Ms ELLIS—I will just add a comment there about that free supply to libraries. User pays is terrific but I think we are running the risk of getting bedazzled by the fact that the library either has to get it free from you or has to get the money from its local government to pay. They are all being cut back. It is a case of basically cost shifting from one sector or one level of government to another, continually, to try and keep the things going.

What consultation, if any, will occur in any transitional movement to electronic servicing with the recipients or the users of the service across the board to make sure that they are in fact abreast of the electronic usage? Whilst I think the electronic services have all of the potential we would wish them to have, I am extremely alarmed at the possibility that members of the public will not be able to keep up and that therefore they will be dealt out of the system by one means or another, by inadequate access through libraries or by inadequate or no access themselves. I think we are a long way from being able to say adequately that the public will have appropriate access through electronic means in place of printed means. I do not mean by that that we should rule it out but I do not think we should take that step until we are absolutely confident that there is no exclusion for people in the public.

Mr Pender—We would agree with you 100 per cent and we are not proposing an electronic alternative at this stage. We certainly want to ensure that the community has access to all papers tabled in the parliament. That is why we are proposing that we amalgamate those three schemes. It would overcome the duplication but still give libraries that hard copy that they require and still have it generally available for the public. For the time being, we would not see the electronic option as a be-all and end-all alternative. We would still maintain hard copy distribution.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—I have been at another hearing so I have not heard all of your evidence but, with that 6½ metres of shelf space, it sounds as though a lot of material has been sent out to a lot of libraries. Have we done any research on how much

usage there is in these libraries of these papers? Senator Colston asked whether they pay for these things. Have we ever requested or done any market research as to whether they would pay for them? If we asked the libraries whether they wanted these, would 100 per cent of them say that they have a need for them or would it be a certain percentage?

Mr Pender—We did address one of your questions. I ventured that I was a bit cynical about libraries still wanting them if they had to pay for them. But, in terms of library usage, we have not done any research on just what use is made of the reports that they currently receive. I suggest that it is probably a good question for the library witnesses that will appear before the committee.

In terms of paying, I think one or two of the submissions that have been authorised for publication do suggest that perhaps a nominal fee could be paid to receive those papers to offset the costs. But, as I said, I am a bit cynical about that sort of proposal. We have never asked libraries whether they would be willing to pay.

Senator McKIERNAN—The Bond University, a private university, subscribes to the parliamentary papers. Does that in any way interfere with your cynicism about whether people will or will not subscribe? Are you aware of any other private institutions that subscribe to the series?

Mr Pender—There are a number of subscribers to the parliamentary paper series. I am not sure of the number.

Ms Cameron—It is controlled through the AGPS subscription service so they would be able to give you some advice on that.

Senator McKIERNAN—You did not respond to the question about your cynicism.

Mr Pender—No. There was a lot of negotiation with Bond University before they agreed to pay, I can assure you.

Senator McKIERNAN—This committee was involved.

Mr Pender—Yes, that is correct.

Mr LIEBERMAN—Considering Mr Evans's question and perhaps further consultation and market research, if that ever were to happen, I wonder whether we could also include in what the knowledge of the libraries is the sorts of people who are currently accessing the free service, and how much money they are making out of the free service—if we want to be cynical, because there would be a huge number of people getting the knowledge. Knowledge is strength, knowledge is great, knowledge helps—but they would be charging for their product that they make out of that knowledge. I wonder whether there is any information at all. Probably not, it is probably well hidden—but it is worth

asking.

Mr Pender—If I could just venture a personal opinion about the series, although it is a numbered series on an annual basis now and prior to 1967 it was on a parliamentary basis: the numbers are not consistent, the place where a departmental annual report appears in the scheme of things is never going to be the same, libraries are forced to accept this system for what it is and to accept the volumes in the numerical sequence in which they are constructed and hence, as a research tool, I would have thought that freeing up of the whole scheme would be preferable for libraries because they can group together the department and the House of Representatives annual reports, for example.

So a researcher could go to just one place to get all reports instead of having to go to 12 or 13 different places to get the last 13 years' reports. So that is purely a personal bit of speculation on how these things might be used. One of the purposes of our submission is to free up the whole issue for libraries in that they can put them on the shelves in any way they determine. They would still have their comprehensive index, they would still have the list of all those papers that are presented to the parliament each year.

Mr LIEBERMAN—One question for further response: in your supplementary submission would you be able to impart to us any knowledge you have gained from other parliaments such as Westminster, Canada, maybe even the Congress, as to how they are currently providing the information to the public?

Mr Barlin—We will certainly get that, Mr Lieberman. I know that the situation in Westminster has just changed. HMSO has recently changed and perhaps our friends from AGPS might be more across that than us, but we will certainly look at the Westminster, the—

Mr LIEBERMAN—From a parliamentary point of view.

Mr Barlin—Yes, certainly.

Mr LIEBERMAN—Good. Thank you.

CHAIR—There being no further questions I would like to thank you Mr Barlin, Mr Pender and Ms Cameron.

[10.04 a.m.]

HOGG, Mrs Carolyn, Acting General Manager, Australian Government Publishing Service, Wentworth Avenue, Kingston, Australian Capital Territory 2604

HUTCHISON, Mr Ronald, Manager Production, Australian Government Publishing Service, Wentworth Avenue, Kingston, Australian Capital Territory 2604

MULLINS, Mr Paul, Manager Corporate Affairs, Australian Government Publishing Service, Wentworth Avenue, Kingston, Australian Capital Territory 2604

CHAIR—I now welcome the witnesses from the Australian Government Publishing Service. Do you wish to make an opening statement?

Ms Hogg—Just a very brief one, Senator. As a result of the Erwin committee, which was previously mentioned by our colleagues from the House of Representatives, the current role of AGPS is to provide easy and affordable access to Commonwealth information, as articulated in the current *Commonwealth Charter of Printing and Publishing Responsibilities*. Therefore, we see our role in this whole issue as facilitating whichever decision or approach the joint parliamentary committee wishes to proceed with.

Our area of knowledge at the moment is providing you with information on the current process—and I mean ‘process’ in terms of production, distribution and access, because in the current organisation we manage nine Commonwealth Government Info Shops around the country. They were previously the Commonwealth Government Bookshops, but we have changed the name to reflect the types of access that one can now obtain within those shopfronts which include access to electronic publications, the Internet and the like.

In our experience, the current system has got some problems. The obvious one that has been mentioned by the House of Representatives is the problem of duplication. We see that an expanded library deposit scheme certainly would be of assistance in this area, and that mailing and distribution lists, which are currently maintained by the tabling offices and ourselves, could be amalgamated and the number of copies that some recipients receive could be reduced.

There has been some discussion about charges that AGPS currently makes to the parliament. Our view is that those charges that are currently applied—and I think it was talked about in the estimates as \$90,000 to \$100,000—are underestimated. We have not reviewed that process for some years. It is very topical because, as with other parts of the Department of Administrative Services, all AGPS services and functions are being market tested. So it may be quite relevant in terms of any continuation of any process that we estimate that there is probably a shortfall of about 30 per cent in those charges.

One of the charges that does not go into making up the current charge we apply is for space for storage. As you probably know, we have large premises on the Kingston foreshore and, as a result of changing technology through the years, it has a lot of vacant space. We currently do not charge the parliament for the storage of the parliamentary papers series but, with the foreshore swap, changing accommodation and potential changes to our role, there could also be additional charges that might be brought to bear in the current process, if the current process were to remain largely the same.

Another difficulty we have is in relation to providing the number of parliamentary copies. Again, this was mentioned in some detail. I believe that in October 1995 the process was changed from one where the parliament sought to get departments and agencies to provide the requisite number of copies of publications to one where AGPS took on that role. It is a difficult process. Departments and agencies by and large comply with it. But, in terms of being a commercial business, there are a significant number of agencies and departments which do not and the costs of that are quite significant when you are looking at producing those copies. We have an in-house capability to produce them and we have to recover from departments and agencies the costs of doing that to meet the requirements.

There are a number of recalcitrant departments and agencies which simply will not pay for that and, therefore, there is a debt recovery process that we undertake. In terms of charges that we have incurred since we took on that role, probably we have managed to recover 50 per cent of the funds required to meet that role from those agencies that do not willingly comply.

The other issue I guess is that everybody has also mentioned the changes in technology now, in terms of both production and in access, which is a very relevant point. From our point of view, what we see happening is that we are now being presented with choice about how the parliamentary paper series or the parliamentary information is produced. We would probably, at this point, concur that it does provide us with significant opportunity for the future, but right at this point, in terms of access by the broad community, one would have to seriously consider that hard copy is the medium for the foreseeable future to allow that to happen, which is not to say that over the coming years, as has been mentioned, we should not work very hard to encourage those people who do have access to use it. By and large it is a cheaper process to in fact do that. We can provide you with a number of instances of publications that we have produced over recent years and the type of monitoring of the market we have done in terms of accessing that—and what the market is saying about that.

CHAIR—Thank you for your opening statement and your submission. Just on your final point, one of the submissions received by the committee suggests that we appear to be at least 10 years away from all Australians being able to access their electronic information that is supplied by the parliamentary papers series. Do you consider that a fair estimate?

Ms Hogg—In terms of the way people use information, in our experience it really depends on what use you are going to put the information to. From what we see in our information shops, people look for the type of information that they are going to read at their leisure and the type of information that they are going to use for research et cetera. I think there is a deal of work to be done in terms of providing access for those different purposes. In terms of maybe the type of information that is produced by the parliament, where people are going to look at it for research, to augment whatever they are doing, we will be able, in a very short period of time, to produce that information perhaps through an outlet which is in the community—maybe libraries as well—where you can demand print particular chapters or small parts of what used to be a hard copy publication at significantly reduced cost. So, I think we will get there over stages and I think it really depends on the use to which the people are going to put the information.

CHAIR—You said in your opening statement that a number of your products have been market tested. Is that because you believe that the AGPS will be privatised?

Ms Hogg—The government has, in the last budget, looked at all the business units of the Department of Administrative Services, of which the Australian Government Publishing Service is one. A number of those businesses were earmarked for sale and a number were earmarked for market testing. AGPS is one of those, in terms of inviting the private sector to make submissions on the cost effectiveness of the processes that we employ and what could be obtained from the private sector. That is currently under way at the moment.

CHAIR—How would the community service obligations that the AGPS has be satisfied if it was to be privatised?

Ms Hogg—My view is that both the commercial activity and community service obligations of AGPS will form part of the market testing exercise.

CHAIR—In your submission, you list in the activities of the AGPS that it secures the parliamentary paper copies from the author bodies not utilising AGPS services and the committee understands that sometimes you have problems doing this. In general, has the system been working well and how much administrative effort is involved by the AGPS in doing that?

Mr Hutchison—I think it is fair to say the system is not working as well now as it did in the past. We are having considerable trouble receiving copies of annual reports, reports from agencies, bodies that are not going through AGPS, yes.

CHAIR—A greater number of those are utilising other printing services?

Mr Hutchison—They are utilising other printing services, they are not complying with the instructions or the standards to deliver whole paper copies to AGPS for storage to

be processed. At the moment we have somebody who is spending 15 or 20 hours a week chasing up those particular bodies.

CHAIR—The proliferation of reports combined with the fact that people are utilising other printing services is making your job progressively harder in the compilation of the parliamentary paper series?

Mr Hutchison—Yes, it is not all agencies that are not, some are complying with the standards and are supplying them, but there are increasing numbers that are not.

Senator McKIERNAN—In regard to your response to the Chair's first question on the accessibility to the community of information, is it not a fact that if a person goes into a state library anywhere in the country and wants a copy of some material to take away with them there is a charge on that?

Ms Hogg—I would imagine so, yes, if they photocopy it.

Senator McKIERNAN—How can you envisage a new system making greater use of the electronic medium which would provide the same access to the community, to the public, that the free issue of parliamentary papers now provides?

Ms Hogg—I think it is to do with the Internet and being able to find where the information is. As more departments and agencies use the Internet in terms of the way of letting people know that the information is there then I think, apart from the publications that are in the parliamentary papers series, the whole of the information or data that the Commonwealth is producing will be made available. I would imagine that being able to access that index through libraries will increase people's access. That is a cheaper means of distribution than producing the hard copies.

Senator McKIERNAN—I suppose the thrust of my question was the end use and the cost to the end user of the thing. You have responded on the savings, but I will just say that the reduction in funds at the Commonwealth, state and local government levels will lead to increased user pays coming to bear.

Mr Mullins—Well, no, I think the term we use is free to look and pay to take, so that you can go to a library and study the book, you can go into one of our Info Shops and consult material either on the screen or on the shelves. It is when you want to take it away and have your own personal copy that you are charged the marginal cost of distribution. There are no authorship costs in that, but the cost of the paper and the printing of that marginal copy is there.

That has come about because of the policy on charging for government information in printed form. I think that very problem of charging for access to government information in an electronic age is something that we are starting to think about already on

various committees that we are dealing with. I do not know that there is any restriction on it, but I think it will always remain that you will be free to look at it but if you want to take it away you will incur a charge.

Senator McKIERNAN—I had no luck after listening to the House of Representatives witnesses and I had no luck with the letter that initiated all of this from the Presiding Officers on 27 June last year. It seems to me that there was a great reliance on what the Presiding Officers were about in saving funds, because there is going to be a great reliance on electronic forms. The department which gave evidence to us previously has, in my opinion, backed away quite substantially from that reliance on the electronic distribution of material. Can you recall the content of the Presiding Officers' letter? You were here when you listened to the Department of the House of Representatives. In your opinion, am I wrong in the conclusions that I have reached?

Mr Mullins—No, I do not think so. I tend to agree with the House of Representatives, that to rely on electronic distribution and access immediately is not going to be satisfactory—far from it. There are a number of reasons for that. But I also agree with Mr Lieberman that we should be aggressively looking at that. I was responsible for this annual report CD-ROM. One of the major difficulties we had with that was getting the electronic copy out of the departments in the first place.

Even getting hard copy from them to deliver is one thing; getting them to lodge the electronic version, which they would have constructed in order to produce the printed version, is becoming very difficult. Even though you would think it would be a very simple affair for them just to put a floppy disk in the PC and download it and send it along, that seems too hard for a number of departments.

I would tend to agree that you are stuck with hard copy in one shape or form for some years, but that is rapidly decreasing. One of the major difficulties with electronic publishing is the variety of applications, word processing systems and page layout programs that are used, and getting some standardisation there. The Commonwealth is now standardising its desktop. Anyone who produces an annual report other than using a standard word processing package is obviously going to too much trouble; if they are using some other desktop publishing program, it is probably a waste of time.

As the Commonwealth standardises its desktop, we will only have a certain number of fairly standardised packages and we will be able to automate streaming into either Internet access, CD-ROM, downloading, making a floppy disk. Our intention is to have an electronic silo of this information so that someone can go into an Info Shop, browse the electronic database, say, 'I will have that, that and that, and chapter 6 of this,' and either walk out with a floppy disk or print it out if they wish to do that. But that is some time down the track and will certainly require the standardisation of applications and compliance by departments in lodging that electronic text with us.

Senator McKIERNAN—In that response you have drawn some attention to the difficulties you have now in collecting the information for distribution. If we were to abolish the parliamentary papers series and put the onus on departments and other agencies to distribute the information—with legislative backing, as was suggested by the Department of the House of Representatives—do you think that is going to work? It is not working now when you have a relatively simple central agency which they have to put the information into. You have just told us you are not able to get it; even when it is a simple matter of putting a floppy into a machine and downloading it, it is not happening. How would it be if they had to do that to libraries throughout the nation?

Mr Mullins—That is precisely the point we made in our submission. When we are unable to get it, at least we acquire a copy and then make our own copies, at our expense, to put into the parliamentary papers series. If there was no central library deposit scheme operating, libraries would have to place themselves on some 400 or 500 departmental mailing lists to ensure that they got a copy of the annual reports or the documents they are sending. So we fully support a central agency monitoring and administering an information dissemination scheme, whether it be a library deposit scheme or a government information service scheme.

To rely on departments to do it might do the cause of devolution a lot of good, but the consumers would be missing out. It is important that people know that the information exists in the first place, let alone being able to get access to it. At least with a central organisation publishing the index of government publications, electronically or in hard copy form, people are aware of the existence of the information in the first place. I find that that is one of the most important things in this whole affair.

Senator McKIERNAN—I asked the previous set of witnesses how many private universities were subscribing to the series. The question was flicked off to you. Can you fill in the response?

Mr Mullins—Some of the universities have a standing order. In other words, because we cannot quote them a price each year, we send them a quote for the set and they either say, ‘Yes, I will have it,’ or ‘No, I won’t.’ But those who wish to be informed of it are the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Harvard College in Massachusetts, Victoria University in Wellington, Deakin University at Warrnambool, the University of Sydney, the University of Victoria in Canada and the Queensland University of Technology. They are the ones I have on the list.

Senator McKIERNAN—It is probably not your bailiwick to let me know how many other private universities are in existence in Australia. Is the Bond University the only private tertiary institute that is subscribing to the series currently?

Mr Mullins—I do not know the answer to that. I will have to take it on notice.

Senator McKIERNAN—You can take it on notice. My final question is, I suppose, rhetorically to you, Ms Hogg. What are you going to do with all the money that you are going to save if this proposal is initiated? We were told that there are going to be substantial savings, not only to the parliamentary departments but you will be saving something as well. How much will you be saving on your reckoning, and what will you be doing with the money?

Ms Hogg—Just going on to another question that was asked earlier about library deposit schemes and what other countries may be doing in terms of facilitating access through that means, we have been looking very carefully at what is happening at the American government printing office—I am not sure if that is the correct name. There has been a paper released quite recently on the Internet about their proposal to, firstly, considerably expand the libraries involved, but also to divert some of their funding into assisting those libraries with the new technology.

In fact there was a proposal to go to government in terms of assistance to actually acquire the hardware but, more importantly, providing a role by the government printing office in helping people within the libraries, the librarians et cetera, for a considerable period of time, if not indefinitely, to get people accessing libraries familiar with the technology so that it would aid the transfer from the different sorts of media, from hard copy to electronic. That is one example of how, if savings were made in particular programs or administration of particular programs at the moment, that could be diverted into a broader role to help the bedding down of any new technology. We would save money, principally on the administrative side at the moment in not having to chase up agencies that are not paying.

Senator McKIERNAN—The savings would come by a divesting of your responsibility to collect that information. That is where the savings would come.

Ms Hogg—Yes, in administrative tasks—particularly in areas such as debt collection, et cetera, which really are not a productive use of time in any organisation. And because we are a commercial organisation we look at our resources in terms of the workload that we have, and it is rationalised accordingly.

Senator McKIERNAN—This raises another question. From a public interest point of view, why is it not possible that there be a legislative backup built into your charter to ensure that those departments and agencies supply you, the central agency, with the information? Would it not be a tidier way to go?

Ms Hogg—It would certainly help. We really do need some assistance in getting the message across.

CHAIR—There probably is. It is just that the requirements are not adhered to.

Ms Hogg—Yes. For instance this year, in terms of getting the electronic copies of the annual reports, PM&C certainly assisted us this year when it issued its annual instructions to departments and agents about the production of annual reports and specifically mentioned that an electronic copy should be available for the Australian Government Publishing Service. But out of the 25 major departments and agencies we got about 15.

Mr Mullins—Sixteen, as of now. We follow them up regularly and we just cannot get an answer. It seems as though it is a simple thing to copy this file onto a floppy and send it over. We think there is something else going on, but it is impossible to get it out of some of them.

Mr LIEBERMAN—I would like to follow on with a couple of questions on the senator's line of questioning. On page 4 of your submission you outlined your requirements in the tabling process such as the provision of hard copies and, later on, the floppy disk, et cetera. As a committee, I suppose, we have to decide whether we are going to make recommendations that they be incorporated in legislative form or otherwise to be enforced. I am interested in what you have said about some departments and agencies not cooperating at the moment, notwithstanding a fairly recent directive to do so from the Prime Minister's department. So you are not embarrassed, I am going to ask the question. Would you make available to the committee a list of the departments and agencies who are in default and who have failed your reasonable request to comply?

Mr Mullins—That is for the electronic copy of their annual report?

Mr LIEBERMAN—Any—both. I foreshadow, Mr Chair, that we might have some interesting dialogue then with those agencies to find out why.

Ms Hogg—It is only the actual annual report that any substantial request has gone to departments and agencies through PM&C, so it would probably be fair to limit it to those publications.

Mr LIEBERMAN—I am happy to extend it to the other defaults that you referred to earlier because we are looking at whether or not we make a recommendation as to how do we administer, how do we enforce it, so we need to know a bit of blood and guts as to why it is—

Ms Hogg—I might have misunderstood your request. You are actually asking for those agencies who have not supplied the parliamentary papers series?

Mr LIEBERMAN—Yes.

Ms Hogg—Yes.

Mr LIEBERMAN—Yes, indeed.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—Can I just ask here, do you also supply, if it is applicable, to those agencies who are not paying? I mean, they are agencies that are not paying, and you were talking about debt collection before. Are they agencies and departments?

Ms Hogg—Yes.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—Could you add that to the list that Mr Lieberman is asking for?

Ms Hogg—Yes.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—Those ones that are in default.

Ms Hogg—Yes.

Mr LIEBERMAN—The second question is this—and we touched on this with the House of Representatives evidence—if there is to be a change, there is a need to examine the legal implications of it. You might have heard me ask Mr Barlin if there was the possibility of getting some legal advice to the committee on what sort of privileges and other issues need to be addressed—and copyright. Would it be possible for your department to work either separately or with the House of Representatives in responding to that request to give us your view of any legal issues that need to be addressed if there is a change, and what the implications are of that? That is going to be pretty important, I think. That is about all. Thank you very much for the guidance you have given us to date.

CHAIR—Mr Evans.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—I have some questions, yes. We had further evidence that 6.5 metres per library shelf space is taken up with these papers series. That seems to me to be an awful lot of paperwork, and paper, being produced. What percentage of production would this parliamentary paper series be for your total overall production for the year—minute, significant or—

Mr Mullins—That is only 41 additional copies to each run which can run into, say, from 300 up to 5,000 depending on the nature of the paper.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—What I am trying to get at is not necessarily the libraries; I am not talking about them specifically. I am talking about the total run. What percentage of the total run of what we are talking about, the parliamentary paper series, at the moment is the total production for your organisation? Is it only a small part of it or is it a large part of it?

Mr Hutchison—It is only a fairly small part of it. It is made significantly larger by the fact that we have to spend so much time seeking copies and chasing them. But totally it is not a large part of the total production process within our organisation.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—So if we were to stop this procedure it would not affect any staffing levels?

Mr Hutchison—No.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—You spoke about storage before and the costs of storage, have you got any figures on the cost of storage of these things? And what sort of cost of product is actually installed? How much produced material is installed?

Mr Hutchison—I could not give you the value of that material but currently we have approximately 150 square metres of storage for parliamentary papers. I believe the industry rate is about \$70 per square metre.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—That is 150 square metres, floor space?

Mr Hutchison—When we first receive the parliamentary papers, we are required to check the copies required for bound volumes. We wrap them and then store them until advised by either the Senate or the Reps of the parliamentary paper number. We then put them in crates and they are stacked four crates high. The total storage space of the crates is 150 square metres.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—A parliamentary office is 150 square metres, or thereabouts, in floor space, and you have got some air space there as well. It is a fair bit; is it not?

Mr Hutchison—Yes.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—Is the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet responsible for the asking for these things to come through?

CHAIR—I understand they are.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—Have you bothered to ask any of these people you deal with as to whether they would prefer an electronic copy or a paper copy or do you just hand out paper copies?

Ms Hogg—If you are looking at overall usage, AGPS's biggest customer is government itself and then business. By and large, government and business are quite au fait with the electronic media and are willing to use that. But there is always the need for the general public to access the information.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—But you see it as easy to adapt electronic copies to a public system, through the library system. Everyone talks about the Internet but I am not talking about the Internet. I am talking about discs and other things. I would imagine that every library, if it was formatted correctly, could use it electronically.

Ms Hogg—Yes, I think the library's major concerns are funding the hardware. And, to some extent, there is the issue of the availability of staff to help people with the process of searching and retrieving information, which is not as easy, initially, as browsing along a shelf to find your information. In the discussions that we have had with the library committee, which we are part of, those are their major concerns. Ultimately, obviously, they want to go this way but those are the changed management issues for them.

Mr RICHARD EVANS—Okay, thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you.

[10.51 a.m.]

MISSINGHAM, Ms Roxanne, Convenor, Federal Libraries Information Network, c/- PO Box 84, Lyneham, Australian Capital Territory 2602

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

Ms Missingham—I will make a fairly short statement. I will cover some of the issues that have already been covered today, but I hope you will bear with me. Firstly, I note that the latest edition of the *Australian Encyclopaedia* notes that there are 1,200 libraries in Australia. FLIN was established in 1994 and covers approximately 320 libraries in Australia. Most of these are very small, with less than a person, and all of these have a major departmental library as their chief coordinator. All departmental libraries, as you know, receive a free copy of the parliamentary papers series. We have a very strong network by which we provide services, coordinate, and aim to reduce duplication of services. Libraries are constantly reviewing our collections, services and activities, and we fully support a review of the Commonwealth parliamentary paper series.

In the past fortnight I have spoken to 20 of the 26 Commonwealth government libraries currently on the free list of parliamentary papers, and their comments are basically that the series is absolutely essential and it is a core part of their collection, and mostly they do not lend that material because it is so important. The index is also essential: they use that as a filing tool, as they do not separately catalogue the reports; and so they are able to make a saving in that way. They commented that it is an excellent retrieval tool. They noted that departments and agencies currently pay for the printing costs of the documents which are circulated to them in the parliamentary paper series. None of the libraries that I have spoken to had received a letter advising of the possible discontinuation of the parliamentary papers series, and they had some concerns about consultation.

Regarding the current use of the parliamentary papers series, every one of the 20 libraries that I consulted noted that their collection was heavily used, and that it was core material for policy advice and the administration of government policy. Some examples I have to give were from the audit office. Every time the audit office staff go out to do an efficiency or effectiveness review of a government agency, they go to their library, get the parliamentary papers run, obtain the annual reports and reviews and other reports of those agencies, and use those to brief themselves before they go out. That makes their visits much more effective and, because they can obtain all of the material in the one place, it is quite an efficient service, from their point of view. The Treasury department library also serves the Department of Finance, and they were particularly strong users. They have a set of papers going back to 1901 and they find that the historical material is very valuable in reviews of government decisions as well, and they stressed to me the importance of preservation.

I briefly want to address five issues, the first one being costs. I have noted that the departments and agencies currently pay for printing of the material, not the distribution within the parliamentary papers series. Some libraries expressed a concern to me that, if they had to pay for that material again through subscription, it could be seen as double-dipping. There was also a concern about the cost of processing invoices: if they had to subscribe and were not on the free list, they would be paying invoices at least once every four to five weeks and, at a minimum cost of \$25 an invoice payment, this would not seem a whole-of-government efficiency. Certainly, it would be in the range of \$60,000, just for the payment of invoices for this series, if those 26 government departments and agencies were charged. They also noted that, if they did not have the parliamentary paper series material and had to obtain that from other libraries, there would be a minimum cost of \$9 per item per loan. If they wanted to borrow it from the National Library in less than 10 days, it would currently cost them \$27. If the National Library only had one set, that set would not be available for loan; and so there would not, in essence, be access to this information.

The second issue is indexing, which was seen as very important because it was used for filing so that we did not have to classify material into Dewey or any other system. You would probably be used to Dewey in your local public libraries. The libraries noted that they could not afford to catalogue and classify each individual item, and that there was whole-of-government efficiency in the current series. The level of document control in numbering the printed series is important, both within the parliamentary departments and outside. Also, FLIN would be happy to offer to assist if there were any review of indexing.

The third matter I want to briefly address is electronic access. Of all of the Commonwealth government libraries, only one Commonwealth government library has networked access to the Internet. The standard form of most Commonwealth government libraries is, as within public libraries, that there is one machine in the library which has a telephone next to it or a telephone line, and they dial up into the Internet through a commercial supplier. Generally they are called ISPs, information service providers. Most libraries have a line of around 1,200 bytes per second access, which is a fairly average line. It is not a fast line; but, usually, that is all they can get through their Internet service provider.

When they download documents using this sort of connection, they find that it is not possible to successfully download a document of more than about 20 pages. For anything that is longer than about 20 pages, you are looking at more than 20 minutes to half an hour tying up a machine; you also start to have problems with line traffic; you get breaks in the documents, and you may get a corrupted document or file. Electronic substitutes are not effective on the basis on which we currently operate Internet access. Also, the other comment that we strongly make is that most people, if it is a 100-page report, are not going to sit down and look at all 100 pages on screen. Reading it in the electronic environment is not a natural thing to do for a long document, so someone is

going to print it off. If all 320 FLIN libraries print off a Commonwealth government document of 100 pages, it is going to cost roughly six to 10 times the cost of having it commercially printed.

I want next to refer briefly to duplication, because the House of Representatives submission makes a number of comments about this. They have the list attached to their report which shows the duplication of university libraries. None of the Commonwealth government libraries are on that list, and they are also not on the free distribution scheme. I phoned AGPS to ask them—in fact, I did it for another paper I did in January—about the number of publications each year. The number of new titles added to the index to Commonwealth government publications is between 4,000 and 5,000 per year. Of that, roughly four per cent are duplicated to universities through the free distribution arrangement and through the parliamentary paper distribution that occurs. Overall, that is to about 3.3 per cent of all Australian libraries.

The other thing that a number of the submissions also note to the committee is that approximately half of the annual reports in the parliamentary paper series are not currently published by AGPS and are difficult to obtain, often taking many phone calls because publications officers change, distribution lists change and we do not always get notice. The increased effort in collection, should the parliamentary paper series cease, would be at a significant cost to the Commonwealth through their libraries.

The next point I briefly wanted to address is the AGPS. I thought I would give you some background information. The House of Representatives submission talks about the fortnightly list of Commonwealth government publications. I did double-check that with AGPS this morning, as well. That list has not been published since March 1994, so it is not a current document that substitutes in any way, and they are hoping to reinstate that. But there was a long period in which we could not rely on using the index because it was not published; and so it is not a substitute for the parliamentary papers index, in that sense.

With regard to searching, I want to talk briefly about the index and electronic searching. I actually logged on to the AGPS site this morning from my library and did a search on their search engine—after I found where to find it, which took several steps!—and pretended that I was a user wanting to look up an annual report of the Department of Health. Often you cannot remember what the name of a department was at a particular time, so I did the search putting in the terms ‘annual report’ and ‘health’ and got zero results.

I then went back to the search page. It did not have a help screen on the search page that I could find easily. But I inserted the Boolean operator ‘and’ between the words ‘annual’, ‘report’ and ‘health’ and came up with 244 hits. So I would have to look through all those 244 index entries in order to find any single year publication of the annual report of the Department of Health.

The message from that I want to give is that the advantage of the index to parliamentary papers is that they cover a very discrete year or session, or couple of years period now. It is very quick for librarians to go to the shelf, know that they want to get, say, the 1973-74 annual report of the department having 'health' somewhere in the name and to find it quickly within the index, whereas the electronic database, which has many thousands of documents in it, is not efficient for retrieving this sort of material.

I want to talk very briefly about public access and the need for access to information. I actually picked up this American libraries magazine from December 1996 this morning and read it. It has an interview with President Clinton where the first question is about access to government information. His answer is:

A healthy democracy requires a well-informed, well-educated citizenry.

The submission from FLIN is that the parliamentary papers series is an important part of that well-informed citizenry. As one of the submissions says, it is much cheaper to run a dictatorship and not to publish any reports, but one of the things we value in Australia is public access to information, our democracy and our members and senators.

In summary, libraries are an important part of the information process in making available parliamentary information. Governments, departments and agencies currently pay for the printing, and government libraries prove an effective part in distributing that to government offices. There are over 100,000 government offices in Australia.

Electronic distribution is not mature or stable enough and also runs the risk of allegations of cost shifting. If you have to go into a public library, you can dial into the Internet and you are going to have to pay at least 20c a page for what you print out on that laser printer. So it is going to cost you \$40 or \$50 dollars to download and print, should you be able to successfully download a document anyway which, in the whole picture of things, is not an efficiency.

The next point is that the index is essential for cost retrieval storage and information and, for us, it is a great degree of coordination. One of the things that libraries do is use the parliamentary papers numbers system to be able to tick off that they have received every individual issue. At the end of the year or every couple of months, they send letters in or, at the Attorney-General's Department, they advised me this morning that they actually phone the Table Office here and ask about missing issues. If the index were to be such that it was not a continuous index from the libraries' point of view, we would be phoning the Table Office every week and driving them insane with our claims for missing issues. We would hope to be able to prevent that.

The fifth point is that the AGPS free distributions scheme only in part duplicates what is done through the parliamentary papers series from our libraries' point of view. We calculated that about four per cent of the titles published by AGPS each year that go on

the free distribution list duplicate material which is in the parliamentary papers series, noting that many documents currently in the parliamentary papers series are not handled by AGPS.

The standing order series is also very difficult in terms of obtaining material, and we have certainly had problems with AGPS in the past with standing order series. AGPS has an uncertain future, though we would hope that their importance for community obligations of providing information is recognised.

Finally, I would like to say that FLIN would be happy to contribute to any process review or continuing review of the parliamentary papers series. I would like to suggest to you to look at it in terms of the whole-of-government effectiveness and costs. We would be happy to continue to consult or to provide information to you on any further aspect of the inquiry.

CHAIR—Thank you for your submission and thank you for your opening statement. One of the things that you said was that, when approaching the recipients of the parliamentary papers series, they had indicated to you that they had not been told of the review. I would just like to correct that for the record. We, as a committee, wrote to all the recipients of the parliamentary papers series and asked them to make a submission if they cared to do so. In fact, about 50 have done so. So they have been advised.

Ms Missingham—The 26 Commonwealth government libraries and agencies that are on the free distribution list were not included in the mail-out of that letter. I am not sure why that oversight occurred, but having spoken to 20 of them, I do not think it is an accident that 20 of them did not get it. I think that the list that was used for the distribution did not include them. I am not suggesting it was deliberate or anything, but I think that it reflected the distribution that occurs, particularly with the university libraries and the subscribers and that there was inadvertent omission of the 26 people on that list.

CHAIR—I know that the Bond University pays for the parliamentary papers series. Do you feel that libraries would be prepared to pay for the continuation?

Ms Missingham—I can only speak in that sense on behalf of Commonwealth government libraries and the view generally of Commonwealth government libraries, particularly when they spoke to their managers, was that their departments already pay for the printing of the material and the lodgement. So to pay to repurchase material that had already been printed would to them seem not an appropriate course of action, but I cannot speak on behalf of the university libraries. I think they are probably the other sector that you will be speaking to in your next hearing that may be willing to pay.

CHAIR—One of the things you said in your opening statement was that in respect to electronic access there are some concerns about the stability of that information. Therefore, there was a suggestion that perhaps, if we as a committee were to recommend

that there be a continuation of the parliamentary papers series, it would be for a period of time until such time as (a) stability of information was guaranteed, (b) that there was sufficient community access to meet the community service obligations and (c) the fact that you have to disseminate information to have an involved democracy and for all those sorts of reasons. What is your view on that?

Ms Missingham—It is interesting with the change to electronic information that we have seen a number of government agencies take down their old annual report from their web site when they put up a new annual report. The only agency that I know of that has actually has an active preservation policy is the Australian Bureau of Statistics, which captures both the Internet electronic information and the diskette type information.

But we have not seen any degree of stability in the market yet and I would hope for preservation purposes that it emerges. There is a group that the National Library is running called PADI, preservation and access to digital information, which is looking at these issues, but they have no solutions yet, particularly as the sort of technology to read the files changes. They have found that material that was preserved in the 1970s is no longer readable in the 1990s. Disks have changed, hard drives have changed, all sorts of things have changed. So there would need to be an active process in upgrading.

Senator McKIERNAN—You have advocated in your closing oral comment that you would be prepared to assist the committee to examine this issue and look at it from a whole of government option. In this day and age, is that realistic with so much competition around and so much pressure on individual departments and agencies to go down the user-pays track? Is that a realistic option that we as a committee should take into consideration and might it not be a waste of time?

Ms Missingham—The reason I suggested the whole of government perspective particularly is because that is the perspective that the Office of Government Information Technology has taken to records management and is now taking to information management through the paper that was issued by the Information Management Steering Committee. So we in Commonwealth government libraries are seeing an increased whole of government approach in the last two years through the Office of Government Information Technology. So we have tried to look at it in this light and say, ‘What does it cost the whole of the Commonwealth to provide this service? If we put these steps in so that we were charging back to departments, how much would it cost as whole of government? Is this an efficiency?’ Those are the questions we are raising because they have been put in our minds by things that are happening within the public sector environment.

Senator McKIERNAN—This committee is now on the way in this inquiry into the continuation of the parliamentary publications series. The initiative to bring that about was because of the pressure that the Presiding Officers are facing on their dwindling budgets. I suppose we could make recommendations that AGPS or some other agency

could pick up the costs and alleviate the burden played by parliamentary departments, as the parliamentary departments see it, or for example, we could make recommendations that Commonwealth libraries make a greater contribution to it. The Commonwealth libraries will resist that because they say they are already making a contribution to it. Where does the whole of government approach start and where does it finish? How can we get into the process to ensure that we do have a holistic approach to the matter?

Ms Missingham—I guess what is underlying your approach absolutely is that information is not free. It is not a free commodity, but also democracy is not free. There are some costs for democracy. In essence we see that the provision of the parliamentary paper series is a part of that cost. Yes, it should be reviewed and made more efficient. If there are ways of making it more efficient that would be absolutely terrific, but there is not the capacity within Commonwealth government libraries to pay for it. We are shrinking, the Public Service is shrinking, as is everyone else—as are our budgets. So we do not see that we have the capacity to pay and, if we do not have the capacity to pay, it means that information will not be accessed both by Commonwealth government officers and historically by the Australian community. We think that that would be a great tragedy.

Senator McKIERNAN—But then why should parliamentary departments pay? Surely basically they are in the same boat. It is not the parliamentary departments' duty to disseminate information. Other bodies would have that responsibility. It would not be the parliamentary departments, would it?

Ms Missingham—I have no strong view on whose obligation it is, other than it is an obligation of democracy. From our point of view within Commonwealth agencies, we pay for the documents. We pay for the 320 copies that are deposited and then the extra copies that are circulated. There are about 700 copies that are deposited and those need to be done in a central, coordinated fashion which is effective and efficient from your point of view.

We do not see that reducing that down to just the copies that are deposited for members and senators in the House is a very effective way of doing it. If we were to be charged, we would not be able to pay for that service. So the questions about the responsibility of exactly which agency is responsible are important decisions, but there is not a lot that we have to contribute to the debate at this stage, other than to suggest that, if each individual Commonwealth agency was required to do the full distribution of all of the copies for every paper that is ordered to be printed, that would be probably quite inefficient because every single agency would presumably be supplied with the lists by the department. We would all do the mail-out which would result in quite an increased cost in the management and administration of that service.

Senator McKIERNAN—My final question relates to the use of electronic distribution. The Presiding Officers were very strong in their approach to the possibilities of using enhanced and increased use of technology in the distribution of information. But

the Department of the House of Representatives in their submission and their presentation here this morning seem to be backing away from that. I notice in your submission you are saying that electronic distribution is probably up to 10 years away. If the parliamentary paper series folded in a matter of three months—and the budget is only three months away now—how would the current technology that is available in libraries be able to cater and cope with Commonwealth departments at the moment? Perhaps other people could answer from the wider community.

Ms Missingham—For that material which is in electronic form—and not all of the parliamentary paper series is in electronic form now—that could be preserved, providing that the tools that are used to read the material are preserved, presumably centrally in the National Library. But that would not necessarily give us good access. As I pointed out, Commonwealth departmental libraries have, generally speaking, ordinary line access which means they cannot download large documents. There are also a number of documents that departments and agencies have put up on the Internet now which we cannot download because there are faults in the files and we cannot print, which causes great frustration.

Just because something is electronic does not guarantee its preservation. There is also a large body of material which is not in electronic form. We would see that there would be no easy access strategy for that on a long-term basis. But I am quite happy to go back and consult more widely with libraries and come back to you if there is anything you would like to know.

Senator McKIERNAN—That might be of use to us, thank you.

Ms Missingham—That is fine.

Mr LIEBERMAN—I was interested to note that there are 320 Commonwealth funded libraries across Australia. There is a pie chart that shows their distribution. Would we be able to get a list of the libraries and their addresses? Did you say that some of them were staffed only by one or two people?

Ms Missingham—Yes.

Mr LIEBERMAN—Could you give staffing against each one, please?

Ms Missingham—I can see what I can find out. I probably cannot give you a lot on the staffing. Many of the libraries are very small. The Department of Defence library is manned part-time by Defence staff. I will try and collect what I can.

Mr LIEBERMAN—Thanks, that would be very helpful. You also mentioned that those libraries provide important information for other government agencies and for policy makers. I do not know whether I am asking an unreasonable question—and don't pull any punches if you think it is. Could we be briefed on the clients that each one has? I take it

that some of them have got standing arrangements, such as you said for Defence, for example. I would be interested to know the list of clients they have—and I do not mean the ones that come on an ad hoc basis, but those on a regular basis. I want to know that so we can see who is getting the service regularly, as we might need to talk to some of them about the impact of any changes we recommend on your service to them. So this is a positive, not a destructive, line of questioning.

I noticed that the objects of FLIN are, amongst other things, to develop and implement cooperative schemes and resource sharing activities. I guess that is also one of the objectives of this inquiry, so we have a lot in common. We want to make sure that public access is available. It disturbed me to hear that your Commonwealth libraries are in fact are being charged by other libraries—

Ms Missingham—Yes.

Mr LIEBERMAN—to obtain information about government reports and documents. Would it be possible to get some examples—some blood and guts as I would say, being from the country—of that? I would be very interested to know who is charging the Commonwealth libraries for information about government departments.

Ms Missingham—I might just give you a brief bit of information. All libraries in Australia generally moved to a user-pays basis for photocopies of inter-library loans and book loans through the inter-library loan process in the early 1980s. The National Library instituted charging and they charge us for any loan. We do not lend material to them, because the National Library is not a resource in that sense, but the universities also charge us for access. There are some groups that have free inter-library loans. Commonwealth government libraries as a whole lend things between each other freely, but material that we need to get from any state library, from many public libraries, from any university library—with a few exceptions—and from the National Library we are charged for at a rate between \$9 and \$27 per item.

Mr LIEBERMAN—Yes. What I am asking for—and I do not want to get into commercial confidentiality matters, so tell us if it is a sensitive area—are some examples of those charges by agencies, the names of those agencies and the type of document they were charging for, and whether those same agencies are getting documents free from the Commonwealth libraries and, if so, what sorts of documents?

Ms Missingham—Okay; I will get as much information as I can.

Mr LIEBERMAN—I would be interested in that. It could be fertile ground for dialogue.

Senator McKIERNAN—Could we have a scenario whereby a journalist could approach the Department of Defence library seeking information, if that library did not

have the information on hand it could seek to borrow it from the National Library at a cost to that library and, if that was allowed, would the Department of Defence library be able to put a charge on the journalist for gathering that information?

Ms Missingham—That is a very interesting question. Generally speaking, all Commonwealth departmental libraries service their clients in their department—that is, you cannot off the street and walk into a Commonwealth government library and expect to be serviced. If the journalist was working in the Department of Defence, then he or she would have free access to the Defence library. Generally speaking, most libraries pick up the cost of inter-library loans as a part of their overall library budget. But some libraries in the Commonwealth will charge the end users for service. They will do that for database searches and for a number of complex reference inquiries.

Mr LIEBERMAN—You may have heard some of the House of Representatives submission and the AGPS submission. Certainly, copies of their submission will be available to you. I would be interested to know, in a supplementary submission from FLIN, what you think about the workability of the reform model that the House of Representatives puts forward for consideration—a critique of how you see it. Obviously we all want to have coordination and resource sharing to ensure reasonable public access in the interests of democracy and all of that. I would like to get your perspective on what you think, how it might be improved and could you include things like the legal aspects, which particularly interest me. On a final note, we appreciate the service of the Commonwealth library, it has been very good. Thank you.

Ms ELLIS—In one of the earlier submissions, a great deal of store was put in a couple of questions about the inconvenience and about the amount of linear space taken up on shelves for these parliamentary papers and reports. The comment was made that maybe it was a burden upon libraries to have to absorb such information. I do not see it that way: that is what a library is for. But can you give me your view on the degree to which it is an imposition on libraries to absorb such material. I think 6.5 metres, per year, was mentioned and that this may be a deterrent to wanting the information.

Ms Missingham—Well, 6.5 metres per year is not what I have experienced in Commonwealth government libraries with parliamentary papers collections. They have been a bit smaller than that, in terms of growth. The parliamentary papers collection in all of the 20 libraries that I approached, and certainly in the libraries that I have worked in, has been amongst the most heavily used material in the collection, particularly in the Audit Office. It is heavily used in their monograph collection, and more heavily used in their journal article collection so it is not an impost for them to collect it. In fact, they get a better cost return on access to the Commonwealth parliamentary paper series than they do for a number of other types of materials in the collection.

Ms ELLIS—Another comment from earlier suggested that most libraries, if formatted correctly, could handle electronic material adequately. I think the evidence you

have given in relation to the use of electronic data has answered that query to my satisfaction. It has broadened my knowledge somewhat and I want to thank you for the information that you have given on that particular aspect.

CHAIR—Thank you.

[11.24 a.m.]

ADCOCK, Ms Nola, Acting Deputy Head, Information and Research Services, Department of the Parliamentary Library, Parliament House, Canberra, ACT 2600

HEALY, Ms Margaret, Politics and Public Administration Information and Research Services, Department of the Parliamentary Library, Parliament House, Canberra, ACT 2600

TEMPLETON, Mr John William, Acting Parliamentary Librarian, Department of the Parliamentary Library, Parliament House, Canberra.

CHAIR—Welcome. I now invite you to make an opening statement before we ask you questions.

Mr Templeton—I have a couple of very brief comments to make. The parliamentary library has put a submission to the committee. The parliamentary library is here as a very specialised user of the parliamentary papers series. We believe that it is a very important resource and one that is frequently used by staff of the parliamentary library.

The thrust of the library's submission is that we believe that a hard copy series should continue to be provided; although, we think it could probably be changed and made more efficient. That does not mean that it is perfect in its current form but we believe that hard copy should be maintained. We also believe that there should be a single comprehensive index to facilitate retrieval.

Even though the parliamentary library is a very imaginative and innovative user of information technology, we would backup the comments made by Ms Missingham and others that there are limitations on the use of electronic access to information, particularly the preservation of material that is stored on the Internet—how long material is there, what format it is in and what version of a document it is. While electronic access is important, and has great potential, there needs to be a balance between hard copy and the traditional methods of retrieval and access. Ms Adcock and Ms Healy are the experts in this area and I will defer to their greater wisdom and experience.

Ms Adcock—I think Mr Templeton covered our main issues. We are a specialised user and we use the material heavily. We probably have about 100 linear metres of shelving for our parliamentary papers collection, and our collection goes back to 1901. We have copies of all papers, both those ordered to be printed and those that have not been included in the general parliamentary papers run. We find that that collection is invaluable. It is used constantly by our own information specialists and research specialists and we also make copies available to members.

We support the submission put up by the Association of Parliamentary Librarians of Australasia. The state parliamentary libraries also use parliamentary papers in a similar heavy fashion to what we do. Depository libraries are another element which allows a wider access for the general public. The state libraries and the university libraries are also in that category. The Commonwealth libraries tend to be the ones who ask for the material on request.

For us, having a clear, single organised series, which is done once rather than many times over, would be the most effective way to go. We have some concern at the moment about the duplication of the series in that an initial number is issued and then there is a changeover to a permanent number series. In other words, we maintain two runs: the daily papers number and those that are in the permanent run. From our point of view, that involves extra handling and we see that there would be a value in streamlining it.

Preservation is a real concern at the moment, especially if the Internet is being seen as a solution. At the last election, with a change of government, there was a lot of outcry because government departments took off the Internet all of the press releases from previous ministers and put on the new lot. Libraries are concerned with the totality of the record, not just as governments change, so that was a particular concern. I think we mentioned in our submission that we keep special collections of party policy documents. They changed between the print form and the electronic form, and there is a problem of some corruption and so on. It is a problem when you are trying to find the authoritative text of a particular document.

We have a very good Internet link and we use it extensively. It is available at the desktop for our information and research specialists. However, if someone wants to download and print a large document it can tie up the printers for long periods and there is no guarantee that it will come down accurately. Because of that difficulty with accuracy, we now put a disclaimer on material that we send out to senators and members which points out that it has come from an electronic source and that we cannot guarantee its total authenticity and accuracy.

Ms Healy—The only follow up statement that I want to make is that we are in a very lucky position in that we have immediate access to the papers. They are very heavily used. We are able to get copies of the Daily Papers Lists and we can phone through to the Bills and Papers Office for help about the index. Our experience in using the parliamentary papers does make us very concerned that there should be good access for the wider community. We get quite a number of public inquiries, as would the Bills and Papers Office, from outside users, government publications, librarians and from members' electorate offices. We are continually made aware of how difficult it can be to get access to these publications, particularly if the inquirers are not in an area where there are adequate library services, and so many of these libraries are facing cutbacks.

CHAIR—How do you deal with inquiries from the public?

Ms Healy—We are as helpful as we can be, given our necessity to give priority to members and senators. We always try to suggest where the information might be available and we liaise with the Bills and Papers office to try to make sure that their needs are met.

CHAIR—Do I understand that the basis of your submission is that you support the continuation of the parliamentary papers series but with a beefed up indexing system?

Mr Templeton—We would support the continuation of a series, preferably one without the need to change numbering, and perhaps a more widely available and easily accessed central indexing. We think there could be improvements, and we are sympathetic to the situation of the Department of the House of Representatives that they want to reduce some of their costs. If there is any suggestion of looking at ways of doing that we would be very happy to help. Getting back to our starting point, this is a very important public resource and, while electronic information and electronic access has come an enormous way, there still has to be the striking of that balance between the numbers of hard copy kept, the access to those hard copies and, more importantly, the widespread knowledge of where those copies are.

Mr LIEBERMAN—Your very positive and helpful offer on page four in your conclusions attracted my eye. In the second paragraph you talk about the community service obligation and state:

If by other means it is possible to ensure good access and distribution of papers, and if the discontinuation of the series does not result in a transfer of labour and costs with consequent decreased efficiency in organisations, then the Library would see no problem with discontinuation of the official numbering of the series.

With that sort of very wholesome and positive approach to change, it occurs to me that it might be appropriate to ask the parliamentary library to give us a supplementary submission after representatives have had the opportunity of examining both the House of Representatives submission and the Australian Government Publishing Service submission, which were only tabled today. I also noticed your very wise recommendation that we make sure we know what is happening with the Government Publishing Service or at least ensure that any change has written into it a requirement that the effect of the change be immediately examined in respect of the process that we have in place at the time. That is a very good recommendation. In my view, that is absolutely essential.

Mr Templeton—We would be very pleased to give a supplementary submission to the committee after we have had a look at those other submissions.

CHAIR—Thank you for attending and we look forward to receiving your further deliberations.

Committee adjourned at 11.34 a.m.