



AUSTRALIAN SENATE

CLERK OF THE SENATE

Submission No. 2

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31 May 2013

Senator Louise Pratt  
Chair  
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital  
and External Territories  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Senator Pratt

**PROVISION OF AMENITY WITHIN THE PARLIAMENTARY TRIANGLE**

Thank you for your committee's invitation to make a submission to its inquiry into the provision of amenity within the Parliamentary Triangle.

For the purposes of this submission, and given the limited timeframe, I sought the views of Senate Department staff on the issue by way of a brief questionnaire distributed by email on 28 May, with a closing date of 30 May. There were 66 responses to the questionnaire, representing just under 40% of staff in all areas of the department. The results of the survey were collated by staff in the department's Human Resource Management Section and are provided here for the information of the committee.

In addition to providing the views of staff, I would like to comment on three matters of relevance to the terms of reference:

- the changing nature of the working environment;
- particular features of working life in Parliament House, including the facilities available within the building;
- features of the department's employment framework and human resource policies which recognise the relative isolation of working in Parliament House and the extended hours often worked by staff.

*The changing nature of the working environment*

The relevant features of the working environment in Parliament House have been relatively stable over the past 25 years for Senate Department staff. Its characteristics include:

- an expectation that staff will be physically present in the building to support the Senate, its committees and senators, with minimal opportunity for working from home;
- an expectation that the majority of staff are full-time employees, often working extended hours;
- an office environment with heavy dependence on information and communications technology;
- a building, relatively isolated by its design and scale from surrounding buildings, and accessible mainly by car, with some bus services;
- provision of onsite parking which has been restricted over time to certain categories of pass holders as the number of nearby office buildings increases, particularly on the north east perimeter
- provision of bicycle racks and access to showers/changing rooms.

There have been significant changes over the same period to aspects of the non-working environment. Extended retail hours and the growth of online services have taken a great deal of pressure off the need to run errands during lunchbreaks. Paying bills, undertaking banking transactions, collecting medical rebates or getting prescriptions filled, picking up supplies for dinner or the next day's school lunches, or replenishing the cat food are all possible to achieve by methods other than physically leaving the workplace at lunchtime. Access to some services like dry cleaning remains largely confined to business hours or slightly extended business hours but most things can be done on the way to or from work, or online. Nevertheless, the survey results indicated that approximately half of the respondents leave the building during the day at least once a week for these types of purposes, to attend appointments, in relation to child care arrangements or to access alternative food outlets

#### *Working life at Parliament House, including facilities available within the building*

Working life at Parliament House is characterised by periods of long hours and intense activity, particularly during sitting and estimates weeks. For many staff, leaving the building to access nearby amenities is not an option. It is unlikely to be an option in the future, even if there were more amenities in the area.

In any case, leaving the building is not easy, except by car. Walking anywhere, particularly from the Senate wing, involves significant distances and the traffic arrangements and road design do not encourage walkers. The limited time available can rule out walking as an option. Pressure on car parking in nearby centres such as Kingston or Manuka can also be a deterrent to accessing services outside the building.

In recognition of the requirements and pressures of parliamentary service and the isolation of Parliament House at the apex of the Parliamentary Triangle, and for historical reasons, there are numerous facilities at Parliament House that are not generally available to other workers in the Parliamentary Triangle. These include such onsite facilities as:

- a post office (which is useful for receipt as well as despatch of items)
- a bank and ATM facilities

- a child care centre
- a travel agent
- a gymnasium and swimming pool
- a hairdresser
- a gift shop (which for staff is sometimes the source of emergency gifts)
- a florist (ditto)
- food and beverage outlets, including a general store with a limited range of items (and a dry cleaning service)
- vending machines
- a members' and guests' dining room which has offered restaurant-style facilities for staff on non-sitting days on an irregular basis
- a free public WiFi network.

Access to these facilities, combined with the distribution of kitchen facilities in the general office areas, means that basic needs can be met without leaving the building.

In this respect, staff working in Parliament House are generally better off than those working elsewhere in the Triangle, although some of those services – such as the post office – are also available to people visiting the building. This raises the question whether there are services that could be provided in publicly accessible areas of Parliament House to increase amenity in the Triangle. However, the same factors of distance and isolation that keep us here during the day may well deter other workers in the Triangle from climbing the hill to access those services here.

*Features of the department's employment framework and human resource policies which recognise the relative isolation of working in Parliament House and the extended hours often worked by staff*

The department's enterprise agreement includes a commitment for the department to cover the fringe benefits tax liability should it apply to employees because of the advent of paid parking in the Parliamentary Triangle. The same clause was also included in the previous agreement following negotiations with staff.

The department's policy on use of departmental resources allows occasional use of such resources as email, the internet and office services (telephones, photocopiers, printers, stationery, mail collection services) for personal purposes, provided that such use is minimal and generally carried out outside standard working hours.

With the growth of ownership of smartphones and tablets, and the availability of a public WiFi network, staff have less need to use official resources to facilitate occasional personal business.

*Survey of Senate Department staff*

Whether the availability of more amenities in the Parliamentary Triangle would change the pattern of use of such services by employees in the Senate Department is a moot point, as the

data collected in our quick survey shows. A summary of those findings, together with the questions asked, is attached.

I would be happy to assist the committee further in any way.

Yours sincerely

(Dr Rosemary Laing)

## Summary of Survey Findings on the Provision of Amenities within the Parliamentary Triangle

### Department of the Senate

May 2013

#### Introduction

1.1 On 24 May 2013, the Clerk of the Senate was invited by the chair of the [Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories](#), Senator Pratt, to make a submission on the provision of amenities within the Parliamentary Triangle.

1.2 On 28 May 2013, employees of the Department of the Senate (the department) were asked to respond to a survey on that subject. Responses to the survey received prior to 31 May 2013 were taken into consideration.

1.3 The survey contained eight main questions. These questions were grouped into the following two subcategories:

- Travelling to and from Parliament House and within the Parliamentary Triangle; and
- Retail services including the provision of food within the Parliamentary Triangle in comparison to services offered in other business areas (e.g. Civic).

1.4 The survey questions are listed at **Attachment A**.

#### Findings

1.5 Sixty-six responses to the survey were received. These responses came from Senior Executive Service, Parliamentary Executive Level and Australian Parliamentary Service level employees. Responses were received from employees in each of the Offices within the department (i.e. Clerk's Office, Table Office, Committee Office, Procedure Office and Black Rod's Office). Responses were received from full-time and part-time employees.

1.6 The majority of responses (i.e. 81%) noted that they drove to work either by themselves or shared driving with another person. Three per cent said that they caught the bus and 6% said that they walked or rode.

1.7 The influencing factors most frequently given in relation to why employees drove to work over other means of transport were convenience and lack of adequate public transport. Others also noted the need to drop off and pick up children before and after work; having to go out during the day; changing work deadlines and the provision of free, secure car parking at Parliament House for employees.

1.8 While it is noted that ACTION has approximately 71 services<sup>1</sup> per weekday stopping at Parliament House - commencing at approximately 6:10am and concluding at 11:10pm (i.e. Routes 2 and 3), and noting accessibility to other bus routes nearby, respondents highlighted that direct bus services to Parliament House usually required catching multiple connecting buses and that trips were much slower than other modes of transport. It was noted that the bus routes that service Parliament House were not direct to town centres (i.e. Civic or Woden) and they worked their way around certain suburbs and the Parliamentary Triangle.

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<sup>1</sup> *Action Bus Timetable*, [http://www.action.act.gov.au/timetables\\_and\\_maps/routes\\_by\\_number](http://www.action.act.gov.au/timetables_and_maps/routes_by_number) (31 May 2013).

1.9 Of those respondents who walked or rode to work, most cited that they did this for health and convenience reasons. A number of respondents noted that they would prefer to walk or ride to and from work but did not do so because of safety concerns in relation to a lack of direct and safe bike lanes to and from Parliament House.

1.10 The majority of respondents (80%) agreed that current amenities provided at Parliament House were adequate given their regular mode of transport (i.e. car, bus, bike or walk). That said, comments about insufficient parking spaces during parliamentary sitting weeks and concerns about the introduction of paid parking in the Parliamentary Triangle were made by many respondents. A respondent noted that free, secure car parking compensated for other negative conditions of employment associated with working at Parliament House and was a factor that differentiated employment in the Parliamentary Service from other employment.

1.11 For those choosing to ride their bikes to and from Parliament House, comments about better storage and changing areas were made. A respondent noted that the cost of some specialist bikes is great and that current arrangements are less than secure and detract from this mode of transport being used.

1.12 Fifty-one per cent of respondents suggested that they left Parliament House during the work day. Of those, the majority of employees noted that they left Parliament House only once a week. The reasons given for this were to attend personal appointments (e.g. solicitors, medical practitioners, hairdressers), to access retail services (e.g. banks, chemists, alternative food outlets) and because of childcare arrangements.

1.13 Of those who did not leave Parliament House during the work day, 15% of respondents noted that this was because of difficulties in getting car parking upon their return. It was noted by some, that this becomes more problematic when parliament is sitting.

1.14 Nearly half of the respondents (43%) indicated that they regularly use other retail services in the Parliamentary Triangle. One respondent noted that the range of cafés in the Parliamentary Triangle was limited and that there were few retail outlets, other than those specifically designed to cater for tourists. Some respondents noted that when they did need to access retail services that they would travel to Civic, Woden, Fyshwick or Kingston. A suggestion for a small shopping centre in Barton was made and others noted the ability to purchase items online could be done without leaving the workplace as the reason for not needing retail services in the Parliamentary Triangle.

1.15 Of the sixty-six responses received, six (9%) respondents had a high level of dissatisfaction with the level of retail services in the Parliamentary Triangle, 10 (15%) said that they had a medium level of dissatisfaction and another 10 (15%) had a low level of dissatisfaction. Other respondents were either not dissatisfied with the retail services offered in the Parliamentary Triangle or chose not to respond to the question.

1.16 It is noted that there are a range of amenities provided at Parliament House (i.e. a bank and automatic teller machines; a Post Office; a travel agent; a physiotherapist and onsite nurse for first aid; a hairdresser, a gym; a childcare centre; a library; a gift shop; a florist; and, food outlets and vending machines). Respondents noted using a range of these, with food outlets being the most common.

1.17 The most commonly noted concern about the retail services provided in Parliament House was in relation to food outlets. Quality, range, price, opening hours and service were

all noted as not being to the expected level. Concerns about food outlets were also one of the most commonly listed reasons why respondents left Parliament House during the day. Respondents noted that there needs to be more impetus for the current food outlets to improve service and satisfy customers and that this aspect had not been managed well.

1.18 Of the sixty-six responses received, five (7%) respondents had a high level of dissatisfaction with the level of retail services at Parliament House, 12 (18%) said that they had a medium level of dissatisfaction and another 11 (16%) had a low level of dissatisfaction. Other respondents were either not dissatisfied with the retail services offered at Parliament House or chose not to respond to the question.

1.19 Thirty per cent of respondents stated that they would like more shopping options in the Parliamentary Triangle, including a supermarket or convenience store. A further 19% said that better food outlets were needed. Respondents said that accessibility and pricing would influence their use of these amenities.

1.20 In addition to those who work in the Parliamentary Triangle, it was noted that visitors, including school groups who attend the department's Parliamentary Education Office regularly express their concerns about the lack of amenities in the area. Approximately 140,000 students, teachers, parents and bus drivers enter the Parliamentary Triangle each year to visit various institutions. It is noted that tour schedules are often planned around the need to provide amenities for these visitors such as toilets, lunch stops and bus parking bays. A respondent suggested that a place within the Parliamentary Triangle is needed for school tour operators where they can park their buses; have access to toilets; where there is an all-weather place to have a break and allow students to 'run around' safely.

1.21 Twenty-seven per cent of respondents stated that they would like better food outlets in Parliament House. A convenience store and chemist were also noted by some as preferable. Quality, price and convenience were noted by respondents as influencing factors that would get them to use these amenities in the future.

## **Summary**

1.22 The Parliamentary Triangle, including Parliament House, is somewhat isolated from amenities provided in Civic and other town centres in Canberra. Few amenities used by respondents are found within the Parliamentary Triangle and while the town centres are relatively close in proximity, transport options and parking issues precluded many respondents from accessing them.

1.23 While some amenities, such as retail services, can be accessed online from one's computer, mobile telephone or portable, handheld devices, access to quality and affordable food outlets were noted as problematic for many respondents.

1.24 The provision of more amenities was recommended by many respondents and would be used if convenient and they provided cost effective services. In addition to those amenities wanted by those who work in the Parliamentary Triangle, better amenities for visitors, and in particular school groups, are needed.

## Provision of amenities within the Parliamentary Triangle

The Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories has written to the Clerk of the Senate and asked that she make a submission in relation to the provision of amenities within the Parliamentary Triangle including those delivered at Parliament House.

Responses to the following questions will be collated and used to formulate that submission.

Responses received by COB on **Thursday 30 May 2013** will be taken into consideration.

Please email your completed survey response to: [hrm.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:hrm.sen@aph.gov.au).

*Questions 1 to 4 relate to travelling to and from Parliament House and within the Parliamentary Triangle.*

### Question 1

<i>How do you travel to and from work?</i>
Please select an appropriate response
If other, please provide details below.
Comments

### Question 2

<i>What influences the choice identified in your response to question 1?</i>
Comments

### Question 3

<i>Once you are at Parliament House, do you find the amenities provided in support of your regular mode of travel (i.e. car, bus, bike, walk) are adequate?</i>
Please select an appropriate response
If no, please provide details below.
Comments



#### Question 4

<i>How many times a week would you travel outside of the Parliamentary Triangle to access amenities during the working day?</i>
Please select an appropriate response
What are the main reasons for this travel?
Comments

Questions 5 to 8 relate to retail services including the provision of food within the Parliamentary Triangle in comparison to services offered in other business areas (e.g. Civic).

#### Question 5

<i>What type of retail services including food outlets do you regularly use within the <u>Parliamentary Triangle</u> excluding <u>Parliament House</u>?</i>			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Financial services	<input type="checkbox"/>	Postal services
<input type="checkbox"/>	Travel services	<input type="checkbox"/>	Health/medical services
<input type="checkbox"/>	Fitness services	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hairdressers/beauty services
<input type="checkbox"/>	Childcare services	<input type="checkbox"/>	Information services (e.g. library)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Gift shops	<input type="checkbox"/>	Florist
<input type="checkbox"/>	Food outlets (including cafés, restaurants and vending machines)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other
Of those retail services you use in the <u>Parliamentary Triangle</u> excluding <u>Parliament House</u> , which do you consider to be inadequate? If able, please provide reasons.			
Comments			
Please provide any suggestions you may have about how these could be ameliorated.			
Comments			
If applicable, please rate your level of dissatisfaction with the retail services within the <u>Parliamentary Triangle</u> excluding <u>Parliament House</u> .			
Please selection an appropriate response			

#### Question 6

<i>What type retail services including food outlets do you regularly use in <u>Parliament House</u>?</i>			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Financial services	<input type="checkbox"/>	Postal services
<input type="checkbox"/>	Travel services	<input type="checkbox"/>	Health/medical services

<input type="checkbox"/>	Fitness services	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hairdressers/beauty services
<input type="checkbox"/>	Childcare services	<input type="checkbox"/>	Information services (e.g. library)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Gift shops	<input type="checkbox"/>	Florist
<input type="checkbox"/>	Food outlets (including cafés, restaurants and vending machines)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other
Of those retail services you use in <u>Parliament House</u> , which do you consider to be inadequate? If able, please provide reasons.			
Comments			
Please provide any suggestions you may have about how these could be ameliorated.			
Comments			
If applicable, please rate your level of dissatisfaction with the retail services in <u>Parliament House</u> .			
Please selection an appropriate response			

### Question 7

What retail amenities would you like to see in the <u>Parliamentary Triangle</u> ?
Comments
What factors would influence you to use them?
Comments

### Question 8

What retail amenities would you like to see at <u>Parliament House</u> ?
Comments
What factors would influence you to use them?
Comments