

Introduction

The Joint Committee on Publications

- 1.1 The Joint Committee on Publications is comprised of the Publications Committees of both the House of Representatives and the Senate. These committees can meet separately or together as a joint committee.
- 1.2 When meeting jointly, the Committee has the power to “inquire into and report on the publication and distribution of parliamentary and government publications and on matters referred to it by a Minister”.¹
- 1.3 This is the 12th report of the Committee since its establishment in 1970, and the fourth dealing specifically with the Parliamentary Papers Series (PPS). Other inquiries relating to the series were presented in 1971, 1986 and 1997.
- 1.4 In 1997 the Committee recommended that the series “continue in its present form until there is a viable replacement either in electronic or printed form (or both).² This recommendation was accepted by the Presiding Officers.³

1 House of Representatives standing order 219 and Senate standing order 22.

2 Joint Committee on Publications, *Future of the Parliamentary Papers Series*, Canberra, 1997, p. iii.

3 Presiding Officers’ response, *Senate Hansard* (10.11.98) pp. 32–3; Government response, *Senate Hansard* (11.3.99) p. 2773.

The Parliamentary Papers Series

Purpose

- 1.5 The Parliamentary Papers Series is a comprehensive series of documents recording the activities of the Australian government, the Parliament and its committees since Federation.⁴ The series is intended to provide a convenient and accessible permanent record of certain papers concerning the Parliament and Government.⁵

Selection of documents

- 1.6 The 1964 report of the Joint Select Committee on Parliamentary and Government Publications (the Erwin Committee) stated that documents presented to the Parliament “of a substantial nature” should be selected for the PPS.⁶ Responsibility for determining which documents are to be included in the series lies with either House.
- 1.7 A resolution that a presented document be printed (Senate), or that the document be made a Parliamentary Paper (House of Representatives), includes that document in the PPS.⁷ This is the way most Parliamentary committee reports are included in the series.
- 1.8 For the vast majority of documents, however, this function is delegated to the Publications Committee of each House, which usually meet together as the Joint Committee on Publications.
- 1.9 The Committee considers all documents presented to Parliament which have not been made a Parliamentary Paper by either House. The Committee recommends which of these documents should be included in the PPS. These recommendations are usually always adopted by the Houses.
- 1.10 Guidelines for inclusion of documents into the series were laid down in the Committee’s 1977 report, and were amended by the Committee in 1986.⁸

4 Department of the Senate, *Submission 1*, p. 1.

5 Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission 16*, p. 1.

6 Joint Select Committee on Parliamentary and Government Publications, *Report*, Canberra, 1964, p. 28.

7 Senate standing order 169 and House of Representatives standing order 202.

8 Joint Committee on Publications, *Inquiry into the purpose, scope and distribution of the Parliamentary Paper Series*, Canberra, 1977, p. 6; Joint Committee on Publications, *Review of the cost and distribution of the Parliamentary Paper Series*, Canberra, 1986, p. 9.

Distribution

- 1.11 The Parliamentary Papers Series is essentially two products:
- Loose documents (called pamphlet copies), which are processed as parliamentary papers as soon as possible after tabling. These are dispatched in economical parcels and not necessarily in numeric order.
 - Blister packs, which, as of 2001, come to recipients infrequently in large batches after each document in the batch is available and each volume's preliminary matter is ready. (No blister pack volume is dispatched until all its contents are available.) The last volume in the last batch for the year contains an index. This product may be bound by the recipient.⁹
- 1.12 Each document is allocated a unique parliamentary paper number to assist in identification. This number is shown on a label at the foot of the back cover on all PPS copies of documents.
- 1.13 Government departments and agencies are required to supply 150 B5 copies of each Parliamentary Paper. Forty of these copies are untrimmed, or slightly oversized to facilitate binding, which are the copies used for the blister packs. Author bodies meet the costs of producing these papers and any action made necessary because the documents do not meet the required production standards.¹⁰
- 1.14 The series is administered by the Department of the House of Representatives, with the assistance of the Department of the Senate. The chamber departments share the costs of the series, estimated to be approximately \$130 000 per year.¹¹ This figure reflects the processing, storage and distribution costs of the series.
- 1.15 Canprint Communications Pty Ltd is the Parliament's distribution agent for the PPS. It is responsible for labelling each parliamentary paper, distribution of the series and the collation and storage of blister packs.
- 1.16 Prior to 1 January 2006, recipients of the series received free copies of the series in pamphlet and/or blister pack form. The Parliament, through the Joint Committee on Publications and the Presiding Officers, determines which organisations are entitled to receive sets of the series.

9 House of Representatives Table Office, *Parliamentary Papers Series*, see http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/publ/admin_rec.htm.

10 Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Guidelines for the Presentation of Government Documents, Government Responses, Ministerial Statements & Other Instruments to the Parliament*, see http://www.dpmc.gov.au/guidelines/docs/guidelines_govt_docs.pdf.

11 Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission 16*, p. 12.

- 1.17 The criteria for inclusion in the guidelines “were gradually laid down in the early years of the [20th] century”¹² and have been designed to ensure the widest possible dissemination of Parliamentary publications.
- 1.18 Previous recommendations of the Committee relating to these guidelines have attempted to balance public access to the series against the desire for cost effectiveness. In its 1986 report, the Committee recommended that secondary schools be excluded from the free distribution guidelines, as no schools were currently receiving them. The Committee also recommended excluding members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery because this group already received documents upon presentation, and the provision of PPS copies would be an unnecessary duplication.¹³
- 1.19 The series is highly valued by recipients as it provides publications that can otherwise be hard to find or obtain.¹⁴ Many submissions received by the Committee stated that the series is frequently used by students, researchers, staff and clients.

The inquiry

- 1.20 On 12 May 2005 the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives (the Presiding Officers) wrote to the Committee, informing them of changes they had made to the distribution of the PPS, to take effect from 1 January 2006, and requested the views of the Committee on further, more extensive changes.
- 1.21 The Committee resolved to undertake a formal inquiry into the more extensive changes suggested by the Presiding Officers, as well as investigating the impact of the changes already made.
- 1.22 The Committee contacted all recipients of the PPS, including all Commonwealth Government Departments and several peak bodies, informing them of the changes made by the Presiding Officers and inviting them to make submissions to the inquiry.
- 1.23 The Committee advertised its inquiry in the House Committees advertisement in *The Australian* newspaper on 5 October 2005.

12 Joint Committee on Publications, *Report relating to the distribution and pricing of Parliamentary publications*, Canberra, 1971, p. 39

13 Joint Committee on Publications, *Review of the cost and distribution of the Parliamentary Paper Series*, Canberra, 1986, pp. 21-22.

14 Parliamentary Library of Western Australia, *Submission 12*, p. 1.

- 1.24 Twenty submissions were received, as well as three supplementary submissions. A list of submissions is at Appendix A. Six exhibits were also received and these are listed in Appendix B.
- 1.25 The Committee held public hearings on 31 October and 7 and 28 November 2005 at Parliament House, Canberra. Details of the hearings and the witnesses who appeared are at Appendix C.
- 1.26 Realising that the Committee would be unable to report before the changes to the distribution took effect on 1 January 2006, the Chair of the Committee wrote to the Presiding Officers, requesting that the implementation of the changes be delayed until the Committee presented its report.
- 1.27 The Presiding Officers replied by stating that the changes would be implemented as planned and indicated that stock numbers supplied by agencies for the PPS will not be reduced in the short term, to allow flexibility in responding to the Committee's recommendations stemming from this report.
- 1.28 On 6 February 2006 members of the Committee undertook on-site inspections and informal briefings on both the National Library of Australia's PANDORA web archive project and the processing of parliamentary papers by Canprint Communications Pty Ltd.