

Changes to the eligibility guidelines

Background

- 2.1 Hard copies of the Parliamentary Papers Series (PPS) are provided free of charge to eligible recipients. The distribution list is determined according to guidelines approved by the Presiding Officers, and has been amended from time to time. Organisations apply to receive the series free of charge and, if they meet the criteria, are included in the distribution list.
- 2.2 The Committee first made recommendations concerning the free distribution list in 1971, setting out the eligibility guidelines in substantially the same form as then applied. In his submission to that inquiry, the Clerk of the House of Representatives stated that recommendations by the Committee would be welcomed, as the criteria for inclusion had not been challenged for many years.¹
- 2.3 Since that time, the number of copies distributed to eligible recipients has been reduced from at least 552 in 1971 to 134 in 2005. Several categories of recipients, such as secondary schools and newspapers, have been removed on the recommendation of the Committee,² contributing to the reduction in distributed copies.

1 Joint Committee on Publications, *Report relating to the distribution and pricing of parliamentary publications*, Canberra, 1971, p. 34.

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

Summary of changes

- 2.4 The Presiding Officers' changes to the PPS guidelines, to take effect from 1 January 2006, include restricting the list of eligible recipients. The "increasing electronic availability of the documents in the PPS" was cited as the basis for making these changes.
- 2.5 Under the revised eligibility guidelines, the libraries of States, State parliaments, tertiary education institutions and the main national or parliamentary library of a country which has an exchange arrangement with the National Library of Australia will continue to be eligible for one free copy of the series, along with appropriate addressees as determined by the Presiding Officers.
- 2.6 Twenty five recipients – fourteen departmental libraries, seven foreign embassies, three municipal libraries and one political party – will no longer be eligible for a free copy of the series.³
- 2.7 The Department of the House of Representatives and the Department of the Senate stated that there would be minor savings in postage from the reduced number of recipients.⁴

Commonwealth government departmental libraries

- 2.8 Of those recipients removed from the eligibility guidelines, only Commonwealth government department libraries provided submissions to the inquiry, either on their own behalf or through the Australian Government Libraries Information Network.
- 2.9 The Department of the House of Representatives reported that of the 25 bodies no longer eligible to receive the series free of charge, four government departments wrote to the Department seeking to continue receiving the PPS. The Department of the House of Representatives stated that it had some sympathy with the case put by these agencies for their reinstatement.⁵
- 2.10 The Committee received evidence that departmental libraries consider the series essential in supporting their agencies in the development and delivery of government services. The PPS is a vital source of information on the activities of government and the parliament, including the review

3 Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission 16*, p. 3.

4 Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission 16*, p. 3 and 11; Ms Rosa Ferranda, Department of the Senate, *Transcript of evidence*, 7 November 2005, p. 4.

5 Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission 16*, p. 10.

- of past policies and programs.⁶ As such, the series is highly valued and utilised, especially in those departments whose work encompasses all portfolios, such as the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.⁷
- 2.11 Receipt of the PPS by these departmental libraries would avoid a significant duplication of effort and waste of resources of library staff who would otherwise have to obtain the documents from other sources, such as from author agencies directly, inter-library loan or via the Internet, were the documents to be available online.⁸
- 2.12 Several submissions expressed reservations about accessing the PPS electronically. While most parliamentary papers are placed online by author agencies, there are gaps in the online series, and long term access to the papers is not guaranteed.⁹ The Committee also heard evidence that, even if a document was available online, desktop internet access is not universal across government agencies.¹⁰
- 2.13 The Department of the Senate submitted that the provision of copies of the PPS to departmental libraries is “an appropriate exchange” for the documents provided for the PPS by government departments and agencies.¹¹
- 2.14 The Committee accepts that the removal of departmental libraries from the eligibility guidelines would have a detrimental effect on their ability to provide effective and efficient services to government. The minimal cost savings to the chamber departments would be outweighed by the increased cost to be incurred by each departmental library as a result of their exclusion from the guidelines. The Committee therefore encourages the Presiding Officers to take a ‘Whole of Government’ view when reviewing the eligibility guidelines to the PPS.
- 2.15 Several submissions recommended that Commonwealth departmental libraries continue to be eligible to receive free copies of the PPS and that

6 Australian Government Libraries Information Network, *Submission 4*, p. 2. See also Department of Education, Science and Training, *Submission 17*, p. 1; Attorney-General’s Department, *Submission 20*, p. 1.

7 Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 7*, p. 1.

8 Australian Government Libraries Information Network, *Submission 4*, p. 2. See also Department of Education, Science and Training, *Submission 17*, p. 1; Department of Parliamentary Services (Commonwealth), *Submission 11*, p. 2.

9 Ms Kym Holden, Australian Government Libraries Information Network, *Transcript of evidence*, 31 October 2005, p. 8; Ms Gaik Khong, Department of Parliamentary Services (Commonwealth), *Transcript of evidence*, 7 November 2005, pp. 19-20.

10 Ms Kym Holden, Australian Government Libraries Information Network, *Transcript of evidence*, 31 October 2005, p. 7.

11 Department of the Senate, *Submission 1*, p. 2.

individual libraries be asked whether they wish to remain on the PPS distribution list.¹² The Department of the House of Representatives commented that the “inclination is for people to say that they wish to continue to receive a free service”, indicating that it is unlikely for recipients to opt out of the distribution list.¹³

- 2.16 The Committee agrees with this sentiment but notes that the revised guidelines recommend the regular survey of recipients. The Committee encourages the Department of the House of Representatives, as the principal administrator of the series, to check with recipients, at least every 18 months, whether they wish to continue to receive their entitlement.

Municipal libraries

- 2.17 Under the changes made by the Presiding Officers, municipal libraries will no longer be eligible to receive a free copy of the PPS.
- 2.18 In its 1997 report on the future of the PPS the Committee stated that “it is through Australia’s library systems that the public has access to parliamentary papers.” At that time, it was estimated that 70% of the Australian population visited a public library between 1989 and 1994.¹⁴
- 2.19 During 2003-04 there were 105 million visitors to local government, national and state libraries. Almost 100 million of these were to the 532 local government libraries.¹⁵
- 2.20 The Presiding Officers have agreed that, in the instances where such libraries have received parliamentary papers prior to 1 January 2006, these libraries will remain on the distribution list.¹⁶

12 Department of the Senate, *Submission 1*, p. 2. See also Australian Library and Information Network, *Submission 6*, p. 4; Ms Kym Holden, Australian Government Libraries Information Network, *Transcript of evidence*, 31 October 2005, p. 5.

13 Ms R McClelland, Department of the House of Representatives, *Transcript of evidence*, 7 November 2005, p. 10.

14 Joint Committee on Publications, *Future of the Parliamentary Papers Series*, Canberra, 1997, pp. 10-11.

15 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Public Libraries, Australia, 2003-04*, see [www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/DD3BEA2E4FA5DA11CA256FF100787DE0/\\$File/85610_2003-04.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/DD3BEA2E4FA5DA11CA256FF100787DE0/$File/85610_2003-04.pdf).

16 Australian Library and Information Association, *Submission 6*, p. 4; Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission 16*, p. 15.

Foreign embassies and political parties

- 2.21 The Committee has in the past accepted that foreign embassies¹⁷ and political parties¹⁸ should be included on the free list for the PPS, on request. This has been based on ensuring the “widest possible access to documents tabled in the Parliament”.¹⁹
- 2.22 The demand for the series among these recipients has, however, declined since 1971, when political parties and embassies received at least 45 copies between them²⁰. By 1997 this had fallen to 22 copies and by 2005, eight copies.²¹
- 2.23 While libraries offer access to the general public, and departmental libraries serve the public through better services to government, the sets of the PPS held by foreign embassies and political parties are accessed by a limited number of people.
- 2.24 The Committee considers that the alternative methods of accessing parliamentary papers, while unacceptable for departmental libraries, may be appropriate for embassies and political parties.
- 2.25 As suggested by the Presiding Officers, these bodies can access most PPS documents through the publications.gov.au website, or can obtain copies directly from the author body. This has the added advantage of them receiving only the documents of interest, rather than the entire series.
- 2.26 Another approach for these bodies may be to subscribe to the series. The issue of providing the series as a subscription service is discussed further in Chapter 5.

Recommendation 1

- 2.27 **The Committee recommends that the eligibility guidelines for the Parliamentary Papers Series be amended to include Commonwealth government departmental libraries.**

17 Joint Committee on Publications, *Future of the Parliamentary Papers Series*, Canberra, 1997, p. 14.

18 Joint Committee on Publications, *Report relating to the distribution and pricing of Parliamentary publications*, Canberra, 1971, p. 7.

19 Joint Committee on Publications, *Review of the cost and distribution of the Parliamentary Paper Series*, Canberra, 1986, p. 20.

20 Joint Committee on Publications, *Report relating to the distribution and pricing of Parliamentary publications*, Canberra, 1971, p. 39. These 45 copies were of papers relating to financial matters. It is unclear how many copies of the other papers were received by foreign embassies.

21 Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission 16*, pp. 14-15.

Recommendation 2

- 2.28 **The Committee recommends that recipients of the series be regularly surveyed to ascertain whether they wish to continue receiving Parliamentary Papers.**