



Submission 06

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20 October, 2005

Mr Jason Sherd
Secretary
Joint Committee on Publications
Parliament of Australia
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Sherd

Re: Inquiry into the Distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) thanks the Committee for its invitation to make a submission to the Inquiry. The Association is the professional organisation for the Australian library and information services sector and represents 5 000 individual members, 1 000 institutional members and the interests of 10.7 million library users. The submission has been prepared by our Expert Group on Government Publications.

The Parliamentary Papers Series (PPS) is the most important record of government and Parliament available to Australians. The free entitlement of their national, state, university and government libraries to receive a hard copy set of the Parliamentary Paper Series has provided Australian citizens with easy access to Parliamentary Papers.

At present, digital copies of the PPS can only be considered as an addition, not an alternative, to the hard copy format. Providing access to digital copies of the PPS and this is a welcome consideration by the Committee since most of the series is being published in an electronic format already. However until there is in place a reliable and secure system for distribution and preservation of the digital publications, ALIA considers that hard copy is the required format for distribution to libraries of record to ensure long-term access and preservation of the content of the series.

A purchased subscription service to the series is not appropriate for national, state, university and government libraries. The Parliamentary Papers are important to public understanding of the organisation of government and of government activities, and the accessibility of the reports is essential for the public accountability of government in a democratic society. Libraries fulfil an important role by making the information in the papers freely available to the public now and in the future. Subscription charges or cost-recovery for material should not be required for this service.

1. Summary of recommendations

General

- That the Committee's brief be widened to assess and monitor on a continuing basis the broader issues of access to and preservation of government information.
- That principles on government information access be developed, including principles of access equity for all users, which could provide the basis for legislation.

Specifically relating to digital issues

- That access to the PPS be enhanced by providing a website where papers are published and maintained in digital format. The PPS need their own database of electronic papers located and maintained at the Parliament of Australia. A website with links to the departmental publications existing on agency websites is not a satisfactory alternative because access to publications is not secure. The agency may decide to delete the publication, move to another site or the organisation itself may be abolished.
- That a program for the digital preservation of the papers be established. A responsible digital repository should be developed for all papers in the PPS for permanent preservation for public access. Investigation of this proposal would include the possibility of a system for the uploading of document files from government agencies to a digital archive system. It would provide a single authoritative source from which masters can be made to create printed or digital copies of papers to meet government, library and public needs. The alternative of users or libraries printing out the paper they require from URL addresses is not viable. The cost of printing and storing a hard copy paper should not be transferred to the range of users of Parliamentary Papers.
- That Deposit libraries be given permanent ongoing access to the digital format of the papers. In a system to distribute the PPS in digital format it is essential that the digital copy of the paper is the official tabled copy.
- That there be a co-ordinated digitisation program for making older significant government publications accessible.

Supply and distribution of papers

- That before any action is taken to exclude the libraries of the Australian government departments there be proper consultation with each of these libraries on their willingness to be taken off the list of recipients, as they are key libraries in collecting and providing access to the PPS.
- That agency performance for the supply of government documents to the Parliament be audited. This would assist the Parliament to improve the supply of documents.
- That the Parliament's contract with CanPrint Communications for the distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series include requirements for monitoring that a paper has been created, collection and timely despatch of the papers to recipients, and an efficient system for libraries to claim and receive missing papers.

- That as libraries fulfil an important role by making the information in the papers freely available to the public now and in the future there should not be subscription charges or cost-recovery for material to support this essential service to all Australians.

2. The changing government information scene

The current scene for publishing and distributing government information continues to be a complicated and changing environment. The shift from publishing in hard copy to publishing in digital format is accelerating but the reliable provision of access to and long term preservation of digital publications is still not assured. Also, programs for the digitisation of significant older publications are only now being proposed and developed.

In order to provide current background information to the Committee for the issues raised by the Inquiry I would like to bring to your attention an excellent summary of the current environment from the papers and discussion at the *Digital Amnesia Seminar* hosted by ALIA and sponsored by the National Library of Australia and the National Archives of Australia held on 21 April 2005.

<http://conferences.alia.org.au/seminars/digital.amnesia2005/summary.html>

Key issues to emerge from the seminar are:

- The Australian government is now primarily online as part of the Government Online strategy, publishing is predominantly online, services have moved more slowly to online delivery, and the strategic issues now emerging for consideration reflect a maturing in the assessment of online delivery.
- A new set of questions needs to be asked about online services and publications, including whether appropriate technology and delivery strategies are being used.
- The aspiration of placing all services and publications online is near, however whether the delivery method is appropriate has yet to be measured.
- Complex issues exist in relation to audience needs – some, such as health care consumers, have sophisticated needs for accurate detailed information.
- Analyses of types of users, such as those done by ABS, give more insight, and new or novice users require greater assistance.
- Service models for resources and e-government services are still in development and need to evolve to meet changing understanding of consumer needs and profiles.
- Legal issues, including the use of creative commons concepts, should be explored to ensure access to government resources.
- Libraries, particularly public libraries, can enhance access to and utilisation of e-government. Adequate access, however, through public terminals and support through library staff assistance requires greater funding of public libraries.
- Future resource discovery tools are likely to be influenced through the semantic web, these tools will rely on metadata which need to be intelligently and accurately applied.

- Guidelines are required to ensure that government publications are reported to Australian Government Information Management Office (AGIMO) and the National Library Australia to enable information about these publications to be made available to the public in an acceptable and useful format.
- The publishing process needs to incorporate the supply of information for resource discovery to support access and utilise cross linkages.
- Permanent access needs to be addressed as an issue urgently, before more information and publications are lost — AGIMO, the National Archives and National Library all have a contribution to make to solving this problem.
- Ongoing management of resources is required to prevent 'link rot', and to ensure that as organisations change their resources/publications remain accessible.
- The National Library Australia needs to have the right to collect, ensure access to and preserve electronic publications of all Australian government agencies.

3. Terms of Reference

- **Potential impact of changes to the distribution of the PPS made by the Presiding Officers, namely the tightening of eligibility guidelines and the cessation of blister packs to commence on 1 January 2006**

Tightening of eligibility guidelines

Recommendation: That before any action is taken to exclude the libraries of the Australian government departments there be proper consultation with each of these libraries on their willingness to be taken off the list of recipients, as they are key libraries in collecting and providing access to the PPS.

It is of concern to the Association that the new eligibility guidelines exclude the libraries of Australian government departments. These libraries are key libraries in collecting and providing access to information in the PPS and they should still be included in the eligibility guidelines.

There has not been enough time for proper consultation with all government libraries to know what their requirements are. Some libraries may be willing to be taken off the list of recipients but it is recommended that the Committee formally requests this information by surveying these libraries.

The Association notes that it is proposed that municipal libraries be excluded under the guidelines but that the three recipient libraries in this category will be asked if they wish to keep receiving the PPS papers.

Cessation of blister packs

Recommendation: That agency performance for the supply of government documents to the Parliament be audited. This would assist the Parliament to improve the supply of documents.

Recommendation: That the Parliament's contract with CanPrint Communications for the distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series include requirements for monitoring the existence of the publication, collection and

timely despatch of the papers to recipients, and an efficient system for libraries to claim and receive missing papers.

The Association has written separately in response to the decision of the Presiding Officers regarding the cessation of the blister packs to commence on 1 January 2006. That letter is at Attachment 1. A summary of the potential impact of the changes in the distribution of the PPS made by this decision and addressed in our letter is included below.

The Parliamentary Papers Series are the most important record of Government and Parliament available to the Australian public. Australian citizens have been able to have easy access to Parliamentary Papers through their public, national, state, university and government libraries supported by the free entitlement to receive an unbound set of the Parliamentary Paper Series. In this way, the more significant tabled documents dating from Federation are available throughout Australia for use by students, researchers and other sections of the public. The Series is therefore a major reference source for information on the role and activities of the Australian Parliament and Government.

With the cessation of the blister packs from 1 January 2006 there is real concern in the library sector that the efficient collection of the Parliamentary Papers set by libraries is at risk. With the new arrangement the official complete set of Parliamentary Papers will no longer be received by libraries directly from the Parliament of Australia and a gap in some library collections may be the result. It will be very difficult for libraries to collect, collate and bind a complete and reliable print set if the papers are received one by one throughout the year.

The action has transferred the problems associated with delays, time spent and costs from the Parliament to CanPrint Communications and from this organisation to libraries. These problems are going to be duplicated across all deposit libraries and will have resource and collections implications for each library.

It is recommended that the auditing of agency performance for the supply of government documents to the Parliament be implemented. This would assist the Parliament to improve the supply of document situation.

It is the experience of deposit libraries that CanPrint has been unhelpful with claims for publications not received under the Library Deposit Scheme organised by Australian Government Information Management Organisation (AGIMO).

It is recommended that the requirements of the Parliament's contract with CanPrint Communications for the distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series should include monitoring the existence of the publication, collection and timely despatch of the papers to recipients; and an efficient system for libraries to claim and receive missing papers.

- **The provision of the PPS in a digital format, either as an alternative or an adjunct to the hard copy series**

Recommendation: That access to the PPS be enhanced by providing a website where papers are published and maintained in digital format. The PPS need

their own database of electronic papers located and maintained at the Parliament of Australia. A website with links to the departmental publications existing on agency websites is not a satisfactory alternative because access to publications is not secure as the agency may decide to delete the publication, move to another site or the organisation itself may be abolished.

Recommendation: That a program for the digital preservation of the papers be established. A responsible digital repository should be developed for all papers in the PPS for permanent preservation for public access. Investigation of this proposal would include the possibility of a system for the uploading of document files from government agencies to a digital archive system. It would provide a single authoritative source from which masters can be made to create printed or digital copies of papers to meet government, library and public needs. The alternative of users or libraries printing out the paper they require from URL addresses is not viable. The cost of printing and storing a hard copy paper should not be transferred to the range of users of Parliamentary Papers.

Recommendation: That Deposit libraries be given permanent ongoing access to the digital format of the papers. In a system to distribute the PPS in digital format it is essential that the digital copy of the paper is the official tabled copy.

Recommendation: That there be a co-ordinated digitisation program for making older significant government publications accessible.

The indication that consideration is being given to providing access to digital copies of the PPS is welcome since most of the Series is being published in an electronic format already. However until there is in place a reliable and secure system for distribution and preservation of the digital publications we consider that the hard copy format is the required format for distribution to libraries of record to ensure long term access and preservation of the content of the series. Digital copies of the PPS can only be considered as an addition to the hard copy format not an alternative.

Further issues of access and preservation relating to the digital format are addressed below.

Access to papers

Publication of papers in digital format implies the capacity for good discoverability on the Internet. However, this may not be the case as there can be difficulties in knowing of the existence of a publication, then once it is known, in finding it on a website or in a library catalogue. For example, the AGIMO web-based search tool www.publications.gov.au has been produced to facilitate the search for government documents but 'Parliamentary Paper' is not an indexed field. To extend their search users need to follow the link to the National Library of Australia catalogue. The AGIMO site links to the Index to Parliamentary Papers at <http://www.publications.gov.au/click.php?http://www.aph.gov.au/Library/parlpapers.htm> search tool but the index only covers all papers tabled since 1992. If the title of each individual paper is not known then the paper may be difficult and time-consuming to find.

Whatever discovery mechanism is employed the PPS needs its own database of electronic papers located and maintained at the Parliament of Australia. A website with links to the departmental publications existing on agency websites is not a satisfactory alternative because access to publications is not secure. The agency may decide to delete the publication, move to another site or the organisation itself may be abolished.

The availability of the hard copy format of the PPS through national, state, university and government libraries is still an efficient and reliable form of public access to the full sets of these publications.

Preservation of papers

The Digital Amnesia Seminar referred to above demonstrated that government online publishing is fragmentary and transitory. One of the key issues from the seminar was that permanent access needs to be addressed urgently before more digital information and publications are lost.

Ongoing management of resources is required to prevent 'link rot' and to ensure that as organisations change their resources/publications remain accessible. Papers at the seminar demonstrated that some government agencies are not taking appropriate steps to keep their publications available.

The National Library of Australia's digital archiving program PANDORA already exists to collect and preserve online government publications from Australian government agencies but in order to ensure the long term availability of publications the National Library needs to have the right to collect, ensure access to and preserve electronic publications of all Australian government agencies.

It is recommended that the Parliament consider developing a responsible digital repository for all papers in the PPS for permanent preservation for public access. Investigation of this proposal would include the possibility of a system for the uploading of document files from government agencies to a digital archive system and of the digitisation of the older PPS papers. Deposit libraries should be given permanent ongoing access to the digital format of the Paper. In a system to distribute the PPS in digital format it is essential that the digital copy of the Paper is the official tabled copy.

There should be a single authoritative source from which masters can be made to create printed or digital copies of papers to meet government, library and public needs. Once this is in place the distribution of the PPS in hard copy format to deposit libraries can be reviewed. The alternative of users or libraries printing the paper if they require it in hard copy format is not viable. The cost of printing and storing a hard copy paper should not be transferred to the range of users including deposit libraries of Parliamentary Papers.

- **The feasibility of a subscription service, either in digital or hard copy form**
- **The possibility of partial or full cost recovery for the series**

Recommendation: That as libraries fulfil an important role by making the information in the papers freely available to the public now and in the future there should not be subscription charges or cost-recovery for material to support this essential service to all Australians.

A purchased subscription service to the series is not appropriate. Through the free entitlement to receive the Parliamentary Paper Series Australian citizens have been able to have easy access to Parliamentary Papers through their national, state, university and government libraries. Access to information about Parliament and government through the PPS is critical to Australian democracy and the collection of PPS in hard copy provides primary source material for this information service. Libraries fulfil an important role by making the information in the papers freely available to the public now and in the future and there should not be subscription charges for material to support this service.


Libraries which have been entitled to the free distribution of the PPS may find it difficult to fund a subscription cost to the PPS. Acquisition budgets in most libraries are not generously endowed and a decision and a move to subscription, partial or full cost-recovery would force decisions on funding the PPS at the expense of other purchased material for the library collection. This is a decision that libraries should not have to make as the PPS should be freely available to all Australians.

The Association appreciates this opportunity to encourage the Committee to consider widening its brief to assess and monitor on a continuing basis the broader issue of access to and preservation of government information. We encourage your support of the development of government information access principles, including principles of access equity for all users, which could provide the basis for legislation.

ALIA calls upon the Committee to continue the free distribution to libraries of the Parliamentary Paper Series in hard copy format to national, state, university and government libraries at this time. Should major changes occur to the Series the Association would welcome the opportunity to be involved in discussions on options to ensure libraries in Australia are guaranteed ongoing access to this material which is fundamental to democracy in Australia.

I may be contacted on jennifer.nicholson@alia.org.au or on 02 62158215.

Yours sincerely,



Jennefer Nicholson
Executive Director

Attachment 1

11 October 2005

Ms Robyn McClelland
Clerk Assistant (Table)
House of Representatives
Parliament of Australia
Canberra. ACT. 2600

Dear Ms McClelland

Parliamentary Papers Series – Cessation of Blister packs

Australian citizens have been able to have easy access to Parliamentary Papers through their national, state, university and government libraries by the free entitlement to receive an unbound set of the Parliamentary Paper Series. An important part of the each library's service is to provide information on the activity of the Australian government and the collection of the Parliamentary Papers Series in hard copy provides primary source material for this information service. ABS statistics indicate that during 2003-04, there were 105 million visits to local government, national and state libraries, representing an average of five visits per head of population and library statistics show that access to government publications is one of the most requested areas of assistance.

<http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/08cdeae368a2a931ca256a780001d4db?OpenDocument>

It is therefore of great concern to ALIA that in July 2005 you wrote to institutions which receive one free unbound set of the Parliamentary Paper Series to say that from January 2006 they will no longer receive the collated set in blister packs from the Parliament. Instead, each library would receive one numbered and labelled pamphlet copy of each paper sent once they are received by your distribution agent, CanPrint Communications. The pamphlet copies would not necessarily be sent in numerical order.

In your letter you state that factors taken into consideration for this decision are that your Office often experiences delays by author agencies in supplying sufficient stock, spends considerable time monitoring the receipt of the papers and incurs the cost of processing, storage and distribution of the blister packs. Your Office's support for libraries in providing this service has been very much appreciated.

However, our Expert Group on Government Publications advises that with the proposed changes the efficient collection of the Parliamentary Papers set by libraries is at risk. In effect this action has transferred the problems of delays, time spent and costs from the Parliament to CanPrint Communications and from this organisation to libraries. There is a real concern that problems associated with being alerted to the existence of the Parliamentary Papers and with the collection of the publications are

going to be duplicated across all deposit libraries. These problems will have resource implications for each library.

With the new arrangement the official complete set of Parliamentary Papers will no longer be received by libraries directly from the Parliament of Australia and a gap in some library collections may be the result. It will be very difficult for libraries to collect, collate and bind a complete and reliable print set if the papers are received one by one throughout the year. The proposal is not a favourable alternative to the existing situation where one institution, the Australian Parliament, co-ordinates the activity of collecting, collating and distributing the set to all libraries rather than expecting each library to repeat the same task.

Under the Library Deposit Scheme, organised by Australian Government Information Management Organisation (AGIMO) deposit libraries currently receive hard copies of Australian government publications supplied by CanPrint Communications. It is the experience of deposit libraries that CanPrint has been unhelpful with claims for publications not received and nearly always directs libraries to the author agency rather than it following up on claims. I would appreciate it if you could advise me whether the requirements of the Parliament's contract with CanPrint Communications for the distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series will include the important tasks of monitoring the existence of the publication, collection and timely despatch of the papers to recipients; and whether there will be an efficient system for libraries to claim and receive missing papers.

After 2001 when the blister pack system was introduced the PPS lost their usefulness as a current resource. The packs were sent to libraries infrequently after each document in the batch was available and each volume's preliminary matter was ready. If libraries could be notified about where to find a current online version of the paper and if the tabled papers were received reliably and promptly at the end of the session so that the set could be bound we would have the best combination of quick access to information and long term preservation.

You also state that the Joint Committee on Publications has been informed of these changes and advice has been sought from the Committee by the Presiding Officers on possible further changes to the distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series, including the possibility of supplying the series in an electronic format or a cost-recovery service such as a subscription.

The suggestion that you are considering providing electronic copies of the Parliamentary Paper Series is welcome especially since most of the series is being produced in an electronic format already. Consideration to providing a website devoted to accessing the papers and to a program for digital preservation of the papers is recommended. However, until an appropriate system for the digital preservation of the papers is in place it is important that the hard copy form of the papers is the form that is included in the free entitlement distribution to libraries. The Digital Amnesia Seminar hosted by ALIA and sponsored by the National Library of Australia and the National Archives of Australia held on 21 April 2005 (<http://conferences.alia.org.au/seminars/digital.amnesia2005/>) demonstrated that although the Australian government publishing is now primarily online as part of the

Government Online strategy government online publishing is fragmentary and transitory.

I would appreciate it if you could include me in any consultation about your decisions on possible further changes to the distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jennefer Nicholson". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.

Jennefer Nicholson
Executive Director