



State Library
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21 October 2005

Mr Jason Sherd
Secretary
Joint Committee on Publications
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Sherd

Inquiry into the Distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series

Please find enclosed a revised version of our submission (forwarded to you via email and post on 19th October 2005) to the *Inquiry into the Distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series* prepared by the State Library of Victoria. Please discard our earlier version. I apologise for any confusion caused by sending a revised version.

Thank you for inviting the Library to make a submission.

My contact details and return address are as follows:

Anne-Marie Schwirtlich
CEO and State Librarian
State Library of Victoria
328 Swanston Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

Yours sincerely

Anne-Marie Schwirtlich
CEO and State Librarian



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Submission to the Inquiry into the Distribution of the Parliamentary Paper Series

Comments on the Terms of reference

1. The potential impact of changes to the distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series made by the Presiding Officers, namely the tightening of eligibility guidelines and the cessation of blister packs to commence on 1 January 2006

State Library of Victoria's position: The Library opposes the cessation of blister packs.

The State Library of Victoria is the major reference and research library for Victorians whilst also serving the national and international community. Over the last year more than 900,000 people visited the Library on Swanston Street to use the collection and visit exhibitions. In the same period 22 million people visited websites supported by the Library. An important part of the Library's service is to provide information on the activity of the Australian government and the collection of government documents received on deposit, including the Parliamentary Papers Series (PPS) in hard copy, provides primary source material for this information service. In fact, the Library's holdings of Australian Parliamentary Papers extend to Federation in 1901.

The PPS is an important source for current and future historical research and a **distributed standardized version** of this Series is vital to the ongoing understanding of the Australian Parliament. The savings generated by ceasing to distribute the blister packs will have long term implications not only for government collections but for the research community.

The availability of blister packs of the PPS ensures that they are collated at a central point and in a standardized way thereby enabling all libraries which receive them to bind them accordingly. This means that anyone using these documents in any one of the Library Deposit Scheme libraries will be using the same product. Under the proposed scheme, each library may handle the Series differently, either processing each item individually or collating them for binding in any sort of order.

It appears that the factors taken into consideration for this decision, namely delays, time spent contacting agencies to request that they fulfill their obligations, and costs associated with processing, storage and distributing the blister packs are being passed onto Canprint Communications. Libraries will need to monitor receipt of these documents from the distributor thereby incurring extra costs.

2. The provision of the Parliamentary Papers Series in digital format, either as an alternative or an adjunct to hard copy series

Digital as an adjunct to the hard copy series

State Library of Victoria's position: The Library supports the provision of the Parliamentary Papers Series in digital format.

The Library welcomes the suggestion of providing digital copies of the PPS in addition to the paper format, especially as many papers are already being produced in digital format. However it is recommended that a fully searchable website devoted to the Papers is developed to ensure that they are brought together for ease of access by the public.

Coupled with the provision of digital copies of the Papers is the need to preserve the digital Papers. Just as the hard copy Papers have been retained and conserved in perpetuity for future generations so must the digital versions of the Papers be preserved. In fact there is already a mechanism in place for preserving digital government publications. Known as PANDORA, the National Library of Australia provides a digital archive for just such a purpose.

It is recommended that there be ongoing government financial support for PANDORA to ensure the National Library continues to provide this means of archiving, conserving and accessing digital documents.

Digital as an alternative to the hard copy

State Library of Victoria's position: The Library opposes the provision of the Parliamentary Papers Series in digital format only until such time as internet connectivity and computer literacy are stronger.

It is premature for the PPS to be provided in digital format only. Australian Bureau of Statistics figures indicate that in 2001, while 66% of Australian households had access to home computers, only 53% of households had Internet access.¹ As these figures indicate access to the Internet and indeed computer literacy is not yet universal. There is still a high demand for paper format publications particularly from older people. For some time to come the PPS should be provided in both hard copy and digital formats.

3. The feasibility of a subscription service, either in digital or hard copy form

State Library of Victoria's position: The Library is opposed to paying a subscription for the Parliamentary Papers Series, whether the Papers are in digital or hard copy form.

Traditionally, the Australian Parliament has placed a heavy emphasis on its public education and awareness raising role and activities. Easy access for Australians to an enduring record of Government and Parliamentary activity, through the Parliamentary Papers Series, has been a cornerstone of Parliament's support of a democratic society and of encouraging civic responsibility.

¹ Household use of information technology. Canberra : Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004. p. 5

The State Library of Victoria and all of the other libraries which have received the PPS without cost have been willing partners in a national scheme which has simply and effectively made the PPS publicly accessible.

The libraries that house and provide access to the PPS support Parliament, that is, libraries make the deliberations of the Parliament publicly accessible to the community on behalf of the Parliament.

The State Library of Victoria therefore believes that the PPS should continue to be provided without cost.

The Library is aware of the costs involved in producing the hard copy Papers in loose form and also in blister packs. Consequently, the Library suggests that once digital versions are made available, an alternative could be that the blister packs are supplied on a subscription basis and that the loose Papers and the digital version are provided free-of-charge.

4. The possibility of partial or full cost recovery for the series

State Library of Victoria's position: The Library opposes full cost recovery for the Parliamentary Papers Series.

The Library believes that the Parliament should provide the PPS without charge to libraries to enable Australian citizens to operate effectively in a democratic society. It is incumbent on any Australian government to give its citizens free access to its publications including parliamentary ones through libraries.

This is the situation in the United States of America and the United Kingdom - both countries are committed to providing free access to government publications. Indeed, in December 2004, the United States Government Printing Office re-confirmed its commitment to provide, via Federal Depository libraries, "free and ready public access to the printed and electronic documents, and other information products, of the Federal government".² The United Kingdom provides free access to parliamentary papers by making official documents of the Parliament available on the Parliamentary website free-of-charge.

² A strategic vision for the 21st century. Washington D.C. : U.S. Government Printing Office, 2004. p. 1