

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee —Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearing—October 2015

Answers to Questions on Notice

Parliamentary departments, Department of Parliamentary Services

Topic: **Parliament House Collection and Exhibitions**

Question: **59**

Written **Senator Wong**

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 4 December 2015

There was considerable media interest following a Facebook post by Liberal MP Craig Kelly about a piece of art in a visiting exhibition recognising the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Bell Shakespeare Company, depicting the witches from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

1. Please confirm this is a piece that is not part of the permanent collection of Parliament House?
2. Please confirm the area concerned is regularly used for visiting exhibitions?
3. How many visiting exhibitions have used the space, and others in Parliament House, in 2014–15?
4. How many complaints has the Department of Parliamentary Services received about art in the building over the last five years? Please indicate how many of these related to works in the permanent collection and how many related to works in visiting exhibitions?
5. How many complaints have been received from members of the public about the piece depicting *Macbeth's* witches?

Answer

1. The artwork by Wendy Sharpe depicting the witches from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is not part of the Parliament House Art Collection.
2. The wall on the first floor on the House of Representatives side opposite the Presiding Officers Exhibition Area is regularly used for displays of artwork including visiting exhibitions, displays by the Department of the House of Representatives and displays of artwork from the Parliament House Art Collection.
3. In 2014 and 2015, the following visiting exhibitions (exhibitions not drawn from the Parliament House Art Collection) were on display in Parliament House:
 - *National Visual Arts Showcase*, Regional Arts Australia, Presiding Officers Exhibition Area, 4 March to 30 April 2014
 - *After 200 years*, AIATSIS anniversary display, HoR wall, first floor, 26 May to 13 July 2014
 - *Namatjira to now*, Big hArt & Ngurratjuta Many Hands Art Centre, Presiding Officers Exhibition Area, 25 November 2014 to 9 February 2015
 - *Standing on Sacred Ground*, AIATSIS/Indigenous Land Council, Senate wall, first floor, 4 July to 24 September 2015
 - *The Art of Shakespeare*, Bell Shakespeare, Senate and HoR walls, first floor, 8 – 25 October 2015

All other exhibitions staged within Parliament House during 2014 and 2015 were drawn from the Parliament House Art Collection.

4. Over the last five years, six complaints have been received and recorded that relate to art within the building, including the way it was displayed or lit. No complaints have been received about the nature of the artworks. The complaints are as follows:
- 14 December 2013 - complaint from visitor about the quality of the lighting on the Great Hall tapestry
 - 22 December 2013 – complaint from member of the public about the Coat of Arms on front of the building not being correct
 - 18 January 2015 – complaint from visitor about quality of lighting on Great Hall Embroidery on the mezzanine level
 - 11 February 2015 – complaint from visitor regarding other visitors touching artworks
 - 19 February 2015 – complaint from visitor regarding other visitors touching artworks
 - 6 May 2015 – complaint from visitor about desk obstructing view of Whitlam and McMahon portraits
 - 20 October 2015 – complaint from Senator regarding the positioning/safety of the Robert Hannaford painting commemorating the Centenary of Federation

All of the complaints listed above are in relation to works in the Parliament House Art Collection. No complaints have been recorded as being made to DPS regarding artworks in visiting exhibitions.

5. No complaints were received by DPS from members of the public about the Wendy Sharpe painting depicting the witches from Shakespeare's Macbeth.