

Parliamentary Departments

2.1 The Committee took evidence from the parliamentary departments on Monday, 13 February 2006.

Department of the Senate

2.2 During a relatively brief examination of the department, members of the Committee and other senators in attendance raised the following issues:

- Senate inquiries and courts, royal commissions and other commissions of inquiry;
- The cost of reconvening the Senate;
- Party status in the Senate; and
- A recent ban of a photographer from the chamber.

2.3 The Clerk was asked whether any inhibitions existed on inquiries into matters that are before other proceedings such as courts and royal commissions. The Clerk, Mr Harry Evans, indicated that while the Senate and its committees have observed a sub judice convention in respect of matters before courts, no such similar measure operates in relation to royal commissions. Mr Evans stated that:

In relation to courts, there is the sub judice convention of the Senate, which provides that an inquiry should not be entered into if is going to cause prejudice to proceedings before the courts. The committee concerned has to weigh the danger of prejudice, particularly having regard to whether there are jurors involved who might be influenced by the inquiry or publicity arising from it and so on. In relation to royal commissions and other commissions of inquiry, the practice which has been followed in the Senate for many decades now is that there is no inhibition on inquiry into or debate on matters before such commissions, because they are not courts and are not trying cases.¹

2.4 As noted in the introduction, this matter is touched upon in the next chapter on the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Department of Parliamentary Services

2.5 The examination of DPS was notable for the appearance of the recently appointed Parliamentary Librarian, Ms Roxanne Missingham. The President observed that this represented the first time a permanent Parliamentary Librarian had appeared before the committee in 16 years.

1 *Committee Hansard*, 13 February 2006, F&PA 3.

2.6 The Committee's examination concentrated on ongoing concerns related to security work around Parliament House, particularly problems with the security bollards and the safety implications for staff resulting changes to traffic access to the building. The Committee also examined recent refurbishments to the Cabinet Office and Prime Minister's Office.