



## **Benefits of Senators and Members wearing passes and threats associated with relaxing screening arrangements for Senators, Members and authorised passholders**

### *Background*

1 At the February 2010 Budget Estimates hearing, the Department of Parliamentary Service (**DPS**) was asked to provide the Committee with detailed information on the cost benefits of reducing security points if Senators and Members carried passes and the threat risks associated with eliminating screening for Senators, Members and authorised passholders as they enter the building.

2 Parliament House has been assessed by the National Threat Assessment Centre, within the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (**ASIO**) as being at a medium threat level. Security arrangements at Parliament House are consistent with the Australian Government's "security in depth" principle, in which multi-layered measures combine to support and complement each other.

### *Eliminating security screening*

3 A review conducted by the Attorney-General's Department in 2009 provided specific advice on a large number of security aspects, including screening arrangements. The report from that review is classified. DPS will provide a private briefing on the review to committee members on request.

### *Carrying of passes*

4 In the first instance, the wearing of passes by Senators and Members would improve the overall security arrangements of the building. The current arrangement, which requires around 150 PSS officers to recognise over 220 parliamentarians, obviously has some room for human error.

5 The annual cost to operate a "24/7" checkpoint with one PSS officer is \$360,000. Where the checkpoint is only occupied when Parliament House is open to the public, the cost comes down to approximately \$120,000 at each point.

6 Each point where a pass is currently required to get through could be a candidate for conversion to an "unattended" mode of operation. This would require installation of an electronic lock that was released upon a swipe of a valid pass, and possibly some other mechanism to ensure that unauthorised personnel could not pass through by "tail gating" behind an authorised person.

#### **Question on Notice – P14**

**Senator PARRY**—Regarding the additional House of Reps and Senate security points, where you have, if I can call it that, a peak-hour lane for senators and members, I believe that it is from 8 am through to, I presume, 9 am or 9.30. I do not know what the time frame is.

That seems to operate with three staff for one hour and, I would imagine, most senators and members would enter the building prior to 8 am. Have you done any study to that effect?

**Mr Thompson**—I will ask Bronwyn to rejoin us. We have certainly been trying to tailor that service—that bit of the operation—to fit with the movements of most members and most senators.

**Ms Graham**—The hours for the ceremonial entrances on the Reps side and the Senate sides do differ. I will premise my response with that. When we looked at the staffing for those areas, we looked at numbers, in terms of when the peak times were. We will adjust that if we learn that we did not get that quite right, but we think that in the main it is reasonably on target. With regard to the specific numbers at specific times, I would not be in a position to answer how many we have at any given time. I know it is different on the Senate side and the Reps side, because there is a different traffic profile at those two entrances.

**Senator PARRY**—Can the current Senate entrance and Reps entrance cope with just one security point and not have a second security point for those peak-hour express lane times?

**Ms Graham**—On the face of it, I think it is a good question. We have not done the analysis to see if that were the case. Certainly, the Senate and the House of Reps general entrances, if I can refer to them that way, do get quite busy. We would need to have a careful look at the congestion around the busy times to see if that were, indeed, possible. It is not something that we have looked at doing.

**Senator PARRY**—Mr Thompson, we have discussed, at previous estimates, senators and members not being required to go through security checkpoints and, indeed, pass holders who are authorised, which I would imagine would be most. I understand there has been a security paper or a briefing to that regard indicating that that would not be a viable option. Would you like to confirm that?

**Mr Thompson**—Yes, you are correct—there has been quite a major security review conducted by an arm of the Attorney-General's Department. It is fair to say that they have not recommended any modification of the current arrangements for parliamentarians to pass through the same security regime as the rest of us. They have suggested we leave it intact, as is.

**Senator PARRY**—So any identified savings there cannot be implemented because of the perceived security risk or threat? **Thompson**—As I understand it, they were taking the current identification regime as

being a given, which is that members and senators do not wear any identifying pass or anything like that. In that situation, their suggestion was that all people—with the exception of the Prime Minister—pass through the one system. Were we to move to a different regime such as does apply in other parliaments, where members wear some clear identification, then maybe they would come up with a different approach. But my understanding is that they were taking it as a given that members and senators do not have a clear pass. As such, their suggestion was that, in terms of security staff having to make judgments about who is and who is not a member, it was better to put everyone through the one lot of magnetometers and x-ray machines.

**Senator PARRY**—So if senators and members had a security pass, would there still need to be security screening at the entry point? Was that part of the review?

**Mr Thompson**—I do not think that we asked them that question as such. But that is a good question, because, at a number of other parliaments, once members and senators are clearly identified then they do not pass through the same regime. That would apply in Ottawa and in London, for example, and in Wellington.

**Senator PARRY**—It does.

**Mr Thompson**—But we have a particular situation here where members do not carry a photographic pass and it is very hard to expect our security staff to recognise the faces of all 230 parliamentarians in a consistent way.

**Senator PARRY**—So if senators and members carried passes similar to the ones public

servants have then the perceived security threat would not exist. So there might be a streamlining of entry into the building, therefore eliminating the need for the security checkpoints that we currently have—at least the vast bulk—and restricting them to non-passholders. Would that be a fair assumption?

**Mr Thompson**—We could certainly ask the Attorney-General's Department to reconsider that part of their review if that were the situation. As I said, that is the model that does apply in some other parliaments.

**Senator PARRY**—Most other parliaments.

**Mr Thompson**—The pass is an electronic key. It allows members to tag through various doors within the building. I would comment that that would have another plus for us, because on a day like today we have some of our officers at various doors monitoring traffic. It is a very low level of traffic. Our view would be that you could achieve the same level of security by simply having electronic tagging through some of these internal doors. That would free up some of our people to do other things.

**Senator PARRY**—In concluding, can I request that for the May budget estimates that we have this detail? I have asked for it now on three separate occasions. I want the detail of the cost benefits of reducing security points if senators and members carried passes and any perceived threat if the screening was eliminated for senators and members and authorised pass holders as they enter the building. It seems to be a cumbersome process. There are other security threats greater than us entering the building every morning. If that could be taken on notice and detailed information on it provided at the next estimates, that would be good.

**Mr Thompson**—There are two parts to your request. The part about us doing some internal costings we can commit to. As to the risk assessment from the Attorney-General's Department, we will go away and we will ask them for that. I hope that they are able to deliver it on time.

#### **Question on Notice – P15**

**Senator JACINTA COLLINS**—If that is the case, Senator Parry, I am interested in seeing these internal aspects. I continue to be frustrated by incapacity to move around the building, particularly when we are not sitting. If we are utilising passes, particularly those upstairs entrances that are closed could be available for a swipe or something with a pass so that you could move through them. I am interested in that aspect as well.

**Mr Thomson**—Senators, we can come back in May with a progress report.