

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Parliament Portfolio

Department of the Parliamentary Reporting Staff

Budget Estimates 2003-04, May 2003

Question: ParlInfo Web/Alert Service - P14b
Outcome: The Commonwealth Parliament to have international standard broadcasting, transcription and information technology services and the Australian community to be able to see, hear and read the work of the Parliament.
Output: Infrastructure and Communications Support
Topic: ParlInfo Web/Alert Service
Written Question on Notice: Monday, 26 May 2003, Page 57

Senator John Watson asked:

1. Why was the system of accessing media clippings electronically through the alert services offered by the Department of the Parliamentary Library changed this year to access via the ParlInfo Web?
2. What problems have been identified with the complex system you introduced? For example, I understand that some of the problems have been:
 - Amalgamation of daily clippings/profile, instead of just daily clippings. This occurred for several weeks.
 - Access to PDF document is more difficult because it is on the second screen, not the first.
 - The print prompt for the PDF file does not fit on the screen.
 - The password recognition feature does not work.
 - The user name required did not work at first.
3. Given that these problems can and have contributed to OH&S issues for staff, what has DPRS done to alleviate the problems and simplify access to electronic media clippings?
4. I understand that the requirement to enter a user name and password was to enable DPRS to collect statistics on the use made of the service. How valid are the statistics being gathered, given that they are not measuring access to the clippings through the internal ParlInfo data base?

Answer:

1. The Alert Service was modified to access the ParlInfo Web service as a result of the ParlInfo WIPI system being replaced. The WIPI system was originally introduced in 1998 to provide a convenient web interface to the ParlInfo data, including the media clipping service.

As usage of the WIPI system grew over time, some instability occurred and there were instances where users of the system experienced small periods of unavailability. Ongoing technical resources were required to maintain the system and to minimise the instability. Further, casual users of the WIPI system were reporting that the web interface was confusing to use, and too complex.

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As a result of a review of WIPI, undertaken in 2001, it was decided that the WIPI system should be replaced with a simpler interface, and more modern technology should be used to reduce support and to provide stability.

ParlInfo Web was introduced in December 2002 as a replacement for the WIPI system, and as a result, the Alert Service which used WIPI, had to be modified to access the new ParlInfo Web.

2. In answer to the specific dot points:

- The 'amalgamation of daily clippings/profile' was caused by a 'bug' in the Alert Service software which resulted in all articles requested by the Alert Service being provided, rather than only the relevant articles for a specified time period. This 'bug' has been fixed and no further problems have been reported.
- The 'accessibility guidelines' which outline the standards to be used for all screen designs for the parliamentary Internet site, prohibit screens being designed with 'frames'. The guidelines have been developed to meet the international standards (W3C) for visually impaired users.

The inability to use 'frames' has resulted in the need for an additional mouse 'click' to display the PDF documents.

- The ParlInfo project team can find no evidence of any problem associated with the PDF print screen. However, this issue may be the result of the screen resolution setting on the individual user's PC workstation. Users normally have their screen setting to be '1,024 x 768'. It would appear that this reported print problem may be due to the PC screen setting being '800 x 600'.
- The problem with 'password recognition' occurred as a result of a security setting in the OneOffice platform. This problem has now been resolved.
- The 'user name required' problem was directly related to the 'password recognition' issue (see above) and has been resolved.

3. As a result of resolving the 'password recognition' and 'user name' problems (see above), the only additional mouse 'click' that is required as a result of introducing ParlInfo Web relates to the displaying of PDF documents. Searching in the ParlInfo Web is identical to the 'old' WIPI system interface.

ParlInfo Web has now been in place for approximately six months. Although there were initial inquiries about the need for additional mouse 'clicks', this issue appears to no longer be a concern.

4. The requirement to enter user name and password details to access the ParlInfo Web service was not to enable the collection of usage statistics. It was necessary in order for users to access ParlInfo Web whilst the problem existed with 'password recognition' and 'user name' (see above). This is no longer a requirement.

ParlInfo usage statistics are captured automatically and transparently to the user, and we are confident the collection is accurate.