

Question 1: Department of the Senate – Senator Fifield

1. Senator Fifield asked about accessibility and the cost of converting committee documents

With respect to accessibility and the trial completed by the Environment and Communications References Committee during the 'Koala' inquiry in 2011, the report on the trial outlined the prohibitive cost of providing a wholesale service to convert public submissions to HTML. Paragraphs 1.21 and 1.22 of the report state that:

...the financial constraints of converting all committee public submissions to HTML format appear to be significant. The process of converting public submissions into HTML format appears to be relatively expensive. The trial indicates that on average it costs \$30.61 to convert one PDF page into HTML (1.21). This cost may be prohibitive if the conversion process is extrapolated to all public submissions received for all inquiries conducted by Senate committees. In the 2010 calendar year the Senate received 40 382 pages of submissions to committee inquiries. Based on the average cost of \$30.61 per page derived from this trial, it would have cost the department in the order of \$1.2 million to convert all committee submissions into HTML format. This figure does not include the conversion of other committee-related documents such as additional information and responses to questions on notice (1.22).

As such, paragraph 1.24 of the report suggested that:

...as an alternative to converting all submissions, the department could create a "request" option on committee inquiry webpages inviting interested persons to select specific submissions for conversion into HTML.

I recommended this course of action to the Chairs' Committee, which endorsed this position at its 23 November 2011 meeting. I also confirm that the Environment and Communications secretariat has not as yet received any requests to convert documents to HTML.

The link to the Environment and Communications Committee report on the accessibility trial, received by the Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee on 12 October 2011, follows:

http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate_Committees?url=fapa_ctte/estimates/sup_1112/parliamentary/index.htm

Senator Fifield also referred to a broken link in Chapter 1 of the 'Koala' report. A broken link in the pdf version has been identified and corrected.