

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Parliament Portfolio

Department of the Parliamentary Library

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Question: P6

Topic: IFLA Reports

Hansard Page: 56

Senator Faulkner-Dr Verrier, has a formal report from the IFLA trip been finalised yet?

Dr Verrier-Yes there has.

Senator Faulkner Would it be possible for the committee to be provided with a copy that?

Answer: Attachment A provides the report on the conference. Attachment B is the text of the papers given by Dr Verrier and Ms Adcock at the conference.

World Library and Information Congress 69th IFLA General Conference and Council Prague and Berlin 2003

Nola Adcock August 2003

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1. Introduction

Each year at its international Conference and General Council meeting the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) explores a theme and the theme for 2003 was *Access Point Library: Media – Information – Culture*. The Congress was held in Berlin 1-9 August 2003 and was attended by more than 4000 delegates from over 130 countries. For 2003 and beyond IFLA has renamed the event the World Library and Information Congress to better explain to observers the content and purpose of this annual event.

IFLA consists of a number of sections and associations which plan and conduct meetings, general presentations and workshops throughout the course of the conference week. This year the Australian Commonwealth Parliament was represented by Dr June Verrier, Mr Rob Johnston and myself at both the a pre conference in Prague 29-30 July 2003, organised by the IFLA Section Parliamentary Libraries and Research Services (PLRS) and the main conference in Berlin. **The program for the Australian delegates is attached.**

While the activities of PLRS were of particular interest I also attended as many as possible of the wider program of presentations about broader library issues and activities. I presented a paper *Innovation in Service Delivery: The Case of Audio Briefs* on as part of PLRS's research day program and represented the Association of Parliamentary Libraries of Australasia (APLA) as its voting delegate at the two IFLA Council Meetings held during the Congress. June Verrier also presented a paper at the research day called *On Socks and Bees and Everything in Between: Navigating the Political Environment – Culture, Constraints and Controversies*. She was elected Secretary of PLRS and spent much of her time working with the new Executive.

Proceeding from the pre conference in Prague are available at <http://www.psp.cz/kps/knoh/ifla2003/program.htm> and the majority of papers presented at the Congress in Berlin are on the IFLA web site at <http://www.ifla.org/>.

2. Prague

Architecturally the city of Prague is caught in a baroque time warp. It is a city rich in history with opulent churches, palaces, museums and historic libraries. The Czech National Library is located in the historic Klementinum complex which dates back to the eleventh century. Today the National Library is a central depository for the publications of the Czech Republic but it is the rare, historic materials that draw researchers from around the world. The collections include ancient Arabic and Persian manuscripts and early printed books which document both Czech and world literary output from the earliest times. While the originals are still held in the exquisite Baroque Library, many of the old manuscripts have been converted to CD Rom format under the Library's Digitisation of Old Manuscripts program. After the 2002 floods the National Library coordinated flood relief programs for the more than fifty libraries whose rare and historic materials were damaged in some way. The floods have heightened awareness of the need to find more stable ways to preserve a wider range of historic materials in both print and digital form.

3. Parliamentary Library Research and Information Services for Central Europe

Traditionally, PLRS holds a pre-conference in an adjacent country, usually hosted by the local parliament and focussing on issues of local interest and concern. This year 90 of the Section's 120 or so members attended.

On the political and economic front bold measures are being taken as the Czech Republic, together with neighbouring Central European countries of the Slovak Republic, Hungary and Poland prepare to enter the European Union (EU) in 2004. This important development has been dominating parliamentary processes and discussion in these candidate countries. The Parliamentary Libraries and Research Services of Central Europe have been very much involved in preparing for these changes.

The theme of the full day of 15 presentations by representatives of the information and research services of the **Czech, Slovak, Polish and Hungarian Parliaments** was *parliamentary information services with special focus on the process of implementation of the European Union law by the associated countries*. Each candidate country has to ensure that its laws are 'in harmony' with EU laws prior to admission and each country is compelled to develop procedures and tracking systems to guarantee ongoing compliance, taking into account the challenge of recording and organising material in multiple languages.

During the period of communist rule, parliamentary research services in Central Europe, if they existed at all, were limited in both depth and perspective. Several presentations referred to the important role the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Development (ECPRD) has played in recent times as a forum for discussion and assistant to nascent research services and especially for the Czech and Slovak Parliaments. The United States, the United Kingdom and the EU have also provided funding and support. Not surprisingly, the main need identified has been for assistance with the legislative process, the development of bills and EU issues. Resourcing research services to support the analysis of public policy issues more broadly remains an issue.

- **Czech Parliament**

Although its origins and collections date back to 1857, the Parliamentary Library of the Czech Republic emerged from the years of communist rule with little technical expertise, limited collections on contemporary issues and no research service of substance. With assistance from the EU and the United States the technology gap has been bridged to a large extent. Both the Czech and Slovak Parliaments have been rapidly introducing sophisticated technology that is unencumbered by the need to deal with data conversion from older legacy systems.

Presentations from the Czech delegates provided an overview of their new systems for synchronising the flow of information between the two chambers using XML as the basis for document creation. To date emphasis has been placed on extracting consistent metadata but future plans extend to the circulation of the full text of documents and the inclusion of government departments through encrypted channels. The aim is to develop personal portals for the ordering and circulation of drafts of selected parliamentary materials.

The focus on EU issues was reinforced by the development of the European Union Reference Library, a cooperative effort between the Parliamentary Library and the Parliament's research arm, the Parliamentary Institute. Within the Parliamentary Institute is the European Law Centre which provides expert assistance to the Parliament on the legal issues associated with EU preparation. This assistance has ranged from the issuing of compatibility reports on all draft legislation to training courses for members of parliament on European Law.

- **Slovak Parliament**

Separate nations since 1991, the Czech and Slovak Parliaments and their libraries work closely together. This cooperation reinforces the historic ties and the similarity of their present paths into the EU. In June 2002 both Republics agreed to foster a joint Czech Slovak Digital Parliamentary Library for the electronic exchange of parliamentary documents. The aim of the project is to create a web site for the text of parliamentary materials dating back to 1848 in languages relevant to the history of both Republics. An important feature of the Digital Library is a web page for each bill outlining its complete history with links to all stages and to relevant documents, something Senators and Members in the Australian Parliament would envy.

Like the Czech Parliament, the Slovak Parliament's research agency, the Department of Analysis and Training, has been providing advice to its members about legislative compliance prior to EU admission. The Department also organises seminars and training sessions for members of parliament on a variety of issues.

- **Hungarian Parliament**

Members of the unicameral Hungarian Parliament have access to a Library which commenced operations in 1870 but whose role and responsibilities have been tied to the many changes in Hungary's political landscape. With the return to a multi-party system in 1990, supervision of the Library was returned to the Parliament from the Ministry of Culture and its focus changed from that of a public research library to an information service for parliamentarians. The print and electronic collections are extensive and include a parliamentary documents archive that dates back to the late sixteenth century. Since 1989 the Library has developed a number of its own databases including Hungarian and

international legal materials, domestic and international news and material on the European Union.

In its evolution the Parliamentary Library has received assistance from ECPRD and the Congressional Research Service and continues to seek their support in preparations for launching a research service. Without a research arm at present, information specialists have extended their roles in various ways including attachments to the Parliament's powerful standing committees. Information specialists attend committee meetings, respond to specific questions and compile information packs for speeches and debates.

- **Polish Parliament**

Library services in the Polish Parliament are generally well resourced and the collections include extensive historic print materials, electronic databases created by the Library, access to Polish commercial database services and a Media Resource Centre. The Library is open to the public and has the responsibility to distribute many parliamentary materials to public libraries and universities.

Presentations from Polish delegates concentrated on the range of issues the Parliament has addressed in its preparation for EU admission. A European Information and Documentation Centre has been developed to assist members understand the issues and processes involved. The research staff of the Centre are subject specialists but must also have multiple foreign language skills to provide on demand translations of sections of the voluminous materials produced by the EU.

4. Berlin

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and unification, Berlin has become the largest construction site in Europe with extensive new developments as well as the renovation of many of the former East's cultural and historic icons damaged by bombing during the Second World War or neglected by previous governments. The German Government's decision to relocate its former West German functions from Bonn to Berlin has meant that ministries such as the Federal Foreign Office, which I visited, have moved into new buildings with impressive new premises for their libraries. The Library of the German Parliament will complete its overdue move from Bonn to Berlin when its new building is completed next year.

Germany has an extensive library system at national, regional and local levels. The challenge since unification has been to integrate what have been very different East and West approaches to resources, collections and professional development. At the national level there are, for reasons of history, three libraries functioning as national libraries in Frankfurt, Munich and Berlin. A cultural evening was organised for Congress delegates at one of these, the Berlin State Library of Prussian Cultural Heritage. Now housed in a massive modern building, the Berlin State Library is renowned internationally for its priceless historic collections. These are in contrast to some of its newer collecting responsibilities of East Asian materials and international law.

5. Parliamentary Libraries and Research Services Program

The main IFLA Conference in Berlin included a program organised by the Parliamentary Section with a research day, a full day in the German Parliament, specialised workshops, an

open section incorporated into the wider IFLA program and open and restricted meetings of PLRS Standing Committee. The structure of the program, with all IFLA sections conducting their workshops on the same day but in different locations, made it impossible to attend workshops organised by other IFLA sections. IFLA intends to introduce program changes in response to criticisms of the length of the Congress and the proliferation of the number of sections pursuing independent programs. These changes would greatly restrict the time for individual section activities in favour of more integrated programs. The possible positive elements of this move were largely overshadowed by the concern about destruction of the many years of hard work by PLRS to reach its present well developed program.

6. German Parliament's Libraries and Research Services

PLRS delegates spent a day in the bicameral German Parliament moving between the separate buildings of the Bundesrat (States House) and the Bundestag, the latter located in the historic Reichstag building, a stone's throw from the Brandenburg Gate. In the opening address, the Head of Administration in the Bundesrat explained the operations of the Bundesrat as one of the five organs of constitutional government in Germany alongside the Federal President, the Bundestag, the Federal Government and the Federal Constitutional Court. After unification, constitutional reforms ensured that the Bundesrat had a role not only in the administration of the Federation but in EU matters too.

The Bundesrat is not an elected chamber. The majority of its members come from the State or Lande Parliaments so the sittings of the Bundesrat are a complex process of juggling commitments between state and federal arenas. In the balance of power between the two chambers an important arbitration body is the Mediation Committee which has the unique role of resolving disputes, primarily about draft legislation. In the majority of cases, the Committee is able to find a constructive, agreed solution. The Bundesrat has a small specialised library which works closely with its much more substantial sister service in the Bundestag.

The afternoon program in the Bundestag consisted of presentations on the role and functioning of the Bundestag and engineering and functional descriptions of the new Bundestag Library. Working together, the reference and research services of the German Bundestag provide a wide range of services to their parliamentarians. Many elements have a ring of great familiarity including the service principles (relevance, political neutrality, appropriate presentation, timeliness, confidentiality) and the operation of a central enquiry point for all reference and research services, even though the Library and the Research Section are separate administrative units.

Presentations from the Head of the Library, Marga Coing, outlined the historic role of the Bundestag Library, the challenges posed by unification and the detailed planning required to move the entire Library and Parliamentary Archives (around sixty kilometres of material) from Bonn to Berlin. The Library has occupied temporary premises in Berlin since 1999 to provide some level of service locally while the main collections and many of the staff remained in Bonn. The development of electronic services and a web site have been important strategies to compensate for the lack of full in situ information services. A significant consequence of the move has been the loss of nearly 40% of the professional staff who decided to remain in Bonn, to be replaced by the same number of untrained staff from other federal agencies in the former East Berlin. This has involved the ongoing

integration and professional development of two groups accustomed to very different work cultures.

In the course of planning the move to Berlin and the reconstruction of the Reichstag Building the need for a separate parliamentary library was examined. The Government and the Ministry of Interior questioned whether the extensive Berlin State Library could perform the parliamentary library role. Reports were commissioned and negotiations commenced soon to reveal that the State Library had neither the specialist staff, the space, nor the parliamentary focus to provide a timely, on demand service for the Bundestag. Today the issue has turned almost full circle with questions about the viability of smaller specialist ministry libraries and whether the Bundestag Library should assume the prominent role of a 'federal library' organising consortia licenses for electronic sources and developing portal services for all federal government agencies.

With the decision to maintain a separate library for the Bundestag the question of space in the Reichstag became critical. All available space was required for parliamentary committees. Eventually the decision was made to build a separate library (including research service accommodation and the member's gym) on the opposite side of the River Spree connected by an open pedestrian bridge. Marga Coing relayed humorous but heated stories of battles with the distinguished architect to create useable space and a functional building. This also had a familiar ring. On top of this came the news that part of the stacks would have to be sacrificed to accommodate an important icon for the Parliament, a section of the Berlin Wall.

7. Research Day and Workshops

The **research day** program has been developed over time to highlight research service issues but in fact the name of the day is misleading in that the issues discussed are fundamental to the delivery of client services in parliamentary information and parliamentary research services. There was a mixture of presentations and discussion covering the full range of perspectives.

- **Trends, Ideas and Innovations**

My presentation about developing a new service, audio briefs, led to some interesting discussion not only about their value in the **Australian** context where time spent by members of parliament in their cars gives them a particular logic but also the use of such a product to address literacy issues for members in less developed countries or in countries where an oral tradition prevails over a written one. Other speakers in this segment covered the broader client service evaluations conducted by the libraries of the **European Parliament**, the **House of Commons** and the **Canadian Parliament**. Copies of their full reports have since been provided. **Norway** provided an update on establishing a parliamentary research service.

Ian Watt from the **European Parliament** discussed a recent review of the Parliamentary Documentation Centre (PDC), the European Parliament's Library. A decision to abolish the PDC and the Research Service and to combine subject librarians, researchers and committee staff into subject based Policy Departments was questioned earlier this year. Despite the lack of published comparative performance measures (something for the Section to work on in the future perhaps) the case has now been made to enhance the functions of the PDC, to increase significantly the staff resources and to concentrate on

'enabling' clients to find their own information through more developed training and information literacy programs. The PDC will retain responsibility for the central help desk for information and research enquiries.

Richard Paré from **Canada** described a 'year of consultancies' involving both clients and staff. Clients, primarily members' staffers, commented on the importance of information technology and the need for the Library to be more visible. The major staffing change in the Library is the proposed merger of reference and research specialists into common teams. Privately we discussed the Australian experience with this initiative.

Keith Cuninghame from the **House of Commons** Library briefly described two projects. The Parliamentary Information Management Services (PIMS) project is a major project managed by the Library encompassing parliament wide and library specific information from Hansard through to subject group files. The other initiative is the recent client survey which concentrated on 'customer value propositions'. This approach has attempted to categorise common types of information seeking behaviours with a view to developing products and approaches that better mesh with those behaviours. Among the expected outcomes are the breaking down of internal distinctions between reference and research, a single highly skilled help desk and a centrally managed knowledge base to replace a multiplicity of group based resources.

Brit Floistad gave a progress report on developments since the establishment of a Research Service in the **Norwegian Parliament** just over three years ago and also discussed some aspects of their first evaluation of services. With just five staff they were making progress but needed to be more visible and accessible, establish stricter criteria for accepting requests and devise mechanisms for establishing client priorities. There were plans for a modest expansion and much closer links with the Parliamentary Library and Archives.

- **Getting the Most out of the Resources We Have**

Presentations from **Hungary, Ghana and Israel** outlined the initiatives that have been taken in these Parliaments to convince, cajole and 'bull doze' the case for value added analytical services, often with meagre resources. **Hungary** has been making the case for a research service by extending the role performed by information specialists while **Ghana** engaged a number of young graduates to extend its research capacity on a restricted budget. The new Research and Information Centre in the **Israeli Parliament** is establishing itself with a small, young staff. In order to stretch the available resources they have developed a three tier approach to service provision which they acknowledge is unusual, even controversial, in the parliamentary environment. At the first level of priority staff are allocated to committees to provide quick, time dependent responses. At the second level there is a group of subject specialists who focus on indepth analysis and the third level consists of ad hoc recruitment of specialist expertise from academia and private research institutions on a needs basis.

- **Managing our 'Political Environments': Culture, Constraints and Controversies**

This session focussed on some of the difficulties and approaches that underpin the delivery of non-partisan services in a partisan environment. Presentations from **Ethiopia, Egypt, the Czech Republic and Australia** highlighted the different cultural barriers and opportunities in providing accurate, rigorous and impartial research and analysis.

Waffa Abdel Elah from the **Egyptian Parliament** discussed the obstacles her research unit have faced when trying to obtain accurate information for research papers. If the information required does exist it is often difficult to access or purposefully withheld by government agencies. Research staff have had to employ a range of strategies to work around this including using contacts in other research units and wider networks. They have also had to look to alternative international information sources to try to get another perspective on the information that is being withheld locally although often the material obtained in this way is not sufficiently up to date or has to be translated. Researchers have found it useful to attend a wider range of seminars and workshops conducted by local experts who tend to be more forthright on these occasions. Changing this culture is seen as a longer-term process dependent on a greater involvement by commentators, specialists groups and society in general to demand a freer exchange of information.

Tesfaye Aberra outlined some of the challenges and opportunities faced by the new Research and Documentation Centre in the **Ethiopian Parliament**. Two practices that appear to be working counter to the establishment of non partisan services are members' expectations that research papers will put forward a particular view by drawing conclusions and making recommendations and the fact that there are no barriers to employing staff with prominent party affiliations. It has also been difficult for the Centre to recruit and retain staff due to poor pay relativities and limited development opportunities. On the optimistic side there is a strong commitment on the part of the Centre staff to provide timely, non partisan services and this appears to be matched by an equally firm commitment within the parliamentary leadership to support a more autonomous, professional research service.

Jindriska Syllova described the main activities of the **Czech Parliament's** Parliamentary Institute and some of the ways in which the Institute has been reinforcing its mandate to provide expert, impartial research. With assistance from the European Union it has been possible to finance cooperation with international institutions and to acquire a range of specialist literature.

June Verrier's presentation highlighted some of the approaches taken in **Australia** to reinforce a non-partisan approach to service provision. These approaches have included clarifying the nature of a legitimate request by way of a detailed statement of entitlements approved by the Joint Library Committee and measures to minimise the misuse of individually tailored briefs that are provided on a not for attribution basis. The presentation included discussion about the reality that some staff will have party affiliations and strong political views and it would infringe Australia's anti discrimination legislation if someone were to be denied employment on this basis alone. The Australian Parliament's Code of Conduct and Parliamentary Service Values have been developed to ensure that all staff carry out their duties fairly and impartially. These documents clearly set out the course of action to be taken if they fail to do so.

- **Building Continuous Innovation**

In the four years since the Parliamentary Library of **Scotland** was established with small print collections and a focus on electronic resources it has increased its resource base and has developed new, well received services such as the web based 'hot topics for debate'. Denis Oag outlined how 'building continuous innovation' has required a careful allocation of priorities (committees come first, then individual members) and collaborative approaches to projects with librarians and researchers combining their expertise.

Covering new approaches to information gathering and information delivery, Donna Scheeder from **Congressional Research Service** described a new model for collaboration which will see the establishment of a Knowledge Services Group to provide specialist librarian consultancy support to CRS's large research divisions. The development of new working tools for collaboration will include specialised portal and content management strategies. Sixteen task forces have been established to implement this initiative.

Unlike the more formal presentations, the **workshop** format proved a very useful way to encourage more dialogue and exchange of information on a range of practical issues. These are a Section initiative which this year were held at Humboldt University. Section delegates could choose from a selection those workshops they wished to attend. Points of interest from some of the workshops attended by the Australian delegates were:

- **User Education** – facilitated by Rob Bryan, NSW Parliamentary Library discussed the importance of user education and information literacy programs that are now standard practice in the more developed parliamentary library and research services. The workshop discussed how to better share experiences with face to face and computer based training initiatives. In its educational program the Scottish Parliamentary Library emphasises the steps involved in taking down a request and has developed a tip sheet of the points to consider and address with clients. There was also interest in the contact officer program and personalised followup visits to new Senators and Members in the Australian Parliament.
- **Knowledge Management in a Legislative Environment** – facilitated by Donna Scheeder, Congressional Research Service the workshop discussed the idea that in the legislative environment intellectual capital is an organisation's most important asset. Emphasis must be placed on building a knowledge sharing culture, built on trust in which sharing is valued rather than keeping knowledge to oneself. CRS has developed a range of approaches to foster 'common knowledge' including intranet work spaces for specialist groups and the setting up of collaborative work teams to develop specific products. With many staff leaving in the next few years it was important to develop strategies around knowledge audits to capture the 'know how' as well as the 'know what' from experienced staff. The Norwegian Parliamentary Library has developed personalised information portals for staff and clients to foster greater interaction and knowledge sharing.
- **Consortia** - facilitated by Jan Keukens from the Netherlands Parliament the group discussed how consortia have become a prime means of dealing with suppliers of information, especially electronic resources. It was noted that pricing deals for consortia were featured by a number of vendors at the IFLA Trade Exhibition. Various models were presented and discussed from loose 'buying clubs' to more organised legal entities. There was caution about the full cost of such deals including poor initial usage rates and the need for a high investment in training. In Canada the consortium of federal libraries has been operating for more than 10 years but the investment of staff time has been high to achieve longer term benefits. The same issues are occurring in Australia as federal libraries go down this route. The Swedish Parliamentary Library has consortia arrangements with its National Library and University Library and some special grants have been provided. In what was thought to be a world first, the Government of Slovenia has signed an agreement for a national site license for information subscriptions, something that

has not got past the discussion stage in Australia. The group briefly explored the benefits and the obstacles to establishing a consortium of parliamentary libraries around the world.

- **Change Management** – facilitated by Tula Laaksovirta from the Finish Parliamentary Library who emphasised that the manager must have a vision of what needs to be done and how to go about doing it, recognising that there is always more changed needed than can be achieved at any one time. She spoke about the conservative tradition of Finland and the need for the library profession to change there. In an environment where librarians are less qualified than in the Australian Parliament, she emphasised the importance of better education to develop the abstract thinking skills necessary for innovation in an increasingly challenging environment. Her presentation generated a lively exchange of ideas on a subject of great importance to many participants.

8. IFLA Congress At Large

A strong theme throughout the Congress week was free and equitable access to information. IFLA's special section on Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE) organised sessions to discuss the impact of different forms of terrorism legislation introduced by various countries and how this legislation might impede information access. The Congress approved a resolution calling for the repeal of legislation which violates human rights and individual privacy through unfettered access to information in the name of national security.

There were also opportunities to attend additional sessions on a wider spectrum of initiatives and innovation as well as inspect new products at the Trade Exhibition. Of particular note were several sessions dealing with copyright and related legal issues.

- **Copyright and other legal issues**

IFLA examines copyright and licensing issues through its Committee on Copyright and other Legal Matters (CLM). Its most recent concerns have been in relation to the implementation of World Trade Organisation (WTO) decisions, especially the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). It is still unclear how TRIPS will affect libraries, copyright and intellectual property issues. A CLM subcommittee has started to look into the practicalities of developing a model copyright law to assist countries implementing TRIPS.

An issue of concern to all libraries, including those parliamentary, is the relationship between copyright provisions in national legislation and the use of contracts to alter or override those provisions. Tom Cochrane from the University of Technology Queensland, who chairs the Australian Libraries Copyright Committee, discussed the Australian Copyright Law Review Committee's (CLRC) report *Copyright and Contracts*, the first report of its kind worldwide. For libraries the findings of the report are of importance because of the increasing trend to license electronic resources rather than to buy them outright. Recognising that the exceptions associated with fair dealing are well established, the CLRC agreed that contracts that attempt to modify such exceptions could alter the balance intended by Australia's copyright legislation and the Copyright Act should be amended to ensure that such contract provisions have no effect. The CLRC report also supported the Digital Agenda amendments to prevent use of technological protection

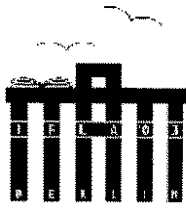
measures to restrict access to copyright material in electronic form. Cochrane concluded that this positive picture is likely to be complicated and compromised by the negotiation of a free trade agreement with the United States.

Paul Whitney from Canada and Kjell Nilsson from Sweden provided an update on libraries and international trade treaties with a sobering view of the overlapping and conflicting agreements being negotiated bilaterally and internationally that are 'unclear, ambiguous and contentious'. Intellectual property rights are a significant element in these agreements and there are serious issues about balancing trade and economic considerations with information access and libraries. The presentation questioned the extent to which libraries, educational institutions and online services are included in multilateral agreements such as the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). There are confused and varying interpretations by different countries. The presenters sounded a warning for countries such as Australia that are negotiating bilateral agreements with the United States. In return for lowering some trade barriers the US is seeking concessions in areas that include intellectual property. With recent extensions to copyright owner protections and penalties in the US it is most likely that existing exemptions for Australian libraries to share resources and access information will be altered by these negotiations.

Under the heading of other legal issues was a presentation by Michèle Battisti on the increasingly controversial practice of 'deep linking' when hyperlinks are made to a page within a web site rather than to the front page of that site. This practice has resulted in lawsuits in a number of countries about infringements to intellectual property (inappropriate use of logos, protected works, parts of databases) privacy and moral rights issues. In most cases the infringements involved attempts to gain some form of commercial advantage. The message from these examples was that hyper linking should respect the copyright of the originator and should not attempt to bypass contractual or technical measures set up by the originating web site.

9. Concluding Comments

I would like to thank the Parliamentary Library for this opportunity to experience first hand developments across a range of issues of concern to libraries in general and parliamentary libraries and research services in particular. It was an opportunity to discuss issues of common interest with international colleagues, to share and to learn. It also highlighted strengths and weaknesses. A lasting impression was of the enthusiastic way in which the emerging parliamentary libraries in Europe have embraced new technologies to deliver services electronically while at the same time nurturing their rich historical and archival collections. For all our strengths, it was a reminder that the Australian Parliament has neither an archive nor designated archivist supported by the skills and programs necessary to preserve increasingly fragile print materials for future generations.



World Library and Information Congress: 69th IFLA General Conference and Council

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 Research Day
Simultaneous Interpretation: -

Innovation in Service Delivery: The case of Audio Briefs from the Australian Parliament's Information and Research Services

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Innovation: people creating value by implementing new ideas *Innovation Network¹*

Introduction

Innovation is about people and ideas. It is about an organisation's ability to provide the creative space and the resources to explore those ideas knowing that new does not always mean successful. When we try something new we take a risk that the result might not be well received by our clients. Fresh and original can just as easily be perceived as trendy or a gimmick. Taking risks is an integral part of innovation and we learn as much from what did not work as what turns out to be successful.

In our parliamentary environments we provide a core of information and research services that are the backbone of our operations. Many of these services have been honed and refined over time in response to client demand and feedback. Members of Parliament expect consistency of service and do not necessarily want us to be at the bleeding edge of innovation. On the other hand, we are all part of a changing service sector where our clients needs and abilities are changing, as are the skills and tools we use to do our work. Creativity and innovation inject excitement into the workplace as well as sending the message to Members of Parliament that we are forward thinking and responsive to their changing needs.

In what circumstances do you decide to experiment with a new type of service:
 ■ where do the ideas come from?

¹ Innovation Network <http://www.thinksmart.com>

- how do you go about planning and establishing a new service?
- what about resource allocation, taking into account existing service commitments?
- how do you assess your success, and your need for improvement?

I will outline how we addressed these questions in the Australian context when we decided to experiment with audio briefs for Senators and Members of the Australian Parliament in the early months of 2002. This was a period of detailed planning to brief new Senators and Members who would enter the Australian Parliament as a result of the November 2001 elections. As we focussed on better communication and marketing strategies it was an opportune time to develop and introduce a new service.

Identifying a new client service need

How do you identify a service gap and where do the ideas come from? Ideas might emerge from staff or clients or from opportunities to share experiences with like organisations. Time out from the work pressures of busy sitting weeks with strategic planning days or staff retreats are a valuable opportunity to consolidate and share the 'intelligence gathering' we all do on a daily basis, or to work through the recommendations of a major client survey and what the recommendations might mean for service delivery. However the ideas emerge, we have to test their relevance to our own environment and the way in which our clients go about their parliamentary business.

In the Australian Parliament we conduct a major triennial evaluation of our services but we also encourage informal feedback through an extensive outreach program. The idea of audio briefs emerged from client visits to several country-based members of parliament who wanted to listen to something interesting in their cars during long driving sessions. Australia is a big continent. Some of our electorates are extremely large and take days to drive across. Members can spend considerable time travelling with limited radio coverage. Even city-based members can spend an hour or two commuting and some drive to Canberra for the parliamentary sittings.

At one of our management retreats we discussed this feedback in the light of two other concerns about service delivery. One was alternative ways to meet the needs of clients who have told us they are too busy to read our written products, however brief. The other concern was the increasing amount of positive feedback we had received from members about personalised oral briefings as we encouraged staff to create more opportunities for face to face discussions with members in their offices.

Although we needed to examine further how this idea for a new service would mesh with our existing mix, it was possible that aural briefs would have wider appeal than the niche market of the country car travellers who had originally sparked the idea. The objective and the challenge was to deliver a high quality product that had the credibility of our written briefs but with the refreshing ease of listening to a well planned and presented radio program on a topical issue.

Planning to prove the concept

At the early stages of planning, administrative structures need to be flexible and not overly bureaucratic. A small working group or ad hoc task force usually provides the best opportunity to assemble a mix of staff who can creatively explore the possibilities of the

concept in an open and non-threatening way. There is also the need to set milestones and some guidelines to keep the planning focussed.

An important piece of preparatory work was a background paper that, informed by discussions with group directors, attempted to put flesh on the concept. From the background paper draft guidelines were developed to help direct the working group's approach and experiments with this new medium. Two early decisions were crucial for the development approach taken. Firstly, we wanted to showcase the expertise of our staff so we decided that audio briefs would be recorded by our information and research specialists rather than using professional presenters. Secondly, in order to maintain the high quality control standards that apply to all general distribution products, audio briefs would be developed, in the main, from the content of our written or electronic publications. This meant that there would always be a written product for those who wanted to go over the detail. In our early experiments we issued an audio brief that was created just for that medium. The detail of the presentation led one member to request the paper for reference and we had to hastily create a pseudo paper that had in fact been the author's speaking notes.

As with other general distribution products, audio briefs would require the same procedures of tracking sheet, endorsement by group director and final clearance by the Head. The difference was the recording process and a heightened awareness of the voice to communicate meaning.

Resource requirements

In most cases, resources to explore new ideas and initiatives have to be found by reallocating existing resources and priorities and by 'reinventing' ourselves. Most of us do not have the luxury of being handed a supplementary budget for innovation. While priorities have to be adjusted and time allocated for new projects, innovation brings with it a sense of excitement and a determination to succeed. Suddenly it is possible to fit that bit extra into the working day.

For the audio brief project seven staff, one from each subject group, volunteered to represent their groups and to provide ongoing feedback. They were also expected to 'perform'. Several had a teaching or lecturing background so their oral communication skills had already been well honed. Another had experience adapting written text for radio presentation. Yet another had worked for a radio station and was also blessed with a voice that recorded well for easy listening. She recorded the standard opening and closing lines and became the sought after 'interviewer' for the briefs recorded in interview style.

The first experiment was a home recording put together by one of the working group while on leave. While the content was excellent, the background crackles and extraneous noises clearly demonstrated the need for professional recording in a controlled studio environment.

Access to the Parliament House Studio and its experienced production team gave us production quality on the technical side that would otherwise have been more complicated if not impossible to achieve. The producer delivered on his promise to "make anyone sound good" and he became an integral part of the team, trusted for his production tips and editing expertise. We also acted on our producer's advice to engage a professional broadcaster to conduct a training session to fast track nascent recording skills.

These external resources were not available in an unlimited way and we had to be mindful of the Studio's other priorities as we tried to get our production line flowing. With first time presenters every minute of recording could involve two minutes or more of the producer's time to remove mistakes, stumbles, hesitations, paper shuffling noises and heavy breathing. Also, recording sessions had to be booked for non-sitting weeks because Senators and Members used the studio in sitting weeks and the producer had other duties during that time.

Although we have now broadened considerably the range of presenters, members of the original working group have remained the local champions of the product and their experience and skills have become a resource others can draw upon. Our own local experts now conduct group or one on one training sessions for new presenters.

Expect the unexpected

The best-laid plans will invariably encounter some unforeseen difficulties. In this case we were so preoccupied with getting the content and presentation right that we did not pay as much attention to reproducing the CDs.

The decision to issue compilations rather than separate CDs for each brief was made for the convenience of clients so that they would not have to receive multiple CDs if they wanted to listen to more than one track. While, with hindsight, this was the right decision, and we have continued with this approach, it presented unexpected problems on the production side. The problems ranged from the logistics of 'burning' multiple tracks onto one CD to the design and compilation of the CD booklet. Watching one of our very talented support staff fix non standard size pages together with adhesive tape convinced us that this hand crafted approach was not sustainable as requests for the briefs flowed in. We have since acquired efficient CD embossing and copying equipment at a modest cost and simplified the amount of detail in the booklet so that it can be reproduced with ease.

Feedback

Feedback to inform and review is a critical part of the development of any new service. While a new product must have a clear identity for promotion and marketing, those involved should not be so fixed in their approach that they are unable to refine and adapt in response to comment and constructive criticism.

Approximately 40 Members of Parliament or their staff requested a copy of one or more audio briefs in the first few weeks of issue. Efforts were made to contact all their offices by phone for some informal feedback using a few key questions. The objective was to draw out the nuances of how the briefs had been received and used. Had the service met expectations? What could be improved? About a third of the offices provided very useful comments. In most instances it was a staffer who had requested the CD and who provided the initial comments. In spite of the fact that audio briefs had been developed specifically for Senators and Members themselves, it was disappointing to discover that, until prompted, many of the staffers had not considered handing it to their Senator or Member. We invited the staffers to do this and then called back for the Senators' and Members' comments too.

The feedback was overwhelmingly positive. One Member gave them 12/10. The words 'excellent' and 'very useful' were used a number of times. Most considered this a 'very good

way to present information' and a refreshing alternative to reading. Most listened in the car but a number listened in the office and some took notes.

Subject, rather than style of presentation or length, was the main interest trigger. Short or long, one voice or two were generally less important considerations than well structured relevant content. One Member emphasised the importance of clear landmarks within the narrative, much like an aural table of contents, to hold interest and to ensure that the listener did not get lost. Others commented on the usefulness of having the track times on the cover so that they could judge whether they had sufficient time to listen.

There was more that we could do to exploit the medium. The interview style was developed to add interest for the listener. One client suggested using different voices for different points of view rather than using one voice to carry the weight of opposing views. Others offered suggestions for issues they would like to hear presented in this way.

There was criticism too. One Member of Parliament, who remains enthusiastic about the service and listens to the briefs while travelling, has not been impressed with the attempts to 'entertain' and to make them sound like radio programs when this is not, in this Member's view, necessary to convey content and sustain interest. I am not sure how this Member would have responded to the suggestion to inject engine thrust noises into a brief on the future of Australia's airline industry. There was insufficient time to follow through on that idea.

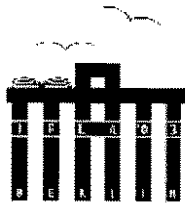
Maintaining the momentum

Twelve months on, audio briefs are part of the established suite of general distribution products issued by the Australian Parliament's Information and Research Services. Further enhancements have included loading the briefs onto our Intranet as digital MP3 files so that clients can listen to the briefs by way of their desktop computers without having to request a copy of the CD. In the coming months Senators and Members will be issued with pocket pcs and we expect they will be able to use these new devices to listen to audio briefs while travelling, even on aeroplanes.

New initiatives have to be nurtured. Audio brief production reached a hiatus several months ago when the business of the parliamentary sittings left little time for the additional tasks of script production and recording in the studio. Maintaining the supply of audio briefs has meant consolidating new procedures and processes and ensuring that everything works smoothly. With encouragement and training more of our specialists are coming to the realisation that, for a small amount of additional work, their intellectual effort can be adapted to reach a wider, appreciative audience.

In conclusion

With any new venture you need to plan well so that new ideas are given every chance to succeed. And if at first you don't ...it is important to keep trying. It is our Members of Parliament who benefit from the value we add to our parliamentary environments when we foster creativity and innovation in service delivery.



World Library and Information Congress: 69th IFLA General Conference and Council

1-9 August 2003, Berlin

Code Number: 165-E
Meeting: 64. Library and Research Services for Parliaments - Research Day
Simultaneous Interpretation: -

Successful delivery of professional and non-partisan services in a partisan environment

On Socks and Bees and everything in between: Navigating the Political Environment – Culture, Constraints and Controversies

June Verrier

Head, Australian Parliamentary Information and Research Service

Rising on the Adjournment debate in the House of Representatives on 12 February 2003, Mr Ross Cameron, the member for Parramatta, said:

In the leftover 70 seconds I want to record that I attended the gym yesterday and arrived without a pair of socks. As I was wondering what to do, a kind stranger produced a clean pair from his bag and offered them to me in a random act of kindness. The random actor was Bill from the Bills Digest Group within the Parliamentary Library. I felt that it was appropriate to recognise the contribution made by the producers of the Bills Digests. Listeners to the House of Representatives may not be aware of the extraordinary contribution that is made to our speeches by the fastidious and scholarly research undertaken within that group...I felt it was appropriate that we as a chamber record our appreciation for their professionalism and service to this parliament and to the nation.

I asked the amused rhetorical question on this feedback: 'Is there was anything we can't, won't or don't do to cater for the needs of the Senators and Members of the Australian Commonwealth Parliament?! Of course there is – and there must be. And this is one of the issues to be addressed in what follows in this session, the theme of which is the successful delivery of professional and non-partisan services in a partisan environment.

Of the many issues that could be tackled under this heading I will focus in this paper on three:

- the 'illegitimate' client¹ request
- the misuse of briefs or papers provided to clients

- the question of the political affiliation of staff.

1. The 'illegitimate' client request

What will fall into the category of the illegitimate client request naturally will depend on the mandate and the charter of the relevant parliamentary library or research service. In the Australian Commonwealth Parliament, for example, we do not respond to requests from the public², we do not allow access to academics³ and we do not respond to constituent letters or requests⁴ because MPs have electorate office staff to do this for them. The Department of the Parliamentary Library's (DPL) Information and Research Service (IRS) is resourced to provide Members of Parliament and their staff with information, analysis and advice to carry out their parliamentary and representational duties. There is a great demand for services and, to ensure the best possible services within that framework, there must be limits.

A Statement of Client Services sets out in broad terms what that entitlement contains and what priorities apply. Within certain limits, Senators and Members have absolute priority, closely followed by their staff and the staff of Committees. Former Senators and Members, their family, members of other parliaments, other parliamentary libraries and departments of state have some entitlement, the latter on account of the reciprocal assistance we so often get from them.

This, of course, poses a number of dilemmas in a situation in which MPs may not be fully aware of the limits to their entitlement to services and may, in any case, seek to work around the rules. The *Statement of Client Services* appears in a document which has a very good recognition factor among clients and is generally well used, namely the *Guide to Services*.

Most important of all, however, is the fact that the *Statement of Client Services* has the authority of the Joint Library Committee of the Parliament behind it. This is a Committee consisting of 14 Senators and Members which is chaired by the President of the Senate or the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Moreover, there has been discussion in the Library Committee of overuse and misuse of IRS services motivated by a concern for equity of access to all MPs, the protection of the focus of services on the delivery of quality professional information, analysis and advice the parliamentary and representational purposes and also by undue pressure on staff.

Some MPs will genuinely not know that they are not entitled to this or that – just as they genuinely often – and in spite of a rigorous marketing campaign – will not be aware of the full range of services to which they are entitled. When the need arises, these usually take quite kindly to advice that we cannot do this or that, for this or that reason and some have even suggested they are surprised by how rarely we set limits.

To assist staff understand service limits – an effort just as important as making MPs aware of them because, for credibility, this policy must be applied absolutely consistently to all or leave a perception of partisanship – we engaged all staff in a major exercise to identify the 'illegitimate request' when the information and research services were combined into a single client service in 1996. From that followed the development of the *Client Service Entitlement* matrix on which staff can draw in their negotiation of request with clients.

Things we do not do:

- excessive photocopying because we are not resourced to provide a photocopying service
- copy material for non-parliamentary clients⁵
- provide legal, medical, financial or taxation advice for personal and not parliamentary or representational purposes because staff do not have professional indemnity
- search for personal information not on the public record on other MPs, public figures or their families
- respond to huge, amorphous, trawling requests, especially those to tight deadlines, (e.g. everything the Prime Minister has ever said about Goods and Services Tax, GST, in the almost 30 years since he entered Parliament)
- respond to requests more properly the province of other parliamentary departments (e.g. the Parliamentary Education Office is resourced to increase awareness of the Parliament and how it works, especially in schools)
- respond to constituents' inquiries (as opposed to brief MPs on issues of concern to their constituents)
- assist MPs or their families with their academic studies
- over service
- do the work Committee staff are paid to do - e.g. assess submissions (except highly technical submissions where IRS has the expertise & committee staff do not).

Implementation

It is all well and good to have a clear *Statement of Client Services*; the challenge is its effective implementation. The power imbalance between the requesting member and the IRS staffer is great and can create its own problems. Staff are advised to make the limits clear to MPs and, if the explanation is not accepted, to refer the problem to their Director or to the Head. Should there be a recurring problem, this will be discussed by the Head with the MP on a routine client call⁶.

Client entitlement is not black and white. As with everything else in a highly charged political environment, the key is judgement – and common sense. And always, if we cannot respond, we do our best to suggest other ways or other places where help may be found⁷. If exceptions are made to the rules, then it needs to be clearly explained that it IS an exception 'on this occasion' – and the opportunity taken again to explain the limits.

This requires an investment in staff training and support. Staff need to be given the tools, the framework and perhaps even the words to assist them to respond in the case of difficult requests or difficult clients. Most important of all is strong support from the top and, ultimately, in the Australian case, from the Presiding Officers and the Library Committee.

2. The Misuse of Briefs or Papers Provided to Members of Parliament

The publicly available product of the Australian Commonwealth Parliament's Information and Research Service can be found at <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/>. Generally referred to as General Distribution Papers (or products), GDPs, this makes up, in recourse terms, approximately 25% of output. These are quality, impartial, balanced assessments of the issue at hand drawing on information publicly available at the time of the (usually speedy) production and subjected to rigorous quality control procedures.

The commitment of considerable resources to GDPs is a primary means to build up the organisation's intellectual capital and maintain expertise in key areas of interest to the parliament. It is also a primary mechanism to enable staff to respond readily, immediately and, as necessary, briefly to the day to day inquiries of greater and lesser complexity that Senators and Members routinely make. Internet presence is also an important part of the IRS's public profile and community services obligation, thereby contributing to peer recognition and the development of valuable networks. As such, when GDPs are drawn on, attribution by clients and the community is both expected and welcome.

Thus when a committee for example reproduces in its Report an IRS 'foundation paper' setting out the background, context and issues for an inquiry, this contribution is now acknowledged. Or a journalist, increasingly frequently basing an entire feature article on an IRS GDP, ideally cites and sources it appropriately⁸. And, increasingly frequently too, GDPs are referenced in the academic literature and used in course work at schools and universities.

The majority of IRS output, however, approximately 75% is generated by individual requests. The term used to describe this is 'directed' information or research and, by definition, it remains confidential to the Senator or Member concerned. These requests can include an extraordinary broad range – from the apt quote, to some international comparisons to give context to the Australian subject matter for a speech, through background briefings for meetings or visits, some points for the Adjournment or for an opening, or even to the development of alternative policy options for a Shadow Minister. These responses are provided to the client's specific direction and written along the lines they suggest. Because they are thus 'directed' they may not be balanced and impartial – and as such should not be attributed to the IRS.

All individually commissioned work is the clients' to use as they wish - without attribution. To remind them of this, responses carry a disclaimer and, as a routine work practice, staff are asked to repeat the point at every opportunity.

But politicians will be politicians – and there will be those who breach this rule. One reason is the very good one – the credibility of the Parliamentary Information and Research Services. Members and Senators like to cite IRS briefs because of the organisation's credibility. Apparently, 'Research carried out by the Department of the Parliamentary Library...' has a caché and a clout that 'Senator Bloggs says...' does not. Indeed, one member, when taken to task for citing individually commissioned work said, 'Oh! But they'll believe you; they won't believe me!' But the danger is that, quoted out of context, IRS could be seen to be partisan.

There is misuse of IRS tailored briefs and this will undoubtedly continue. The protection is the disclaimer and the stand taken in the breach: the explanation is that this particular piece of writing was indeed directed research, written to prescription not as an independent advisory and must be seen as such.

So why make such a commitment to the individually tailored response? Because all the feedback from independently commissioned external evaluation and ongoing feedback mechanisms over the years tells us that this is the part of the service that Senators and Members value most highly. As a client service in a competitive information environment, it would be foolish to do less than capitalise on the specialist parliamentary nous that IRS staff

uniquely develop, their independence and comparative advantage, and respond to meet this niche market.

The DPL, of which IRS is the client service delivery point, is independent; it does not promote (or oppose) the policy of the Government or of the Opposition of the day. Rather it provides the best independent and professional advice in the time available. But as well, if asked to do so, responses will be framed to suit the perspectives of the requesting MP. To know and understand every aspect of the issues at hand, networks and sources include any and all available – departments, lobby groups, academics – but IRS is beholden to none. This independence is a protection, as is the widespread support the DPL and its IRS enjoys across the Parliament.

3. The Question of Political Affiliation

Over the years a great deal of interest has been expressed in the Parliamentary Libraries and Research Services Section of IFLA in the question of appropriate policy on the political affiliation of staff. It was discussed in Boston and in Glasgow in workshops on *Managing the Political Environment*⁹. In Glasgow, the feeling of the meeting appeared to be incredulity that staff could be seconded to – or recruited from – Members' or Ministers' offices, or that anyone with a known political affiliation could be employed.

This is perhaps one of the most fraught issues with which parliamentary libraries and parliamentary research services have to deal. Because participants in this conference come from often very different political and cultural environments, it is one on which consensus is unlikely to be achieved. Nonetheless the attempt to draw out some aspects of it from the Australian model may assist work through this issue and frame guidelines most appropriate in differing polities.

Somewhat flippantly but to make a strong and very important point, I have said to overseas visitors 'isn't it a wonderful comment on the quality of Australian democracy that the Government pays us to help the Opposition oppose!' But this is in fact not quite accurate: the Government pays us to assist the Parliament – all parties which make it up – to hold the Government to account. This is indeed a democratic point of which Australia can be very proud.

Nonetheless, to play that part effectively is occasionally to be a burr in the Government's saddle. But now that both major parties likely to form governments have been in opposition for considerable periods of time since there has been access to the range and quality of information, analysis and advice that IRS now offers, both appreciate full well the very important role IRS can play for them at this time. The Opposition front bench – whichever party is in opposition – tends to be the single most significant client group. The reasons are obvious: oppositions do not have departments of state to assist nor the number of personal staff to do the key policy development work that effective oppositions must do if they are to offer a credible alternative to the government of the day to the voting public. IRS assists considerably in this task – and at the same time continues to provide whatever advice and assistance is required by members of the Government, including Ministers, some of whom continue to call on it in spite of their access to the far larger resources of their departments.

One paradox to arise is that the quality of the responses they enjoy and the quantity of work done leads to the high regard that makes IRS a natural recruitment pool for new ministers in

new governments. Australian law requires that staff be released for this purpose and Australian law requires that they may return from whence they came. Consequently, for example, there is one current member of IRS's staff who spent ten years in Ministers' offices of the now Opposition and there is one member of staff currently on secondment to a Shadow Minister's office.

Australian law, too, does not allow discrimination in employment on the grounds of, among other things, political opinion. Apart from Australia's position as signatory of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966 (ICCPR) and the International Labour Organisation's Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention 1958 (ILO III), there is, as well, the Workplace Relations Act of 1996 (WRA) and the Members of Parliament Staff Act 1984 (MoPS) which governs the employment of staff by members, senators and ministers. One object of the WRA is the prevention and elimination of discrimination on a number of grounds including political opinion. Section 170CK states that an employer must not terminate an employee's employment for a number of reasons, including political opinion. The object of the Members of Parliament Staff Act is to reflect the fact that such staffers were not and are not necessarily partisan and to require departments of state to release – and to take back – public servants who wished to be seconded to MPs offices¹⁰.

Of course people who work in Parliament House have political views. Part of the strength of staff is the interest and enthusiasm they have for the Parliament and the political process. But the culture is that staff leave those views at the front door when they come to work. This enables them to deal fairly, impartially and with equal energy and enthusiasm with all political comers – even those with whose views they may differ – or even find distressing as occurred recently in the case of the emergence of a new party promoting some controversial policies. Even though few were likely to sympathise with those policies, staff were absolutely professional in responding to their requests and did so with the same dedication as for any other MP, as was illustrated by explicit expressions of appreciation of the excellence of service. Just one member of staff felt the need to declare a conflict of interest on the grounds of the apparently racist policies of this party and a consequent inability to work for them. This declaration was appreciated and could be accommodated.

So, how does the Australian legal framework affect choices the IRS makes in employment? Are people with known political affiliations employable in the Parliamentary environment? Generally, Australia's obligations in law do not allow for discrimination in employment, including for political opinion. The *Parliamentary Service Values* and the *Parliamentary Service Code of Conduct* ensure that any such opinions do not influence staff in the course of their parliamentary duties and provide for action to be taken should they do so. These have the authority of the Presiding Officers, that is, the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. And from them flows a culture and work practices which vigorously promotes and defends them.

The *Parliamentary Service Values*:

...

- the Parliamentary Service provides professional advice and support for the Parliament independently of the Executive Government of the Commonwealth
- the Parliamentary Service provides non-partisan and impartial advice and services to each House of the Parliament, to committees of each House, to joint committees of both Houses and to Senators and to Members of the House of Representatives...

- employment decisions in the Parliamentary Service are based on merit.’

...

The *Parliamentary Service Code of Conduct*:

...

- a Parliamentary Service Employee must disclose, and take reasonable steps to avoid, any conflict of interest (real or apparent) in connection with Parliamentary Service employment...

and

- a Parliamentary Service employee must not make inappropriate use of:
 - a) inside information; or
 - b) the employees duties, status, power or authority;

in order to gain, or seek to gain, a benefit or advantage for the employee or for any other person.

...

The *Parliamentary Service Code of Conduct* and the *Parliamentary Service Value* are underwritten by an act of Parliament, the *Parliament Service Act 1999*, which sets out procedures for breaches which can range from counselling, through reduction of salary, to dismissal. Although the reason was not political partisanship, its strength was illustrated, by a case earlier this year when these sanctions had to be used. An employee was first reprimanded and then, after repeating the offence, an investigation followed which concluded by recommending dismissal. The employee chose to resign before this could be put into effect.

An earlier case in the context of recruitment was alleged to involve political discrimination and an objection was lodged with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. After protracted deliberations and legal assistance, HREOC came down in support of the DPL decision. This was that in spite of sound technical and professional claims to the position, the applicant could not demonstrate sound judgment, particularly in the context of a sensitive political environment. Even as the candidate was in the middle of an application for a position in the Parliament, he was writing inflammatory *Letters to the Editor* criticising various policies of the government of the day.

I recall a Canadian Senator remark at the Ottawa *Comparative Legislative Research Services Seminar* in 1998 saying that ‘it left a bad taste in the mouth’ when a research staffer took up a position with a politician, or vice versa. This sums up well the threat that this poses to that very fundamental issue of trust between Parliamentary information and research service providers and the consumers of those services, their parliamentary clients. Truth to tell, we would doubtless prefer this not to happen but, for reasons already explained we have to live with it and manage it. There is thus at the very least a very strong expectation that the staffer concerned will keep their head well down – and probably go beyond the call of duty to establish, or re-establish, their professional and impartial credentials among those clients who may have cause to question them. It is a credit to the staff concerned and to the vast majority of MPs who respect the strong culture and values of the DPL – that it can be made to work.

Conclusion

Perception is everything in the hugely sensitive political – and possibly sometimes paranoid – environment of the Parliament. There may well be a huge difference between perception and

reality – but that is not the point. In one case, for example, an Opposition Member drew to my attention a perception of a conflict of interest which is making for discomfort, in this case because the relevant specialist is married to the public servant responsible for managing the Government's case in a certain sensitive committee inquiry.

Perception or reality it must be dealt with and dealt with with a view to maintaining the integrity of the IRS and the confidence of the client. This requires maturity and common sense at all times from all staff - and is perhaps one reason for the flat structure at relatively senior levels and the relatively 'mature' character of staff employed by the IRS.

And of course, this helps to make us ready, willing and able to cope with all that our clients put upon us and to rise magnificently, as we so often do, to some amazing challenges!

I began my presentation with a story about socks and I will finish it with a story about bees to illustrate some of the extraordinary circumstances into which we get ourselves by being part of the parliamentary process. When I was a young foreign affairs analyst working in our old Parliament House, a certain Member of Parliament came into my office and asked me would I drive him to the Lodge, the Prime Minister's residence, that evening with two beehives because all the Commonwealth car drivers had refused to take him. At the appointed hour, off we set and...

July 2003

¹ The term 'client' is used to describe users of the Department of the Parliamentary Library's Information and Research Services, i.e. Senators, Members, their staff, Committees, their staff and staff of other parliamentary departments.

² By Act of Parliament in 1961, the National Library was created out of the Parliamentary Library in its own building with its own charter. This freed the Parliamentary Library to focus on Parliamentary business and parliamentary clients and freed it from a collecting responsibility. The DPL has first call on the resources of the National Library. The National Library Act of 1961 also separated the Archives Division of the Parliamentary Library and it became the Commonwealth Archives Office within the Prime Minister's Department.

³ A special provision is occasionally made for an academic if there is particular reason, eg the need for access to material only the Department of the Parliamentary Library holds.

⁴ A careful distinction needs to be made between constituents' requests and the need of an MP for briefing on an issue of concern in the electorate.

⁵ The Copyright Act 1968 allows copying by staff of Australian parliamentary libraries for Members of Parliaments only. Section 48A states:

The copyright in a work is not infringed by anything done, for the sole purpose of assisting a person who is a member of Parliament in the performance of the person's duties as such a member, by an authorized officer of a library, being a library the principal purpose of which is to provide library services for members of the Parliament.

⁶ As one of six feedback mechanisms, the Heads seek to call on all Senators and Members at least once in the life of a Parliament to discuss usage patterns, promote new services or services apparently underused in this case, and to elicit feedback on services including any suggestions for improvements to services.

⁷ Electorate office staff have been provided with resource lists, for example on Commonwealth Government departments and programs, welfare payments, immigration inquiries, etc in a Tip Sheet linked to the *Guide to Services* and periodically re-advertised.