



DEPARTMENT OF THE PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARY

Mr Richard Smith AO  
 Secretary  
 Department of Defence  
 R1-5B-Secretary Suite  
 RUSSELL OFFICES ACT 2600



Dear Mr Smith

I am writing to seek your assistance in ensuring that timely responses are provided from the Department of Defence to requests for published or publishable information from Senators and Members, where the Parliamentary Library has handled those requests of their behalf. Recently questions channelled through the Parliamentary Library have received responses within timeframes dictated by Defence, rather than, as was previously the practice, to meet the deadlines requested by the originating Senator or Member. As you would appreciate, this has the potential to cause difficulties for Senators and Members who often pose questions and request answers within short timeframes, which are dictated by their parliamentary and representational responsibilities.

While some potential exists for requests from the Parliamentary Library to divert Defence staff from their normal work, meeting requests from Senators and Members for publicly available, factual information is a significant element in overall accountability to the Parliament.

The importance of the Library having prompt access to publicly available, unclassified factual information from departments has been emphasised by successive Presiding Officers and Joint Library Committees. In this regard, I draw your attention to statements made by the Speaker of the House of Representatives on 17 August 2000 and the President of the Senate on 5 September 2000. These addressed the issue of access at officer-to-officer level by the Library to departments of state for public or publishable information and the timeliness of responses provided. The issue had been discussed at two prior meetings of the Joint Library Committee, which comprises Senators and Members from Government and Opposition parties and which strongly endorsed the principles of direct access to departments and timely responses. I have enclosed copies of the two statements.

I understand that defence analysts in DPL and staff in Defence's Ministerial and Parliamentary Liaison Section (DMPLS) have an excellent working relationship, such that the vast majority of questions are directed through DMPLS to ensure that answers are more complete and more accurate than would be the case if they sought responses on an officer-to-officer basis. The Library also appreciates that our using DMPLS helps minimise disruption to Defence as a whole.

INFORMATION, ANALYSIS AND ADVICE FOR THE PARLIAMENT

Parliament House CANBERRA ACT 2600 [web.library@aph.gov.au](mailto:web.library@aph.gov.au)

The Parliamentary Library does not have control over the timeframes set by Senators and Members although we seek to advise Senators and Members of the practicality of their deadlines. I would seek your assistance in ensuring that the Department of Defence, with whom the Parliamentary Library has always had a good and beneficial working relationship, is able to continue to meet the needs of Senators and Members and, through them, the needs of the Parliament.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J W Templeton', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

J W Templeton  
Acting Secretary

8 September 2003



Australian Government  
Department of Defence

Attachment  
Office of the Secretary

R1-5-Secretary Suite  
Russell Offices  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
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SEC 600/03

Mr JW Templeton  
Acting Secretary  
Department of the Parliamentary Library  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Templeton

Thank you for your letter of 8 September 2003 concerning the provision of information from the Department of Defence to staff of the Parliamentary Library in response to requests from Senators and Members of Parliament.

I note your references to the 'overall accountability to the Parliament' and to the need for us to ensure that Defence continues to meet the needs of Senators and Members and, through them, the needs of the Parliament. You may be assured that we do indeed respect, and take very seriously, our accountability within the framework of Ministerial responsibility to, and the needs of, the Parliament. It is in that context that Defence is always well represented at hearings of parliamentary committees, gives close attention to preparing detailed and prompt responses to a very large number of Questions on Notice and, of course, works closely with the ANAO to ensure the effectiveness of its many audits of our organisation.

As to the relationship with the Parliamentary Library, I note the Speaker's statement of 17 August 2000 that the Library "has no statutory or other right to be provided on demand with information from Government departments and agencies". Nevertheless, having regard to both that statement and the statement by the President on 5 September 2000, Defence will endeavour to respond as quickly as possible to requests for information that has been published or which can readily be made publicly available. You would appreciate, I hope, that our responsiveness to such requests will need to be balanced with many competing priorities, including providing responses to Questions on Notice and to the many representations which parliamentarians make directly to our Ministers and Parliamentary Secretary.

As you are aware, we have asked that requests for information be forwarded through the Directorate of Ministerial and Parliamentary Liaison Services for coordination (as necessary) across all areas of the department. These arrangements have been very effective in ensuring that questions are comprehensively answered.

Yours sincerely

R.C. SMITH  
Secretary

18 September 2003