

Chapter 1

Introduction

Terms of reference

1.1 On 23 June 2011, the Senate referred the following matter, as an inquiry under standing order 25(2)(a), to the Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee, for inquiry and report by 29 November 2011:

The performance of the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS), with particular reference to:

- (a) matters raised at the Budget estimates hearing of the committee on 23 May 2011 and in answers to questions taken on notice;
- (b) policies and practices followed by DPS for the management of the heritage values of Parliament House and its contents;
- (c) asset management and disposal policies and practices;
- (d) resource agreements and/or memoranda of understanding for the provision of services within and by DPS;
- (e) an assessment of the efficiencies achieved following the amalgamation of the three former joint parliamentary service departments and any impact on the level and quality of service delivery;
- (f) the efficient use, management and delivery of information technology services and equipment; and
- (g) any related matter.¹

1.2 The reporting date was subsequently extended to 28 June 2012.²

Conduct of the inquiry

1.3 The inquiry was advertised in *The Australian* newspaper and on the committee's website. The committee invited submissions from interested individuals, organisations and relevant government departments.

1.4 The committee received 23 public submissions. A list of individuals and organisations which made public submissions, together with other information authorised for publication by the committee, is at Appendix 1. The committee held public hearings in Canberra on 16 November 2011, and 2 May 2012. A list of the witnesses who gave evidence at the public hearings is available at Appendix 2.

1 *Journals of the Senate*, 23 June 2011, p. 1100.

2 *Journals of the Senate*, 8 November 2011, p. 1796.

1.5 Submissions, additional information and the Hansard transcript of evidence may be accessed through the committee's website at:

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

Background to the inquiry

1.6 During the February 2011 Additional Estimates hearings, the sale, in late 2010, of two billiard tables from Parliament House was canvassed.³ The committee was told that a heritage assessment of the tables had been conducted before the sale.⁴ The 'heritage assessment' was provided in an answer to a question on notice and consisted of a handwritten annotation by the Disposal Delegate on the *Register of all furniture installed in the New Parliament House*.⁵

1.7 The disposal of the tables was again pursued at the May 2011 Budget Estimates. During questioning, the then Secretary of DPS, Mr Alan Thompson, confirmed that the annotation was the heritage assessment.⁶ Further, it was confirmed that the annotation was added after the Additional Estimates hearing.⁷ It was also revealed that the Disposal Delegate had no qualifications for assessing heritage value of the tables.⁸

1.8 In its report to the Senate following the May 2011 Budget Estimates, the committee noted that it had requested that DPS provide the original version of the declaration of surplus or unserviceable items form and the asset register with the annotation. The committee indicated that it would consider the matter further following receipt of the documents requested.⁹

1.9 In speaking to the Estimates report, Senator the Hon. John Faulkner noted:

Precisely eight months to the day after the sale had occurred, and only after extensive questioning at the Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee—only after those processes did we find out that no

3 *Estimates Hansard*, 21 February 2011, pp 16–17; 41–43.

4 Ms Judy Konig, Department of Parliamentary Services, *Estimates Hansard*, 21 February 2011, p. 42.

5 Additional Estimates 2010–11, Department of Parliamentary Services, *Answers to questions on notice*, No.27.

6 Mr Alan Thompson, Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services, *Estimates Hansard*, 23 May 2011, p. 34.

7 Mr David Kenny, Deputy Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services, *Budget Estimates Hansard*, 23 May 2011, p. 62.

8 Mr David Kenny, Deputy Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services, *Estimates Hansard*, 23 May 2011, p. 65.

9 Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee, *Budget Estimates 2011–12*, June 2011, p. 4.

heritage assessment had been made prior to the sale, contrary to DPS policy; that the Senate's Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee had been misled; that inaccurate evidence to the committee had not been corrected and that very serious questions remain unanswered about the status of documents provided to the committee.¹⁰

1.10 Senator Faulkner went on to comment that the Senate earlier that day had agreed to refer a range of matters to the committee for inquiry. He noted the reference had been supported by government, opposition and Greens senators.¹¹

Structure of report

1.11 The report is structured as follows:

- chapter 2 addresses the sale of the billiard tables;
- chapter 3 provides an overview of the heritage strategy for Parliament House;
- chapter 4 addresses concerns raised about the heritage management of Parliament House; and
- chapter 5 discusses progress on the completion of the Central Reference Document and the apparent loss of material from Mitchell/Giurgola & Thorp archived following completion of the building.

10 Senator the Hon John Faulkner, *Senate Hansard*, 23 June 2011, p. 3707.

11 Senator the Hon John Faulkner, *Senate Hansard*, 23 June 2011, p. 3708.