

## Output Group 2—Table Office

### Outputs

Provision of programming and procedural support to the Senate.

Processing of legislation.

Preparation and publication of the record of proceedings of the Senate, records of current and outstanding business, and statistical information on the business of the Senate.

Processing of tabled documents and maintenance of safe custody of Senate records, and provision of document distribution and inquiries services.

Provision of secretariat support to the Appropriations and Staffing, Selection of Bills and Publications committees.

	Performance indicators	Performance results
Quality	<p>The degree of satisfaction of the President, Deputy President, committee members and senators, as expressed through formal and informal feedback mechanisms, with the quality and timeliness of advice and support and the achievement of key tasks.</p> <p>Key business documents are accurate and of a high standard.</p>	<p>The 2007 senators' survey reported high levels of satisfaction among senators who had used the services of the Table Office with the advice and support provided, consistent with the findings of earlier surveys.</p> <p>Informal feedback and direct contact between senators and staff also indicated continued high levels of satisfaction.</p> <p>Business documents remained of a high standard, with none shown to contain significant inaccuracies.</p>
Timeliness	<p><i>Order of Business</i> finalised and distributed prior to sittings and advice prepared proactively or as required.</p> <p>Running sheets available as soon as practicable; proposed amendments distributed in accordance with requirements; schedules of amendments and prints of bills available in accordance with predetermined requirements.</p> <p><i>Journals of the Senate</i> for the previous day and <i>Notice Paper</i> for the current day available prior to sittings; statistical and other documentation available as required or in accordance with predetermined requirements.</p> <p>All inquiries answered and documents stored or distributed on a timely basis.</p> <p>Meetings held, documentation provided and reports produced within timeframes set by the Senate or the committee, as relevant.</p>	<p>The <i>Order of Business</i> was distributed in advance of all sittings. Advice was given proactively or as required.</p> <p>Running sheets were available for use in the chamber as required.</p> <p>Government amendments were distributed as required.</p> <p>Schedules of amendments, prints of Senate bills and legislative support documents were available as required.</p> <p>The <i>Journals of the Senate</i> and the <i>Notice Paper</i> were available as required.</p> <p>The <i>Dynamic Red</i> was updated in a timely manner during each sitting day, and the <i>Senate Daily Summary</i> was published promptly after each sitting day.</p> <p>Statistical summaries were published after each sitting week, and comprehensive statistics were published on the website after each sitting fortnight.</p> <p><i>Business of the Senate</i> was tabled twice, in accordance with agreed timeframes. Requests for statistics were responded to promptly.</p> <p>All documents were distributed in a timely manner. All inquiries were responded to, and 96% were completed within five minutes.</p> <p>Committee meetings were held, and documents and reports provided, within agreed timeframes.</p> <p>The senators' survey confirmed high levels of satisfaction with the provision of these services.</p>
Quantity	<p>As required to facilitate proceedings; quantities meet predetermined distribution requirements or are accessible electronically or both.</p>	<p>Feedback indicated senators' continued high levels of satisfaction with the provision of documents by the Table Office.</p> <p>All distribution and electronic publishing targets were met.</p>

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### Analysis

The Table Office is divided into three sections, as outlined in Figure 5. It is led by the Clerk Assistant (Table), who also performs duties as a clerk at the table in the Senate chamber, as do the two directors. Each of the sections contributed to the department’s outcome by working towards the following intermediate outcomes:

- effective support for the Senate chamber
- public awareness of the Senate and its work
- effective support for Senate committees.

Figure 5 Elements and responsibilities of the Table Office

<p><b>Executive and Programming</b>  <i>Richard Pye, Clerk Assistant</i>                      Procedural advice                      Business programming                      Production of the Senate <i>Order of Business</i>                      Secretariat services to the Selection of Bills Committee</p>	
<p><b>Legislation and Documents</b>  <i>Rosa Ferranda, Director</i></p>	<p><b>Journals and Notice Paper</b>  <i>Neil Bessell, Director</i></p>
<p>Processing of legislation and preparation of supporting documentation                      Processing and custody of Senate records                      Inquiries and document distribution services                      Secretariat services to the Publications and Joint Publications Committees</p>	<p>The <i>Notice Paper</i>, the <i>Journals of the Senate</i>, the <i>Dynamic Red</i> and the <i>Senate Daily Summary</i>                      Collection and dissemination of statistical information                      Processing of questions on notice and petitions                      Secretariat services to the Appropriations and Staffing Committee</p>

During 2006–07, the office provided effective support for the Senate chamber by:

- providing procedural and programming advice and documentation to facilitate and expedite chamber proceedings
- preparing and publishing formal and informal records of Senate business
- processing legislation and producing documents to assist in the legislative process
- processing and archiving tabled papers and other Senate records
- providing inquiries and document distribution services.

Staff worked towards increasing public awareness of the Senate and its work by:

- providing key information resources, including the *Dynamic Red*, the *Senate Daily Summary* and a range of statistical resources
- progressing the work of the digital imaging project, which aims to provide online access to all documents tabled in the Senate since 1901
- contributing to the seminar program administered by the Procedure Office (see Output Group 3) and other training and development programs.

Several of the staff in the office also contributed to project work to redevelop key information systems—ParlInfo and the Bills System—used to disseminate information about the work of the Senate.

The Table Office also supported Senate committees by providing the secretariats to three domestic committees and by liaising with Senate and joint committee chairs and secretariats to facilitate interaction between the chamber and those committees.

The cost of the Table Office in providing procedural and administrative support for the conduct of Senate business was \$3.0 million (\$2.4 million in 2005–06). The increase comprises in equal parts additional expenditure (by way of salary costs and costs related to the digital imaging project) and the attribution of higher corporate overhead costs.

### **Workload and staffing**

Requirements for advice, statistics and documentary support for the Senate are determined largely by the sittings of the Senate. Specific factors include:

- the days and hours of meeting and the nature of proceedings
- the legislative workload and the number of documents tabled
- the number and complexity of questions and notices from senators
- the number and complexity of inquiries and information requests from clients.

Previous reports have commented on the reduction in the number of sitting days below a long-term average of around 70 in a non-election year. This year, the Table Office supported the Senate on 62 sitting days, up from 58 last year, possibly confirming that the new average is about 60 days.

The full-time equivalent staffing level for the office was 17 (15.8 in 2005–06). In recent years, to help tighten staff numbers, the office has carried vacancies through long adjournments, but there were no such vacancies this year. The office remained staffed to meet peak work periods.

The Director, Journals and Notice Paper, continued to perform duties as Secretary to the Australian delegation to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, funded under Output Group 3.

### **Programming and procedural support**

The Table Office provided programming and procedural support for the operation of the chamber, and met the needs of senators and others for accurate and timely documentation and assistance by:

- providing procedural advice to ministers, government and other senators, party whips and committee chairs, in response to requests and proactively as required
- preparing 969 procedural scripts for use in the chamber, an average of 16 each sitting day (18 in 2005–06)
- providing advice in the chamber as required
- preparing a draft *Order of Business* (or daily program) for briefing whips' meetings in advance of each sitting and publishing the final *Order of Business* before sittings commenced
- maintaining the roster of temporary chairs of committees
- providing a broadcasting captioning service for Senate proceedings
- liaising with committee chairs and secretariats to facilitate interaction between the Senate and its committees.

Staff also arranged for the presentation of documents by ministers, the Auditor-General and committees when the Senate was not sitting. This once exceptional procedure has developed into an increasingly useful avenue for the timely publication of material of interest to the

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Parliament. A total of 205 documents were presented in this manner during 2006–07. A variation on the procedure enabled the presentation during a non-sitting period of a private senator's bill, and its timely consideration by a Senate committee.

In September 2006 the office produced a new edition of the *Standing orders and other orders of the Senate*, to coincide with the restructure of the Senate committee system. This was published in hard copy and online, with annotations explaining the changes. The Senate Programming Officer also began assisting the Deputy Clerk in a project to produce an annotated edition of the standing orders by tracking historical changes to them.

An important role of the Table Office is the provision of advice to the Manager of Government Business and other senators to assist in the efficient conduct of the business of the Senate. During the year, the office advised on a range of matters, including:

- the operations of the Selection of Bills Committee
- the swearing-in of senators to fill casual vacancies
- legislative amendments empowering ministers to increase expenditure
- the recall of the Senate during a scheduled adjournment.

Staff provided advice both in response to requests and proactively, and produced accurate, high-quality documents on or ahead of time. The 2007 senators' survey revealed that 56 per cent of respondents were satisfied, and another 40 per cent highly satisfied, with programming services, including provision of procedural scripts, broadcast captions and the *Order of Business* (the 'Red'), while 4 per cent were neutral. Similar results were recorded in relation to the provision of advice (see Output Group 1).

### Legislation

The office responded to the legislative requirements of the Senate and the needs of senators and others for related information by:

- processing all bills considered in the chamber, meeting accuracy and timeliness standards in all cases
- preparing legislative documents, including procedural scripts, running sheets, messages, schedules of amendments and third reading prints
- recording the progress of legislation
- preparing assent and Act prints, and processing assent messages and proclamations
- maintaining information systems to assist in processing legislation and providing online access to legislative documents.

The charts in Figures 6 to 9 indicate the level of legislative activity in recent years and the effect this has had on the work of the office. The figures for this year are comparable to the averages in recent non-election years, although there was a noticeable increase in the number of bills that passed both Houses.

Figure 6 Senate legislative activity, 2002–03 to 2006–07

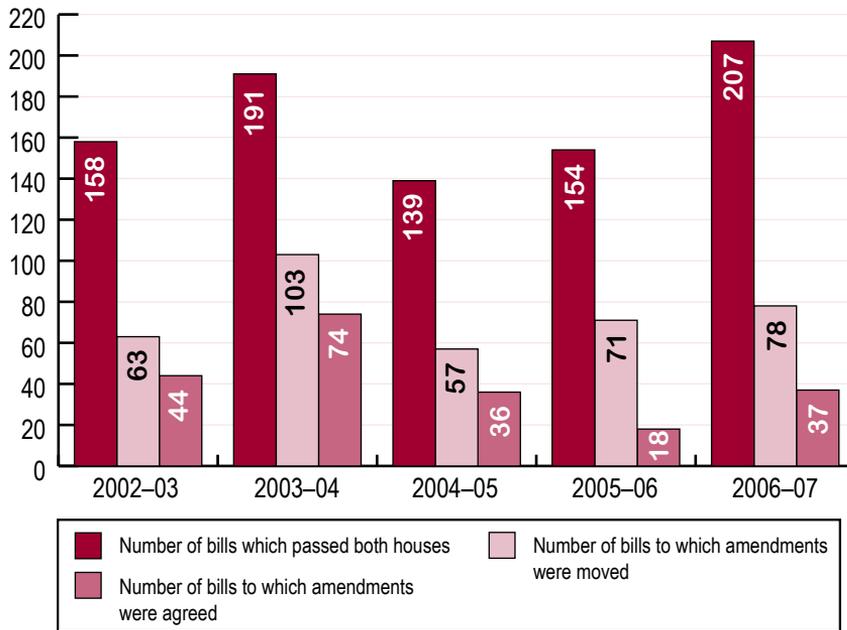
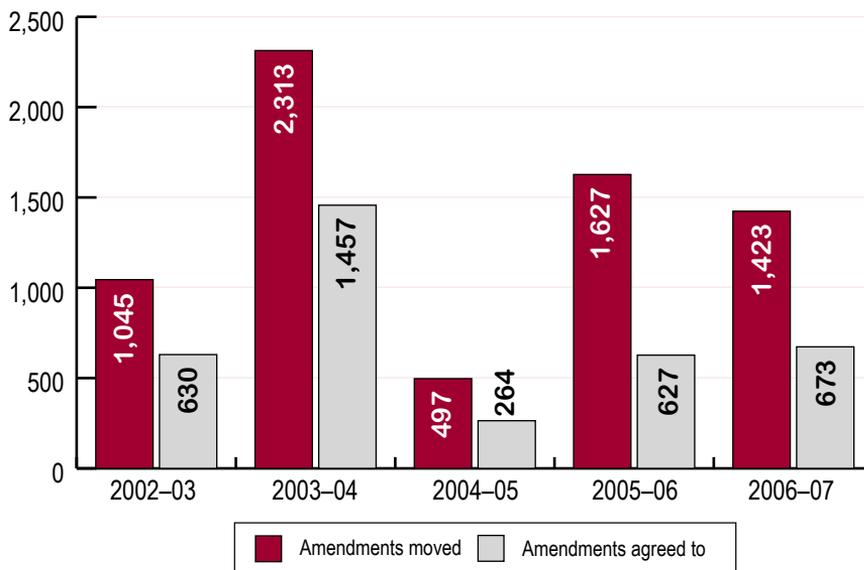


Figure 7 Amendments moved and agreed to by the Senate 2002–03 to 2006–07



Note: The figures for amendments also include requests for amendments and proposals to omit clauses or items from bills.

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Figure 8 **Running sheets, 2002–03 to 2006–07**

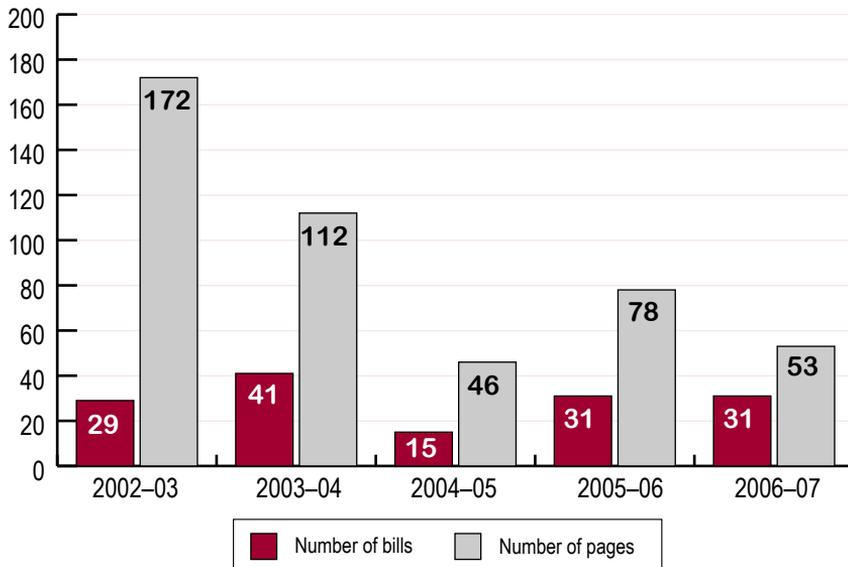
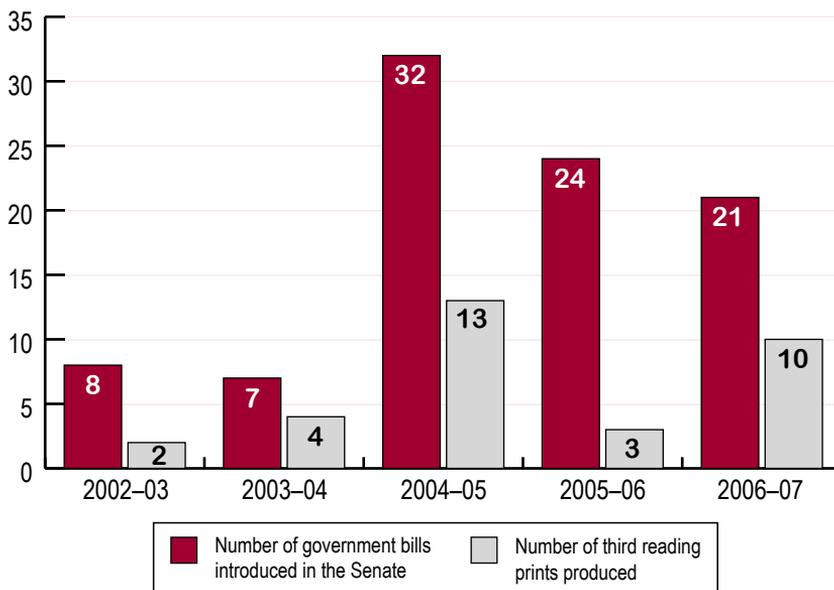


Figure 9 **Government legislation introduced in the Senate, 2002–03 to 2006–07**



The government party majority, described in the 2005–06 report, continued to affect the legislative decisions of the chamber and influence the work of the office. Only seven non-government amendments were agreed to during the year, and there was only one legislative

disagreement between the Senate and the House of Representatives. This again reduced the number and complexity of schedules and messages prepared.

Other business requirements remained at usual levels. Messages, third reading prints, schedules of amendments and assent prints of bills accurately reflected the decisions of the Senate, and the office met all deadlines for the preparation and use of those documents.

*Bills Lists* and *Daily Bills Updates* detailing the progress of legislation were produced in response to chamber sittings and distributed in accordance with agreed timeframes. A survey undertaken by the Table Office indicated that clients were satisfied with the provision of those documents in their current form in hard copy and online.

All bills and related documents were made available online through the Bills System, BillsNet and ParlInfo. Staff participated in two ongoing projects to redevelop these systems. It is expected that the projects will be completed in 2007–08.

According to the 2007 senators' survey, 50 per cent of respondents were satisfied, and 31 per cent highly satisfied, with support for the legislative process, including the provision of running sheets, while 15 per cent were neutral and 4 per cent (one respondent) indicated dissatisfaction. Although there were no related comments lodged with the initial questionnaire, interviews suggested '[i]t is generally accepted by senators that often the provision of running sheets is affected by the senators themselves and departmental staff act as best they can within these constraints'. The timely distribution of accurate running sheets remains a key goal for the office.

### Formal and informal records of business

The office met the needs of senators and others for accurate and timely documentation and information by:

- producing and publishing the *Notice Paper* and the *Journals of the Senate*
- maintaining the *Dynamic Red* and publishing the *Senate Daily Summary*
- compiling and publishing statistical information relating to the Senate
- responding to requests for statistics on the work of the Senate
- maintaining information systems to help produce Table Office documents.

#### Formal records

To meet the requirements of senators and others, the Table Office publishes the Senate's principal parliamentary documents online—both on the Senate website and through the parliamentary information database—and in hard copy.

The *Notice Paper*—the formal agenda of Senate proceedings—provides essential information on current and future business of the Senate and on committee matters. A full *Notice Paper*, comprising on average 210 pages, was published online for each sitting day and was also printed on the first day of the autumn and spring sittings. A printed *Notice Paper*—an abridged version averaging 58 pages—was published before each sitting day. The *Notice Paper* expands during the course of each Parliament as unfinished business accumulates and the number of unanswered questions on notice increases. During the previous reporting period, the full online version averaged 156 pages.

The *Journals of the Senate* are the 'minutes of the meeting' and record decisions made by the Senate. During 2006–07, proof *Journals* were made available online shortly after the end of each sitting day, and printed versions were distributed the next morning. Staff produced and

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published 62 proof *Journals* with an average of 27 pages, compared with 58 *Journals* averaging 26 pages in 2005–06.

After a prompt but thorough check of proof *Journals* and relevant source documents, final *Journals* were published and compiled into bound volumes.

All respondents to the 2007 senators' survey indicated satisfaction with the preparation of the *Journals* and *Notice Paper* (68 per cent satisfied; 32 per cent highly satisfied).

### Informal records and statistics

The office has produced the *Dynamic Red* as an in-house publication for three years and, in May 2006, completed a project to publish it on the Senate website for external users. The *Dynamic Red* provides real-time information on the progress and outcomes of business on each sitting day. This assists senators, parliamentary staff, government departments and agencies, and the general public to monitor Senate proceedings. Web usage statistics show that the application has established a solid external audience.

From July 2006, the office assumed responsibility for producing the *Senate Daily Summary*, a more considered summary of the previous day's proceedings in the Senate and in estimates hearings. The summary contains links to primary sources such as the *Journals*, bills before the parliament and committee reports.

The department made broad productivity gains by having the *Journals* and *Notice Paper* team produce both the *Dynamic Red* and *Senate Daily Summary*. The development of tools to transfer material directly from the *Dynamic Red* also improved the timeliness of publishing the summary. It continued to be an indispensable tool for those who work in, or observe, the Senate.

Statistical summaries of business conducted by the Senate were produced after each sitting week. A more comprehensive set of statistics was also maintained online, providing timely access to the most commonly sought statistics on the work of the Senate. Staff also produced two volumes of *Business of the Senate*, a publication which has for more than 30 years recorded statistics on the work of the Senate.

The office promptly met requests for statistics from senators, parliamentary staff and other clients. There continued to be significant interest in statistics comparing Senate business patterns and outcomes before and after the government assumed its current majority position in the Senate. In 2006–07, the Table Office produced comparative statistics on matters such as:

- rejection of non-government amendments to legislation
- numbers of bills and other matters referred to committees, the length and timing of committee references and the operation of the Selection of Bills Committee
- the outcome of motions seeking the production of documents and information
- the use of 'guillotine' motions in relation to urgent bills.

The statistics that the Table Office compiled on these and other matters were comprehensive, accurate and timely.

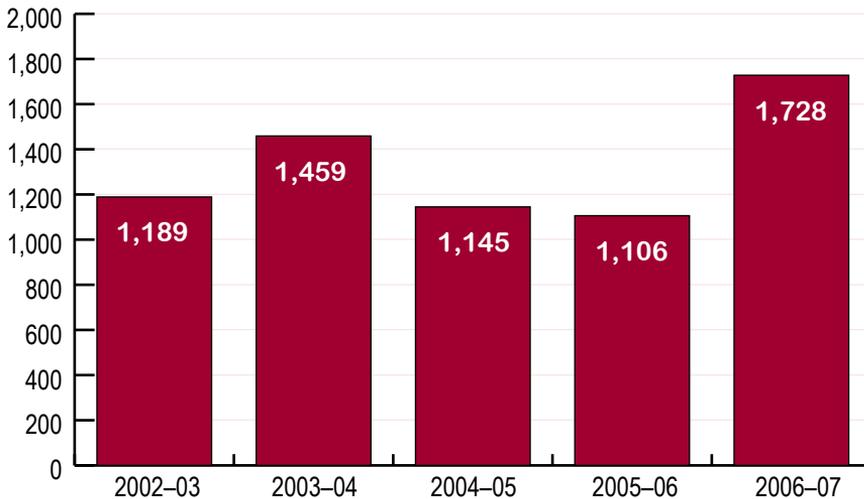
The 2007 senators' survey revealed that 55 per cent of respondents were highly satisfied with the provision of resources such as the *Dynamic Red*, *Senate Daily Summary* and statistical information, while 41 per cent were satisfied and 3 per cent neutral. No dissatisfaction was recorded.

## Questions on notice

Senators continued to use questions on notice—written questions to ministers concerning the administration of public policy matters—as an important accountability mechanism.

During 2006–07, staff processed 1,728 questions on notice—a record number for any year, eclipsing the 1,459 questions lodged by senators in 2003–04. Figure 10 shows the trend in the number of questions on notice in recent years.

Figure 10 Questions on notice, 2002–03 to 2006–07



The Table Office ensured that questions on notice lodged by senators conformed to standing orders and were consistent in format and style. On sitting days, questions were published in both hard-copy and online versions of the *Notice Paper*. When the Senate was not sitting, questions were forwarded to relevant ministers and departments, and the online *Notice Paper* was updated each week to ensure timely publication. These questions were also printed in the *Notice Paper* for the first sitting day in the next period of sittings.

Ministers provided 1,142 answers to questions on notice. Staff processed the answers, circulated them to senators and arranged for their publication in Hansard.

Questions and answers were processed accurately, within agreed timeframes and to the satisfaction of senators. Statistics on questions on notice were collated and published in the *Questions on Notice Summary* in August 2006 and February 2007.

## Petitions

During 2006–07, senators presented 136 petitions from 251,646 signatories. All petitions that conformed to the standing orders were processed promptly and presented in the Senate on the first sitting day after their receipt.

All respondents to the 2007 senators' survey indicated their satisfaction with the processing of petitions, notice of motion and questions on notice, with 52 per cent satisfied, and 48 per cent highly satisfied, with these services.

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### Documents and inquiries

The Table Office processed all documents presented to the Senate during 2006–07 and recorded them in the *Journals of the Senate* and the *Index of Papers Presented to the Parliament*. Copies of documents were made available throughout Parliament House and publicly through our inquiries and documents distribution services.

The original documents were added to the records of the Senate. The record archives include all documents presented to the Senate since its first meeting in 1901.

The documents and inquiries workload depends largely on the number of documents presented to the Senate. One class of documents in particular—legislative instruments—continues to grow at a significant rate, a consequence of the enactment of the *Legislative Instruments Act 2003*. There is no sign of the rate of increase abating. In 2006–07, more than 8,200 documents were presented. Almost 6,700 of these were instruments, approximately 30 per cent more than in 2005–06.

All processing, inquiries and distribution requirements were appropriately met, as reflected in the responses in the senators' survey. Staff respond to and record about 7,000 inquiries each year; in 2006–07 the figure was 6,756. Statistics maintained by the office record that 96 per cent of inquiries were dealt with within five minutes, further improving on the already high standards achieved in recent years. More complex inquiries are dealt with by staff in timeframes negotiated with clients.

The 2007 senators' survey revealed that 61 per cent of respondents were satisfied and 30 per cent highly satisfied with the inquiries service and document distribution, with 4 per cent (one respondent) neutral and 4 per cent (one respondent) indicating dissatisfaction. No comment explaining the reason for dissatisfaction was made.

### Digital imaging project

A major initiative in the Office, now in its 13th year, is a project to copy, preserve and ensure access to the collection of all documents presented to the Senate. The project now encompasses two elements: first, to make digital images directly from the documents presented to the Senate since 2002; second, to create digital images from the microfilm record of the documents from the Senate's first century.

During 2006–07, staff scanned almost 8,000 documents and undertook associated preservation and indexing work.

While preliminary work has been undertaken on the conversion of the microfilm record, technical problems have continued to delay the conversion process, which is now expected to commence in 2007–08.

### Secretariat support for various committees

During the year, the Table Office provided secretariat support for all meetings and reports of the Selection of Bills Committee, the Standing Committee on Appropriations and Staffing, and the Senate Publications Committee.

All meetings were held, and documents provided, within agreed timeframes.

The office began working towards implementing the recommendations of the Joint Publications Committee report on the Parliamentary Papers Series, involving the investigation of options for creating a permanent online repository of all documents in the series.

## **Factors, events and trends influencing performance**

Factors influencing workload and staffing levels are set out above.

Information technology issues continued to be of considerable importance in the Table Office, and staff have been involved in projects to improve the infrastructure and applications used to facilitate its work. A project to provide appropriate backup and restart options for the main server supporting Table Office applications was all but finished in 2006–07. Projects to redevelop the Parliamentary information database and to update the online management of, and access to, legislative documents continued during the year. The fruition of these projects will improve productivity in the office and reduce the need for workarounds in many document management and publishing activities.

## **Evaluation**

The 2007 senators' survey again revealed high levels of satisfaction among senators with the advice, documents and services of the office, comparable with levels reached in earlier surveys, and did not suggest any areas of major concern.

Particularly high levels of satisfaction—above 95 per cent—were recorded in relation to the preparation of records of business; the processing of procedural material, such as notices and questions; and the provision of procedural documentation and advice. More than 90 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the inquiries service and document distribution, while 81 per cent were satisfied and 15 per cent neutral in respect of support for the legislative process. Low levels of dissatisfaction with these last two areas were recorded (one respondent, in each case), but the associated commentary did not reveal any underlying difficulties.

The survey results for particular services and documents have been noted elsewhere in this section of the report.

The office also monitors its own performance—for example, by keeping track of response times for inquiries and surveying users of its bills information documents. This monitoring also indicated a high level of client satisfaction during 2006–07.

Finally, much of the work of the office involves direct contact with senators, their staff and other clients. This presents an ongoing opportunity for feedback about the office's services. Informal feedback continued to be very positive.

## **Performance outlook**

In 2007–08, the Table Office will continue its core work relating to the sittings of the Senate. In particular, staff will provide advice and produce documents to facilitate chamber proceedings and the legislative process; prepare formal and informal records of Senate business; process and archive table documents; provide inquiries and document distribution services; and support the work of committees.

A reduced number of sitting days is expected because of the election period, and staff will undertake a range of practical and administrative tasks associated with the end of one parliament and the opening of another.

The office will produce a revised edition of the *Pocket Guide to Senate Procedures* and the accompanying *Brief Guides to Senate Procedure*, as well as a new edition of the standing orders. More staff will become involved in the project being overseen by the Deputy Clerk to produce an annotated version of the standing orders.

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Staff will contribute further to projects to redevelop ParlInfo and the Bills System, and the projects' implementation should yield tangible productivity benefits. The office will also audit and, as appropriate, update its other information technology applications to develop more intuitive database applications, improved document management and more direct online publication.

Further progress will be made on the digital imaging project, and a sample of the tabled papers archive will appear online as part of a pilot program to seek feedback.