

## Output Group 2—Table Office

### Outputs

Provision of procedural advice and programming services.  
 Processing of legislation.  
 Processing of tabled documents and maintenance of safe custody of Senate records, and provision of a document distribution and inquiries service.  
 Preparation of records of Senate business and proceedings.  
 Dissemination of information on the work of the Senate.  
 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>Informal feedback and direct contact between senators and staff indicated continued high levels of satisfaction, consistent with the findings of the 2007 survey of senators.</p> <p>Business documents remained of a high standard, with none shown to contain significant inaccuracies.</p>
Timeliness	<p>The <i>Order of Business</i> finalised and distributed prior to sittings and advice prepared proactively or as required.</p> <p>The <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>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>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>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 produced 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>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>All documents were distributed in a timely manner. All inquiries were responded to and 94 per cent were completed within five minutes.</p> <p>Committee meetings were held, and documents and reports were provided, within agreed timeframes.</p>
Quantity	<p>As required to facilitate proceedings; quantities meet predetermined distribution requirements or are accessible electronically or both.</p>	<p>Feedback indicated continued high levels of satisfaction among senators with the provision of documents by the Table Office.</p> <p>All distribution and publishing targets were met.</p>

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### Analysis

The Table Office comprises three sections, as outlined in Figure 5. It is led by the Clerk Assistant (Table), who performs duties as a clerk at the table in the Senate chamber. The two directors in the Table Office also perform chamber duties.

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>Sue Blunden, Acting 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>Production of 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>

The activities of the office during 2007–08 were largely determined by the requirements of the Senate and its committees, with the sitting of the Senate determining the level of priority of the different tasks.

In response to the sittings of the Senate, the office provided effective support for the Senate chamber, and increased awareness of the role and work of the Senate, by:

- providing procedural and programming advice and documentation to facilitate and expedite chamber proceedings
- preparing and publishing formal and informal records of Senate business, including the *Journals of the Senate*, the *Dynamic Red*, the *Senate Daily Summary* and a range of statistical records
- processing legislation and producing documents to assist in the legislative process
- processing and archiving tabled papers and other Senate records
- responding to inquiries and undertaking document distribution services.

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

During non-sitting periods, and in particular during the election break and longer adjournments, staff undertook the following tasks:

- finalising the records of the sittings of the Forty-first Parliament and preparing for the opening of the Forty-second Parliament

- undertaking ongoing ‘non-sitting’ activities connected to the procedural work of the Senate, including arranging the presentation of documents to the President, processing questions on notice, and receiving and arranging publication of answers to questions
- progressing the work of the digital imaging project, including loading the pilot repository (the 2002–04 tabled papers) onto the web. The project aims to provide online access to all documents tabled in the Senate since 1901
- undertaking project work to redevelop information technology (IT) applications to publish and provide access to legislation, records of the parliament and support documentation
- providing research assistance for a project overseen by the Deputy Clerk to produce an annotated set of standing orders of the Senate
- contributing to the seminar program administered by the Procedure Office (see Output Group 3) and other training and development programs
- hosting a series of ‘field trips’ to the Table Office, designed to familiarise other departmental staff with the services of the Table Office and the operations of the Senate chamber.

The cost of the Table Office in providing procedural and administrative support for the conduct of Senate business was \$2.9 million (\$3.0 million in 2006–07). The decrease reflects the fact that it was an election year.

### **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 the sittings of the Senate, the nature of the proceedings undertaken in the Senate, and the scheduling of those proceedings
- the legislative workload, including the number of bills passed, the number and complexity of amendments to bills and the complexity of negotiations between the Houses on disputed legislation
- the number of documents tabled
- the number and complexity of questions and notices from senators
- the number and complexity of inquiries and requests for information from clients.

This year the Table Office supported the Senate on only 36 sitting days. The marked reduction in the number of sitting days, compared to 62 in 2006–07, was due to the extended election period from October 2007 (the prorogation, or adjournment, of the parliament) to February 2008 (the opening of the new parliament).

Workloads for staff in the office remained high, however, due to increased levels of legislative activity during the sitting periods, activities associated with the close of the Forty-first Parliament and the opening of the Forty-second Parliament, and the ongoing tasks and project work noted in this chapter. The full-time equivalent staffing level for the office remained steady at 17.

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

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### 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 assistance by:

- providing procedural advice and documentation to the Leader of the Government in the Senate, the Manager of Government Business in the Senate and other ministers, government senators, party whips and committee chairs
- preparing nearly 680 procedural scripts for use in the chamber, an average of 19 each sitting day (16 in 2006–07)
- preparing draft and final editions of the *Order of Business* (or daily program) to assist whips and other senators before and during the sittings of the Senate
- providing a broadcasting captioning service for Senate proceedings
- liaising with committee chairs and secretariats to facilitate interaction between the Senate and its committees
- maintaining the roster of temporary chairs of 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 parliament. A total of 313 documents were presented this way during 2007–08—a 50 per cent increase on the previous year, chiefly because the 31 October deadline for the presentation of the annual reports of most departments and agencies fell within the 2007 election period.

The office also provided advice to the Manager of Government Business and other senators to assist in the efficient conduct of the business of the Senate. In particular, the office advised on:

- matters associated with the change of government and the opening of parliament
- the Senate committee structure, the appointment of parliamentary secretaries to committees and the appointment of new senators to committees from 1 July 2008
- the reference of bills to committees and the operations of the Selection of Bills Committee
- the hours of meeting and routine of business and procedural options for handling bills and motions.

With the change in government, there was also a strong focus on assisting new office-holders settle into their roles as whips and chamber managers, and on providing procedural training to them and their staff.

Staff provided advice both in response to requests and proactively, and in all cases produced accurate, high-quality documents on or ahead of time.

### 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 and recording the progress of legislation
- preparing legislative documents, including procedural scripts, running sheets, schedules of amendments, third reading prints and messages
- preparing assent and Act prints, and processing the assent messages and proclamations.

In undertaking this work, staff met accuracy and timeliness standards in all cases. Staff also maintained the information systems used to process legislation and provide online access to legislative documents.

The charts in figures 6 to 8 indicate the level of legislative activity in recent years and the effect this has had on the work of the office. Despite the historically low number of sitting days, the figures for this year were comparable to the averages in recent election years, suggesting a higher level of legislative activity concentrated into fewer sitting days.

Figure 6 **Senate legislative activity, 2003–04 to 2007–08**

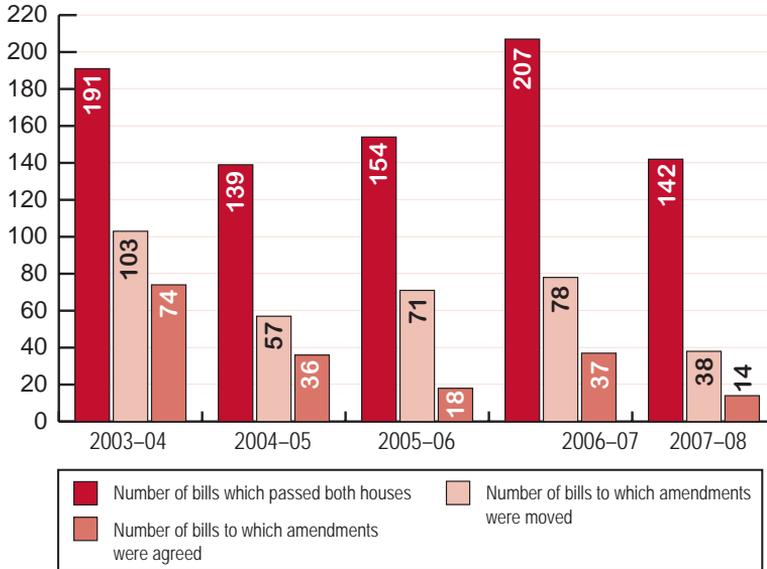
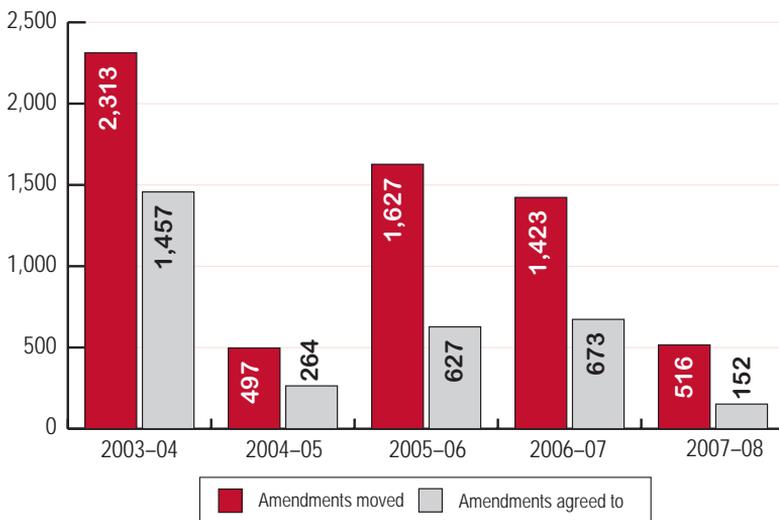


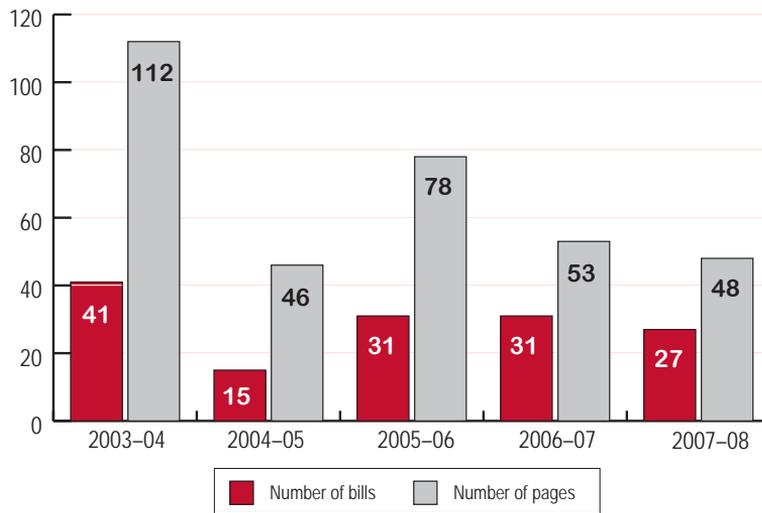
Figure 7 **Amendments moved and agreed to by the Senate, 2003–04 to 2007–08**



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, 2003–04 to 2007–08



In the early part of 2007–08, the existence of a government majority continued to have an impact on the legislative activity of the Senate. In particular, both the number of bills amended by the Senate and the total number of amendments agreed to by the Senate remained low. Of the total number of amendments agreed to, 25 per cent (38) were moved by non-government parties and 7 per cent (11) were finally agreed to by both chambers.

The level of legislative activity resulted in a reduced requirement for third reading prints and schedules of amendments prepared by the section. However, other business requirements remained constant. This was highlighted by the section preparing 163 messages (222 in 2006–07): 150 (211 in 2006–07) were related to the passage of bills, and 13 (11 in 2006–07) were administrative in nature (for example, relating to joint committee membership).

Running sheets facilitate the orderly and efficient consideration of all circulated amendments in committee of the whole. They are prepared when more than one set of amendments from more than one political party are circulated for consideration. Similar numbers of running sheets were prepared in 2007–08 and 2006–07. This reflects the fact that the number of amendments circulated in 2007–08 was comparable to the level for the previous year. However, when compared with the previous election year, the number of running sheets is almost double, indicating an increase in legislative activity and consequent demands on staff resources.

*Bills Lists* and *Daily Bills Updates* continued to provide detailed information about the progress of legislation. The *Bills List* is updated and published online after each sitting day to reflect legislative activity in both chambers.

Section staff spent considerable time participating in the process to redevelop the internal bills system, which manages bills and associated documents and their online publishing. Staff were involved in the tender evaluation process, system design, and testing of the system prior to its final acceptance and implementation. The new system is expected to roll out in the 2008 spring sittings. The investment of staff time will contribute to an intuitive database which improves legislative document management, increases functionality and enables efficient online publication, thus increasing the section's productivity.

## 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. Two versions of the *Notice Paper* were published before each sitting day: an abridged printed version, averaging 43 pages, and a 'full' online version. The *Notice Paper* expands during the course of each parliament as unfinished business accumulates and the number of unanswered questions on notice increases. At the close of the Forty-first Parliament, the full online version was around 200 pages.

The *Journals of the Senate* are the 'minutes of the meeting' and the official record of decisions made by the Senate. During 2007–08, 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 published 36 proof *Journals*, each averaging 31 pages. This is comparable to the result in the previous election year (40 *Journals*, averaging 26 pages). After a prompt but thorough check of the proof *Journals* and relevant source documents, final *Journals* were published and later compiled into bound volumes.

### Informal records and statistics

The office has produced the *Dynamic Red* as an in-house publication for four years and on the Senate website for external users for two years. Conceived as an online version of the Senate's *Order of Business* (the 'Red'), 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. The publication continues to be used by a wide audience, and the addition of an email address has enabled users to contact the author directly with inquiries and comments.

Information transferred from the *Dynamic Red* continues to assist with the timely production of the *Senate Daily Summary*, a more considered summary of the previous day's proceedings in the Senate. The summary contains links to primary sources such as the *Journals*, Hansard and committee reports. It continues to be an indispensable tool for those who work in, or observe, the Senate. The *Senate Daily Summary* was also produced during estimates hearings, providing links to committee programs and other relevant information.

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

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two volumes of *Business of the Senate*, a publication which has recorded statistics on the work of the Senate for more than 30 years.

The office promptly met requests for statistics from senators, parliamentary staff and other clients. The change in government, predictably, led to an upsurge in requests for comparative statistics. In 2007–08, the Table Office produced statistics on matters such as:

- numbers of bills and other matters referred to committees, the length and timing of committee references and the establishment of select committees
- numbers of bills passed by the Senate
- allocation of time for government business.

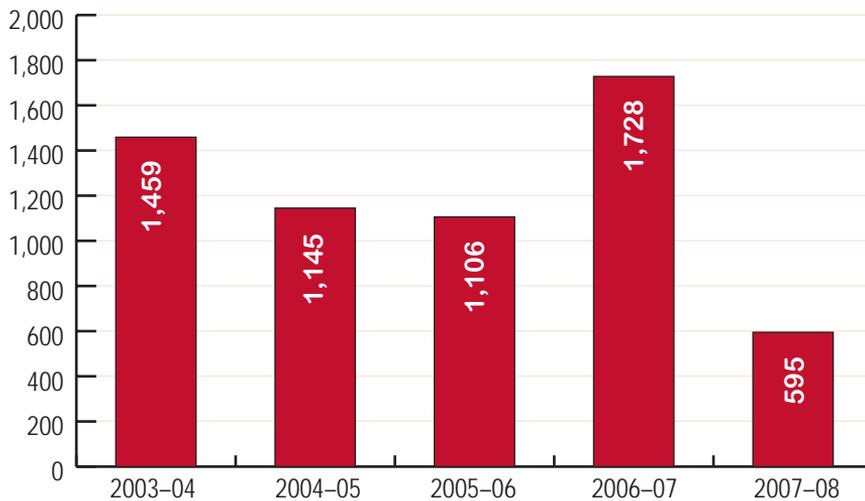
The statistics that the Table Office compiled on these and other matters were comprehensive, accurate and timely.

### 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 2007–08, in keeping with the lighter program of sittings, staff processed 595 questions on notice—barely a third of the record 1,728 asked by senators and processed in the previous year. Figure 9 shows the trend in the number of questions on notice in recent years.

Figure 9 Questions on notice, 2003–04 to 2007–08



The Table Office ensured that questions on notice lodged by senators conformed to the rules contained in the Senate Standing Orders and were consistent in format and style. Questions were published in both the printed and online versions of the *Notice Paper*. When the Senate was not sitting, questions were forwarded to relevant ministers and departments. The online *Notice Paper* was updated each week to ensure timely publication of information.

Ministers provided answers to 603 questions on notice. Staff processed the answers, circulated them to senators and arranged for their publication in Hansard.

Questions and answers were processed accurately and within agreed timeframes. Statistics on questions on notice were collated and published in the *Questions on Notice Summary* in August 2007 and February 2008.

## Petitions

During 2007–08, senators presented 59 petitions from 98,466 signatories (less than half the total of 136 petitions presented in 2006–07). The office continued to provide advice to senators and the public on whether proposed petitions conformed to the rules for petitions contained in the Senate Standing Orders. All conforming petitions were processed promptly and presented in the Senate.

## Documents and inquiries

The Table Office processed all documents presented to the Senate during 2007–08 and recorded them in the *Journals of the Senate* and the *Index of Papers Presented to the Parliament*. Copies of all documents were made available through the inquiries and distribution services.

The original documents presented to the Senate since its first meeting in 1901 are stored in Parliament House under archival conditions. In 2007–08, work began to establish the former Senate Stationery Store as a supplementary storage area. The new storage area and the amalgamation of collections have removed the need for off-site storage of documents, at a small cost saving to the department.

As noted in last year's report, the number of legislative instruments continues to grow at a significant rate, as a consequence of the *Legislative Instruments Act 2003*. On the first sitting day of the Forty-second Parliament, 2,259 Clerk's documents were tabled, of which 66 per cent were legislative instruments. The marked increase in the workload of the section in 2007–08 is illustrated by the fact that the number of documents tabled on the first sitting day of the new parliament was equivalent to more than 27 per cent of the total number of documents tabled in 2006–07 (8,200).

During the year, staff contributed to a review by the Attorney-General's Department of the *Legislative Instruments Act 2003*, drawing attention to the impact the increasing number of legislative instruments has had on the workload of the office, and on the capacity of senators and staff to monitor and access these documents.

## Digital imaging project

A major initiative in the office is a project using digital imaging to copy, preserve and ensure access to the collection of all documents presented to the Senate. The project consists of two streams of work: to make digital images of the documents presented to the Senate since 2002, and to create digital images from the microfilm record of the documents presented during the Senate's first century.

During 2007–08, staff scanned more than 11,400 documents and undertook associated preservation and indexing work.

Work began on converting the microfilm to digital images. This is progressing at a healthy rate, with an average of 300,000 images digitised each month. In early June 2008, a web repository containing images of documents tabled in the Fortieth Parliament (from 2002 to 2004) was made available online. Publication of the initial repository is being treated as a pilot program, and feedback is being actively sought from researchers and other users to test the utility of the system.

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### **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, the Senate Publications Committee and the Joint Committee on Publications.

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

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

Factors influencing workload and staffing levels are set out above.

As in other areas of the department, the effectiveness of the Table Office in supporting the work of senators, the Senate and its committees is heavily dependent on the expertise of its staff. During 2007–08, a number of staff in the office undertook challenging new roles. Their success in undertaking these roles while maintaining the usual high performance standards of the office is a testament to their abilities and to the training efforts and support of their colleagues.

### ***Evaluation***

The principal medium for evaluating our services is the biennial survey of senators' satisfaction with the services provided by the department, due to be conducted next in early 2009. As reported previously, the 2007 survey revealed high levels of satisfaction among senators with the advice, documents and services of the Table Office, consistent with the high levels reported in previous surveys, and did not suggest any areas of major concern.

The office also monitors its own performance—for example, by keeping track of response times for inquiries. This monitoring indicates that the high level of service noted in recent surveys continued during 2007–08.

Much of our work involves frequent direct contact with senators, their staff and other clients. This presents an ongoing opportunity to receive feedback about our services. Informal feedback continued to be very positive.

### ***Performance outlook***

In 2008–09, 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 tabled documents; provide inquiries and document distribution services; and support the work of committees.

The busy start to the new parliament, and the new 'balance of power' in the Senate from 1 July 2008, suggest that the next 12 months will be characterised by high levels of legislative and committee activity. This is likely to be reflected in increased demand for the documents, advice and services provided by the office.

The office will contribute to the training of senators whose terms start on 1 July 2008 and their staff, and provide procedural support for the swearing in of senators on the first sitting day after 1 July.

The first part of the new financial year will see staff involved in the final stages of the redevelopment of key information systems—ParlInfo and the Bills System. The advent of these replacement systems will improve productivity in the office, and is intended to improve

access to parliamentary and legislative documents produced and managed by the office. Staff will continue to be involved in work to redevelop local IT systems, beginning with a project to upgrade the word processing application which underpins the Table Office document production system.

The digital imaging project will continue, with an early review of the pilot program and an examination of the options for streamlining further work on the project.