

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 and other information on the work of the Senate.
 Processing of tabled documents and maintenance of Senate records, and provision of a document distribution and inquiries service.
 Provision of secretariat support to the Appropriations and Staffing, Selection of Bills and Publications committees.

Performance information	Performance results
<i>Order of Business</i> finalised and distributed prior to sittings and advice prepared proactively or as required to ensure senators can meet their duties.	The <i>Order of Business</i> was distributed in advance of all sittings. Advice was given proactively or as required.
Accurate running sheets available as soon as practicable; proposed government amendments distributed in accordance with requirements; accurate schedules of amendments and prints of bills available in accordance with predetermined requirements.	Accurate running sheets were available for use in the chamber as required. Government amendments were distributed as required. Accurate schedules of amendments, prints of Senate bills and legislative support documents were available as required.
<i>Notice Paper</i> for the current day and <i>Journals of the Senate</i> for the previous day available prior to sittings; accurate statistical and other documentation produced to meet the required timeframes.	The <i>Journals of the Senate</i> and the <i>Notice Paper</i> were available as required. 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. <i>Estimates at a Glance</i> was published promptly the day following each hearing. Requests for statistics were responded to promptly and met required timeframes. Statistical summaries were produced after each sitting week and comprehensive statistics were published on the Senate website after each sitting period. <i>Business of the Senate</i> and <i>Questions on Notice Summary</i> were tabled biannually, in accordance with required timeframes.
The Senate record is accurately and safely stored; and all inquiries answered and documents distributed on a timely basis.	All documents were accurately recorded and safely stored and documents were distributed in a timely manner.
Meetings held, documentation provided and reports produced within timeframes set by the Senate or the committee, as relevant.	Committee meetings were held, and documents and reports were provided, within agreed timeframes.

Overview

The Table Office is led by the Clerk Assistant (Table) and has three functional areas, as shown in figure 5. The Clerk Assistant (Table) also performs duties as a clerk at the table in the Senate chamber and as a committee secretary, and is a member of the department's executive responsible for a range of governance matters. The two directors also perform duties as clerks at the table.

Figure 5 Elements and responsibilities of the Table Office

Executive and Programming	
<i>Maureen Weeks, Clerk Assistant</i>	
Procedural advice	
Business programming	
Production of the Senate <i>Order of Business</i>	
Secretariat support to the Selection of Bills Committee	
Legislation and Documents	Journals and Notice Paper
<i>Sue Blunden, Director</i>	<i>James Warmenhoven, Director</i>
Processing of legislation and preparation of supporting documentation	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>
Processing and custody of Senate records	Collection and dissemination of statistical information
Inquiries and document distribution services	Processing of questions on notice and petitions
Secretariat support to the Publications Committee	Secretariat support to the Appropriations and Staffing Committee

Staff numbers fell progressively during 2011–12. The full-time equivalent (FTE) staffing level for the office commenced at 18 and by the end of the year had fallen to 16, in anticipation of the required reduction in staff due to budget constraints. The average FTE for 2011–12 remained at 17.

The cost of the office for 2011–12 was \$2.7 million (\$2.7 million in 2010–11).

Work of the office

During 2011–12, the office provided effective support for the Senate chamber by:

- providing procedural and programming advice and documentation to facilitate and expedite chamber proceedings

- processing legislation and producing documents to assist in the legislative process
- preparing and publishing formal and informal records of Senate business, including the *Notice Paper*, the *Journals of the Senate*, the *Order of Business* (daily program) and the associated *Dynamic Red*, the *Senate Daily Summary* and a range of statistical records
- processing and archiving tabled papers and other Senate records
- responding to inquiries and undertaking document distribution services.

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

Staff in the Table Office continued to be involved in the department's learning and development activities, both as presenters and participants.

Projects being undertaken in conjunction with the other parliamentary departments progressed. The Project Board for the Table Office Production System (TOPS) (which will replace the current Document Production System) met four times. The tender process was finalised and the solution prepared and discussed with staff. The business case for a digitised Parliamentary Papers Series (known as the e-PPS) was finalised and consultations with certain government agencies commenced. The Presiding Officers provided a further response to the 2010 report of the Joint Committee on Publications on the Parliamentary Papers Series (PPS). The office also continued a long-term project to digitally capture the historical *Journals of the Senate*. The immediate work has seen digital *Journals* since 1973 loaded to the Web.

All staff in the office contributed positively to the redevelopment of the Parliament of Australia website. The online publication of Table Office documents is an important means of disseminating information about the work of the Senate. The constraints placed on the publication of these documents on the new website have seen staff working on new proposals to provide this information to senators and others.

The Table Office supported the Senate on 62 sitting days in 2011–12, an increase compared with 37 in 2010–11. The marked increase in the number of sitting days reflects the return to a full sitting year following the election period. It also includes additional sitting days in July 2011.

Programming and procedural support

The Table Office provided 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, both written and oral, 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 1,402 procedural scripts for use in the chamber, an average of 24 each sitting day (a slight increase in comparison with the average of 23 for 2009–10 and 2010–11)
- preparing draft and final editions of the *Order of Business* (the 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.

The office also arranged for the presentation of documents by ministers, the Auditor-General and committees when the Senate was not sitting. In 2011–12, 427 documents were presented using this procedure—a 17 per cent decrease on the 2010–11 total of 515, possibly reflecting the greater number of sitting days in 2011–12 on which documents could be tabled.

The timely provision of advice to the Manager of Government Business and other senators assists the efficient conduct of the business of the Senate and is an important aspect of the work of the Table Office. During the year, advice was provided on a range of matters, including ways to deal with bills expeditiously given the time available for debate (including the application of standing order 142, colloquially known as the guillotine), condolence motions, orders for the production of documents, suspensions of standing orders, motions to establish joint and select committees and motions to vary the routine of business. Staff provided this advice, both in response to requests and proactively, in a timely manner. Staff also produced accurate, high-quality documents on or ahead of time.

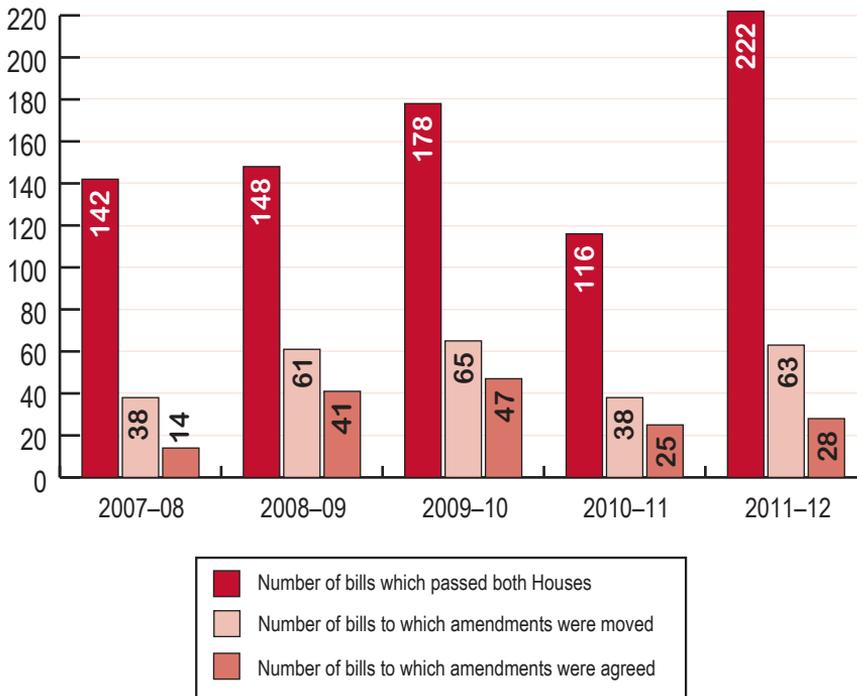
Legislation

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

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

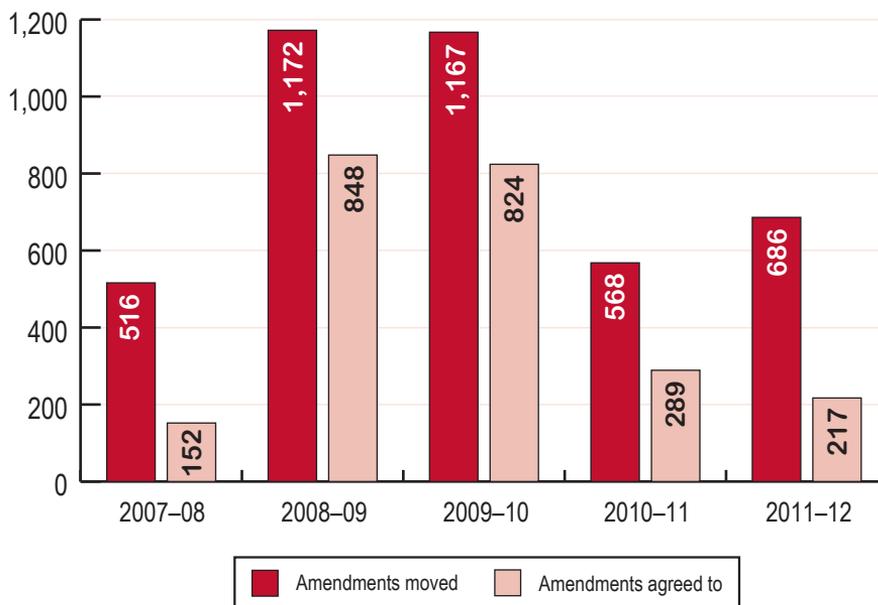
The charts in figures 6 to 8 reflect the levels of legislative activity in the years 2007–08 to 2011–12.

Figure 6 Senate legislative activity, 2007–08 to 2011–12



The number of bills considered and passed by both Houses increased by 91 per cent over the previous period (an election year). This increase may be attributed, in part, to the Senate agreeing on four occasions (in November 2011 and March and June 2012) to the consideration of bills under ‘time management’ motions. These motions set out a schedule of bills to be considered on a particular sitting day and specify the time at which all the remaining procedural questions are put to the chamber. The Senate passed 123 bills pursuant to such motions.

Figure 7 Amendments moved and agreed in the Senate, 2007–08 to 2011–12

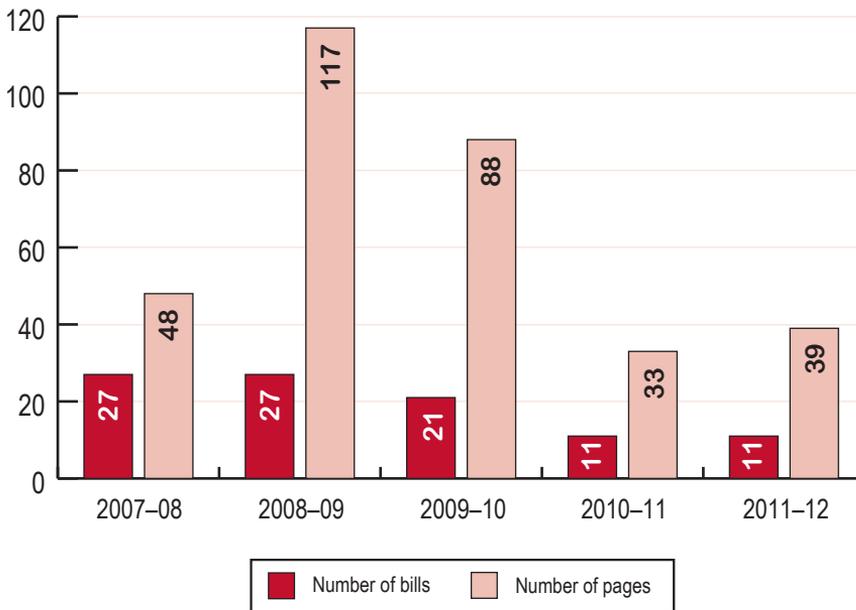


Note: The figures for amendments also include requests for amendments and proposals to omit clauses or items from bills.

The number of amendments moved increased by 21 per cent above the number moved in the previous period. However, the number of amendments agreed to decreased by 25 per cent in comparison with the previous period. The percentage of amendments agreed to compared with amendments moved also continued to decrease, from 50 per cent in 2010–11 to 32 per cent in this period, although figure 7 provides a longer term perspective.

Of the total number of amendments agreed to, 50 per cent (108) were amendments moved by ministers, a decrease from 2010–11 (58 per cent). Amendments moved by minority party and independent senators accounted for 10 per cent (21) of the amendments agreed to by the Senate, a decrease from 37 per cent (106) in 2010–11.

Printed 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 source is circulated for consideration. Running sheets are revised when further amendments are circulated after a running sheet is published. They are also revised to include outcomes and minor revisions when the consideration of a bill is complex and carries over a number of sitting days. Running sheets are also published electronically through hyperlinks in the *Dynamic Red*.

Figure 8 Running sheets, 2007–08 to 2011–12

Although the number of amendments moved increased marginally in the period, the number of bills for which running sheets were prepared in 2011–12 remained static (11 in this and the previous period). The number of pages of running sheets prepared increased—39 pages compared with 33 in 2010–11.

The office is responsible for preparing the formal messages by which the two Houses communicate on legislative and other activity. In 2011–12, 258 messages were prepared (163 in 2010–11). Of those messages, 220 related to the passage of bills, and 38 were administrative in nature (for example, relating to the establishment of joint committees and variations of joint committee membership).

Bills system

Work continued on the bills system, a management and publishing system for bills and associated documents. The issue which arose in 2010–11 relating to the transfer of the bills system to the Parliament’s new standard operating system was resolved finally in October 2011 after two rollouts.

Issues arising from the redevelopment of the Parliament of Australia website were the main concerns of the Bills System Advisory Group during 2011–12. Problems which prevented second reading speeches

appearing on bills homepages were rectified with a subsequent Hansard Production System upgrade in September 2011. In February 2012, it was realised that the bills homepages appearing on the website were not identical to the bills homepages in ParlInfo Search. It was also discovered that third reading prints of bills (prepared when a bill is amended in its originating chamber) were not appearing on the relevant bills homepages. Considerable work was undertaken before the website went live to ensure that the bills homepages on the test site were accurate. The veracity of the bills homepages remains an ongoing concern.

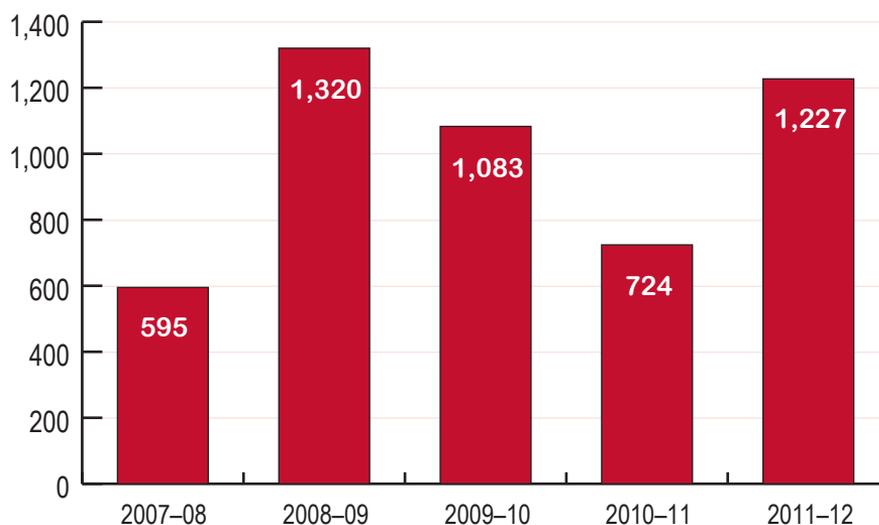
Staff continued to backcapture data for the bills system. The system developer is still to provide a solution to enable PDF-only versions of documents to be loaded to the system if a Word file is not available.

Questions on notice, notices of motion and petitions

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

The *Questions on Notice Summary* records statistics and other information relating to these questions, including response times. Figure 9 shows the number of questions on notice in recent years which clearly follows the electoral cycle.

Figure 9 Questions on notice, 2007–08 to 2011–12



Notices of motion (used by senators to indicate their intention to move particular motions on specified days) are drafted by senators, the Table Office and the Procedure Office. In 2011–12, Table Office staff drafted or edited and processed 633 notices of motion, which were then included in the *Notice Paper* and the *Journals of the Senate*. This is a significant increase when compared with 432 in 2010–11, again reflecting the electoral cycle.

During 2011–12, senators presented 53 petitions (32 in 2010–11), collectively representing 77,457 signatories. The office continued to provide advice to senators and members of the public on whether proposed petitions, including electronic petitions, conformed with the requirements of the Senate Standing Orders. All conforming petitions were processed promptly and presented in the Senate, including those received by the office directly from the public without a senator’s signature to certify the number of petitioners. In such cases, the office seeks a senator’s signature so that the petition can be presented.

Formal and informal records of business

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

- producing and publishing the *Notice Paper* and the *Journals of the Senate*
- maintaining the *Dynamic Red* and publishing the *Senate Daily Summary* and *Estimates at a Glance*
- 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

The Table Office publishes the Senate’s principal parliamentary documents online—both on the Senate website and through ParlInfo Search—and in hard copy.

The *Notice Paper*, the formal agenda of Senate proceedings, provides essential information on the current and future business of the Senate and committees. Two versions of the *Notice Paper* were published before each sitting day: an abridged printed version, averaging 89 pages (74 pages in 2010–11), 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. During 2011–12, the *Notice Paper* was structured to identify clearly the time for which questions on notice asked during estimates had remained unanswered. This assisted senators using the procedures under standing order 74(5) to seek an explanation from the relevant minister for the failure to answer.

The *Journals of the Senate* are the official record of decisions made by the Senate. During 2011–12, proof *Journals* were published online shortly after the end of each sitting day, and printed versions were distributed the next morning. Staff produced and published 62 proof *Journals*, each averaging 26 pages (37 proof *Journals* in 2010–11, averaging 30 pages).

Informal records and statistics

The *Dynamic Red*, available on the Senate website, provides real-time information on the progress and outcomes of business on each sitting day. Relevant bills homepages, amendments and running sheets can be accessed via the *Dynamic Red*. The *Dynamic Red* is a valuable tool to monitor the proceedings of the chamber and attracts a wide audience including senators, parliamentary staff, government departments and agencies, and the general public. It continues to receive favourable feedback from users.

Information transferred from the *Dynamic Red* assists with the timely production of the *Senate Daily Summary*, a more considered and thematic review of the previous day's proceedings. It is an essential tool for those who work in, or observe, the Senate.

Estimates at a Glance is a convenient online summary of estimates hearings, including contact details for estimates committees and weblinks to view proceedings.

Statistical summaries of business conducted by the Senate were produced after each sitting week. The online statistics provide easy access to comprehensive and commonly sought statistics on the work of the Senate as well as individual links to relevant source documents, such as *Odgers' Australian Senate Practice* and *Brief Guides to Senate Procedure*. Staff also produced biannual volumes of *Business of the Senate*, which has recorded statistics on the work of the Senate for more than 30 years.

The number of statistical inquiries is decreasing as awareness of the online statistical collection increases. However, in 2011–12, information not available on the Senate website was still sought by senators,

parliamentary staff and other clients, and these requests were dealt with promptly. The Table Office produced statistics on matters such as:

- allocation of time for bills considered under a limitation of time
- suspensions of standing orders
- time spent on open-ended adjournment debates
- the number of occasions on which motions were moved for the closure of debate.

Inquiries

Copies of all documents presented to the Senate are made available through the inquiries and distribution services provided by the office. The office also responds to inquiries relating to the work of the Senate and acts as an information ‘hub’ for senators, their staff, government departments and agencies and the general public.

Statistics collected by staff answering inquiries indicate that 6,145 inquiries were responded to during 2011–12. Most of the inquiries (95 per cent) were responded to within five minutes. The remainder of the inquiries were responded to by staff in timeframes agreed with clients.

While the majority of inquiries originate from senators, their staff and departmental officers (53 per cent), the services of the inquiries subsection are used extensively by other government departments and agencies (25 per cent of all inquiries) and media representatives and legal organisations (15 per cent) to obtain copies of documents and advice on processes and outcomes from the Senate chamber.

The Table Office continued to use the Document Movement System or ‘telelift’ (an automated transportation system) to convey large quantities of documents, often simultaneously, throughout Parliament House. This system is essential to the prompt and reliable distribution by the Table Office of documents to senators, members and others in Parliament House, particularly documents required prior to the sitting of the Senate. Significant outages of the system continued to occur during the reporting period.

In October 2011 the battery bank of the 23-year-old electric vehicle failed. The vehicle was used for bulk transport of documents within the basement area. It was recommended that the vehicle be taken out of service because the cost to repair the battery bank and other parts of the

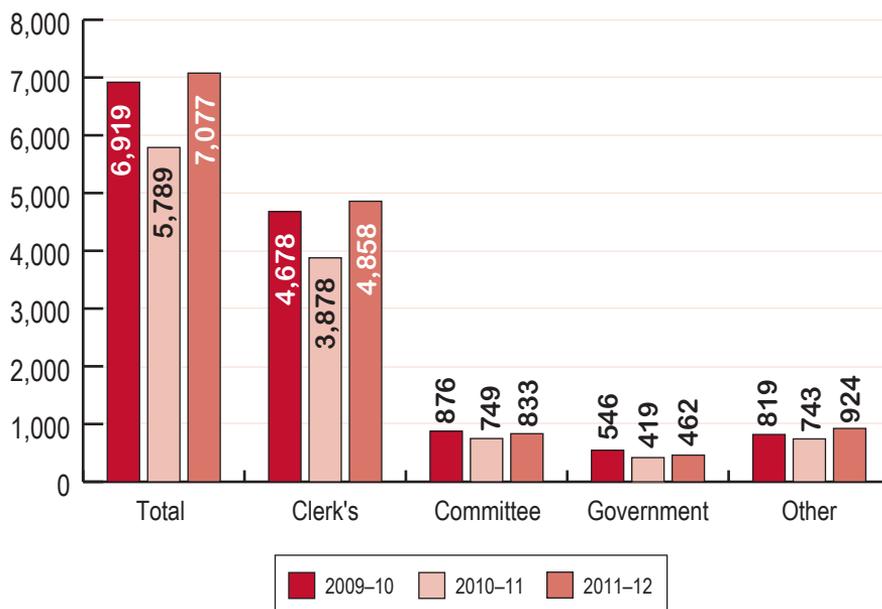
vehicle were uneconomic. The department has sourced an electric trolley to replace the electric vehicle.

Documents

The Table Office processed the 7,077 documents presented to the Senate during 2011–12, and recorded them in the *Journals of the Senate* and the *Index to the Papers Presented to Parliament*. Figure 10 shows the number and type of documents tabled in the Senate in 2009–10 to 2011–12.

The number of Clerk’s documents (legislative instruments and other subordinate legislation), committee reports, miscellaneous documents and government documents presented to the Senate increased during 2011–12 in accordance with the normal electoral cycle.

Figure 10 Documents tabled in the Senate, 2009–10 to 2011–12



The papers database is a joint system maintained by the two chamber departments. The database facilitates the processing of documents and generates reports. One of the reports enables the production of the *Index to the Papers Presented to Parliament*. The index is published through the Senate website, printed at the end of each parliament and available through ParlInfo Search as the Tabled Papers Register. Technical planning is now underway to enable the full text of documents included in the Parliamentary Papers Series to be made available through the register from 2013.

Digitisation and preservation of tabled papers

The office is using digital imaging to copy, preserve and ensure access to the collection of all documents presented to the Senate. There are two streams of work: making digital images and microfilm of the documents presented to the Senate since 2002 and creating digital images from the microfilm record of the documents from the Senate's first century. The digital images are stored in a web repository available through the Senate website.

Most of the technical issues delaying the loading of images (originally microfilmed images) were resolved in 2011–12. Therefore, the digitisation of the microfilm of the first 100 years of documents is almost complete with 27 of the 39 parliaments until 2001 now available online. Documents from 2001 until the current parliament are also available online. Of the 6,031,083 images loaded to the repository, 209,777 were loaded in 2011–12.

All the original documents presented to the Senate since its first meeting in 1901 are stored in Parliament House under archival conditions. The Table Office catalogues and maintains stock copies of some of these documents.

Although the number of documents tabled increased over the previous period, the metres of occupied shelf space remains similar. Tabled papers occupied 25.5 metres of shelf space in 2011–12, and 24.3 metres in 2010–11. This consistent annual volume maintains pressure on the office's limited storage areas which are almost at capacity.

Secretariat support for various committees

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

The staff in the legislation subsection and the programming section also assisted committees by determining 'time critical bills'. On 9 May 2012, the Senate passed a motion referring time critical bills (those with commencement provisions of 1 July 2012 or earlier) to the relevant committee for consideration. The aim of the motion was to ensure that legislation committees had the opportunity to consider the provisions of bills introduced into the House of Representatives when the Senate was not sitting, prior to the June sittings when the legislation would be

required to be passed. The motion provided the option for a committee considering such a bill to decide that no substantive inquiry was necessary and report accordingly to the Senate. Thirty-seven bills were considered under the terms of the motion and nine were referred to committees for inquiry.

The bills were also considered by the Selection of Bills Committee in accordance with the provisions of the standing orders.

All committee meetings were convened, and documents were provided, within agreed timeframes.

Learning and development activities

Staff in the Table Office continued to contribute to the training and development of departmental staff by presenting sessions in the department's training programs and offering 'field trips'.

The field trips are half-day sessions for small groups to give departmental staff and staff from other parliamentary departments the opportunity to learn more about the work of the Table Office. Those who have attended field trips have provided positive feedback that the sessions increase awareness of the services offered by the office.

With the introduction of the department's training calendar, more staff resources have been employed in training. The office has expanded the range of sessions it offers to include training on more detailed elements of Table Office work.

The contribution by staff in the Table Office to the seminar program administered by the Procedure Office continued throughout the year.

Factors, events and trends influencing performance

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

- the number of 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

- the number of documents tabled
- the number and intricacy of questions and notices from senators
- the number and difficulty of inquiries and requests for information from clients.

Evaluation

The principal medium for evaluating the services of the Table Office is the biennial survey of senators' satisfaction with the services provided by the department. As reported previously, the 2011 survey revealed high levels of satisfaction among senators with the advice, documents and services of the Table Office. Satisfaction with the work of the office has remained high across a number of surveys and the office aims to maintain the quality of its service.

Much of the work of the Table Office involves direct contact with senators and their staff, as well as other clients. This presents an ongoing opportunity to receive feedback about the services provided by the office. Informal feedback continues to be positive and supports the survey's evaluation of the office.

Performance outlook

In 2012–13, the Table Office will continue its core work relating to the sittings of the Senate. Changes to further reduce the size of the printed version of the *Notice Paper* will be implemented and the microfilming of the tabled papers will cease, due to budgetary constraints.

Work on the TOPS project will continue in cooperation with staff from the Department of the House of Representatives. In the next year the aim is to have the solution built and staff involved in reviewing work practices to maximise the opportunities afforded by the new system.

In cooperation with the other parliamentary departments, work will also continue on finalising arrangements for an electronic Parliamentary Papers Series and the electronic series will commence.

Staff from the departments of the House of Representatives and the Senate will continue to backcapture bills and associated documents and to further refine the bills system. This will ensure that the bills system meets the needs of senators and their staff, parliamentary staff and persons outside the Parliament.

Work on creating an online collection of *Journals of the Senate* from federation will continue.

The office will continue to focus on possible improvements to its services, including the role it may have in the services developed by SPIO.