

Chapter 2

Electronic Parliamentary Papers Series

Benefits from electronic provision

2.1 In past inquiries, the committee has considered the viability and future of the PPS, noting that there were (are) parallel schemes¹ of varying comparability. The committee is of the view that the PPS must continue because there is nothing as comprehensive to serve as a substitute.

2.2 The PPS serves the community by documenting, disseminating and preserving public information relating to Australia's Parliament and its system of government. As a collection, the series not only benefits the current generation of elected representatives, public servants, researchers and other informed citizens, but it also preserves this information for the benefit of future generations so that they may have access to a strong record of Australia's heritage. This is a theme of many submissions to this inquiry, and indeed, of submissions to past inquiries.

2.3 However, the committee recognises that in its current print form the PPS is not providing the greatest benefit to the largest number of citizens, nor is it being provided as efficiently as the committee would like. The committee considers that providing the PPS electronically would allow greater utility and more efficient dissemination of the information.

2.4 The University of New South Wales (UNSW) Library contend:

The availability of freely available online versions facilitates effective and efficient research. The ability to access a comprehensive repository of parliamentary papers that incorporates advanced search functionality is increasingly an expectation of the Australian research community and the libraries that support them.²

2.5 The committee is also of the view that, once established, an online digital repository should be able to provide the benefits noted in the committee's 2006 report, namely that it would provide:

- more immediate access to the series, overcoming the seemingly unavoidable delays relating to the print copy distribution;
- wider access to the community via any device with internet functionality;
- a central and powerful search facility capable of searching information across the breadth of data contained within the series; and

1 Library Deposit Scheme; Legal Deposit; and Free Issue.

2 UNSW Library, *Submission 3*, p. 1.

- long-term cost effectiveness thereby sustaining the series' future.³

2.6 Another issue, and potential benefit, expressed in several submissions was that an electronic PPS could allow organisations to discontinue receiving print copies. Both the State Library of Tasmania and the UNSW Library noted that their organisations are experiencing infrastructure pressures, in the form of limited shelving and storage space, due to the volume of print documents received each year. The Department of the House of Representatives also indicated that it had received similar statements from current recipients of the PPS print distribution.⁴

Demand for electronic provision of the PPS

2.7 Quantifying demand for electronic provision of the PPS is difficult and it is also likely that further demand for such a resource would only become known after it had been made available.

2.8 Nonetheless, submissions and correspondence received for this inquiry expressed a strong desire for the PPS to be provided online and within a searchable repository. Indeed, several organisations expressed their preference for online access over print.

2.9 In its submission, the UNSW Library stated:

Online availability of research material is the preferred mode of delivery for the majority of researchers. Academic libraries have witnessed a dramatic shift from the use of print based resources to online equivalents, allowing 24/7 online access.⁵

2.10 The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA)—a peak body representing 6,000 members in the library and information services sector—made a similar observation:

Increasingly Australians are accessing information such as the Parliamentary Papers online. [However,] finding the[se] papers online is a considerable challenge ... with some papers simply not being available in electronic form.⁶

3 JCP, op cit, p. 29.

4 State Library of Tasmania, *Submission 7*, p. 1; UNSW Library, *Submission 3*, p. 2; House of Representatives, *Submission 10*, p. 6.

5 UNSW Library, *Submission 3*, p. 1; the State Library of Tasmania make a similar remark.

6 ALIA, *Submission 4*, p. 1.

2.11 The Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS) argues that:

It would be very beneficial for all documents tabled in Parliament that are ordered to be printed to be made available through the parliament in electronic form...⁷

2.12 The State Library of Tasmania stated that it 'would welcome the electronic delivery of the PPS as it would provide 24/7 remote access for our clients'.⁸ It further maintained that the:

...State Library favours online access over print wherever appropriate as this provides direct, immediate access to information, without the need to visit a specific site or wait for document delivery.⁹

2.13 Its submission went on to state that its current print collection has a 'significant impact on storage space' while the 'demand for specific titles is low'. Accordingly, it 'favours online access over print'.¹⁰

2.14 The State Library of South Australia stated that it 'support[s] the online availability of documents tabled in Parliament',¹¹ the Queensland Parliamentary Library stated that it 'would welcome access to an electronic tabled Parliamentary Papers database'¹² and the National Archives of Australia (NAA) stated that it 'strongly supports making the PPS available electronically'.¹³ The National Library of Australia (NLA) agrees with the findings in the committee's 2006 report that 'there is no doubt that the establishment of an electronic PPS would be widely supported'.¹⁴

2.15 Additionally, correspondence received from the State Library of Western Australia, the Attorney-General's Department, and the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy all expressed support for the PPS to be provided electronically.

2.16 It is the committee's view that quantifying demand, or trying to calculate it in absolute terms, should not be a determinant as to whether or not to proceed with developing an electronic PPS. Instead, the committee suggests that demand will increase or decrease according to how successful, or not, an online PPS is in meeting the needs of its users. To this end, the development of an electronic PPS must strive to meet the demands of users, which include:

7 Parliamentary Librarian (DPS), *Submission 5*, pp 1-2.

8 State Library of Tasmania, *Submission 7*, p. 1.

9 *ibid.*

10 *ibid.*

11 State Library of South Australia, *Submission 1*, p. 1.

12 Queensland Parliamentary Library, *Submission 8*, p. 1.

13 NAA, *Submission 9*, p. 1.

14 NLA, *Submission 11*, pp 1-2.

- access to documents within a central repository;
- continuous, permanent and free access;
- electronic documents being provided in common formats (eg. PDF and HTML); and
- the ability to search across texts within the PPS.¹⁵

Recommendation 1

2.17 The committee recommends that an electronic PPS be developed and implemented.

Online availability of documents tabled in the Parliament

2.18 The Parliament House (aph) website contains documents produced, and databases managed, by the three parliamentary departments: the Department of the House of Representatives and the Department of the Senate (the chamber departments), and the Department of Parliamentary Services. This practice has evolved as the internet has grown and its place in society has become customary. In turn, demand for accessing parliamentary information via the internet has increased.

2.19 Initially the parliamentary departments loaded documents which were traditionally only published in print form. These documents included the primary business documents (eg. the *Journals of the Senate, Votes and Proceedings*, the notice papers and the orders of business of both chambers, and *Hansard*), and other fundamental procedural publications. This collection of documents grew as reports and other documents of parliamentary committees, among others, were added to the website.

2.20 The chamber departments have now devised documents specifically designed for the web. Particularly, the Senate Dynamic Red and the Votes Officer's Minutes both provide real time access to information relating to the proceedings of both chambers.

2.21 Bills and their associated documents have been available in static format on the aph website for some time. A recent redevelopment of ParInfo to the ParInfo Search platform has provided enhanced access to these documents together with dynamic procedural events which enable users to monitor bills as they progress through the Parliament.

2.22 Despite this evolution of documents included on the aph website, documents provided to Parliament by government entities for tabling in either chamber are still provided in print format and are not routinely supplied in electronic format.

15 All submissions to this inquiry comment on one or more of these points.

2.23 The Senate's Tabled Papers Database is currently the only means by which some of these documents can be accessed electronically. The original documents tabled in the Senate from 1901 until 2001 were originally microfilmed and are now being digitised to provide online access. Documents tabled from 2002 onwards are now digitised and loaded to the database. The digital images are also microfilmed for conservation purposes.

2.24 Given that the Senate Tabled Papers Database only captures documents tabled in the Senate—that is, it does not include documents that are tabled in the House alone (eg. House committee reports)—it is not a complete record of documents presented to the Parliament. Nevertheless, it does go some way towards providing access to documents presented to the Parliament, including many documents that make up the PPS; yet this database lacks the ability to segregate parliamentary papers from other documents.

2.25 As mentioned previously, documents presented to Parliament by government entities are not accessible from the aph website. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) tabling guidelines¹⁶ set out the requirements placed on departments and agencies that provide printed copies of documents intended for presentation to Parliament. The Australian Government Information Management Office (Department of Finance and Deregulation) standards also require that departments and agencies make those documents available on their respective websites after they have been tabled. There is currently no requirement placed on them to provide any electronic copy to the Parliament.

2.26 In its 2006 report, the committee received evidence that most agencies complied with their obligations to publish documents online.¹⁷ Moreover, the committee heard that 'probably 90 per cent of publishing is now online in the government sector'.¹⁸

2.27 The ANAO report also found that 90 per cent of the 2008 tabled documents were available online.¹⁹ Although this represented a quantum increase from the 54 per cent of documents available online in 2000, the ANAO concluded that 'not all government entities have implemented the relevant policies'.²⁰

16 Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Guidelines for the presentation of documents to the Parliament*, Canberra, January 2001, p. 4.

17 JCP, *Distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series*, Commonwealth of Australia, PP No. 114/2006, p. 28.

18 Ms Pamela Gatenby, National Library of Australian, *Committee Hansard*, 31 October 2005, p. 13.

19 ANAO, *op cit*, p. 16.

20 *ibid.*

2.28 The committee noted in its 2006 report that 'the establishment of an electronic PPS would be widely supported'.²¹ As mentioned above, the evidence to this inquiry has firmly restated the view.

2.29 In addition to supporting an online PPS, there is also some demand for online access to all documents presented to the Parliament.²²

2.30 The UNSW Library²³ and the State Library of Tasmania²⁴ both indicated that savings could be gained if an electronic PPS was provided. The UNSW Library indicated that not having to allocate resources to 'accession, catalogue and house the series' would enable some academic libraries to cease receiving the print copy of the PPS. Similarly, the State Library of Tasmania stated that:

The current paper-based resources have a significant impact on storage space [and] online availability would enable the documents to be printed on demand.²⁵

2.31 The State Library further pointed out that the demand for these titles is low and having to print on demand would have 'minimal impact on the Library's printing resources'.²⁶

2.32 The NSW Parliamentary Library expressed a need for 'timely delivery of tabled papers' and commented about current lags between the time a document is tabled and when it is made available.²⁷

Short and long-term access to documents included in the PPS

2.33 Since Federation both Houses of Parliament have ordered that documents 'be printed', resulting in the inclusion of those documents in the PPS. Before the development of online access to documents through the internet, the print distribution of the PPS provided reliable access to documents considered of substantive interest to the Parliament and the community at large.

2.34 The number of recipients who receive bound volumes and loose pamphlet copies of the series has reduced dramatically over time, as succeeding joint

21 JCP, op cit, p. 28.

22 State Library of South Australia, *Submission 1*, p. 1; NLA, *Submission 11*, p. 1.

23 UNSW Library, *Submission 3*, p. 1.

24 State Library of Tasmania, *Submission 7*, p. 1.

25 *ibid.*

26 *ibid.*

27 NSW Parliamentary Library, *Submission 12*, p. 1.

committees have inquired into and monitored the free distribution of the series.²⁸ This reduction in access to the PPS and delays in distribution means that the modern day PPS is now not meeting two major objectives set by the then Joint Select Committee on Parliamentary and Government Publications:

...that adequate copies are available to all who wish to have a copy, and that the documents are available to be bound into volumes and preserved in a convenient and accessible form as a permanent record.²⁹

2.35 All government publications, including parliamentary papers, were available to the community through the Australian Government Bookshop Network, with shopfronts located in the capital city of each state and territory. This network ceased operations in 2003. As a consequence, government entities became responsible for providing access to their publications, and over time, this access has been primarily provided through the relevant agency website. It could be argued that the Australian community no longer enjoys the central access point to Australian government publications it had before the demise of the network.

2.36 The aph website has grown rapidly as the demand for online access to the documents published within the parliamentary environment has grown. The Commonwealth has also developed policies which require government entities to make their documents and information available online. AGIMO now requires government entities to publish particular information on their websites, including a requirement to publish documents tabled in the Parliament. Together with the PM&C tabling guidelines, government entities are required to provide documents they present to the Parliament in printed form and, at the same time, an online version through the 'most appropriate' site.³⁰ Both AGIMO and PM&C require the printed and the online versions to be the same.³¹

2.37 With these various obligations on government entities in place, the short-term availability of documents tabled in Parliament through the various websites is not an issue. However, the accessibility (the ease of finding) of those documents is an issue. Submissions received from the National Library of Australia, the Federal Parliamentary Library and the Australian Library and Information Association all mention difficulty with locating documents on and across government entity websites.

28 JCP, op cit, p. 7 (The report states that in 1971, 552 recipients received the PPS free of charge. That number is now 51); JCP, *Review of the Cost and Distribution of the Parliamentary Paper Series*, Commonwealth of Australia, PP No. 450/1986 (110 bound volumes were produced and 81 sets provided to eligible recipients, p. 27); Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission 10*, p. 3 (The submission states that in the mid 1990s 24 recipients received bound volumes).

29 Joint Select Committee on Parliamentary and Government Publications, Report, Canberra, 1964, in Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission 10*, p. 6.

30 AGIMO, Documents tabled in Parliament, accessed on 5 June 2010 from http://webpublishing.agimo.gov.au/Documents_Tabled_in_Parliament.

31 PM&C, op cit, p. 8, paragraph 4.35.

2.38 A larger issue is the longer term availability of government entity documents placed on their websites. Currently there is no Commonwealth policy requiring consistent long-term access to government entity documents online. The AGIMO online content requirements refer government entities to the NAA archiving policy which states that 'agencies are not expected to take full responsibility for the preservation of the records of their public web resources over time'.³² This responsibility has rested with the NAA and the NLA which have roles in 'preserving the documentary record of the Commonwealth Government'.³³ The NLA's PANDORA is a well established national web archive.

2.39 The NLA believes that 'the risks to ongoing access are likely to be greater if it is left to individual agencies to manage long-term access and preservation'.³⁴

2.40 Guaranteeing longer term access is also difficult when government entities are restructured, either during the term of a government, or because the government changes after an election. Experience has shown that agencies may actually cease to exist and immediate, easy access to the documents of those agencies then becomes problematic.³⁵ The ANAO also reported that, although it found most documents were available online, one reason given for documents not being available was 'the reorganisation of entities and portfolios following Machinery of Government (MOG) changes'.³⁶

2.41 The diminished availability of the PPS in printed form, coupled with the issue of accessibility, a lack of consistent policy for archiving documents and the fluid nature of government entities and their websites, all point to the imperative that an electronic PPS needs to be located in a central repository. The ANAO report reached a similar conclusion:

A central digital repository located in Parliament would provide the Departments of the Parliament with a higher degree of control over the online publishing of tabled papers and that locating all tabled papers in one Parliamentary location could increase the percentage of these available online closer to 100 per cent.³⁷

32 NAA, Policy on archiving web resources: A Policy for Keeping Records of Web-based Activity in the Commonwealth, revised January 2001, p. 8, paragraph 2.3, accessed on 5 June 2010 from http://www.naa.gov.au/Images/archweb_policy_tcm2-902.pdf.

33 *ibid.*

34 NLA, *Submission 11*, p. 4.

35 State Library of Queensland, *Submission 2*, p.1; UNSW Library, *Submission 3*, p.2; ALIA, *Submission 4*, p. 2; Parliamentary Librarian (DPS), *Submission 5*, p.2; Department of the Senate, *Submission 6*, p. 2; NLA, *Submission 11*, p. 3.

36 ANAO, *op cit*, p. 36.

37 ANAO, *op cit*, pp 36-37.

2.42 This conclusion builds on the committee's 2006 recommendation to develop an online repository for the PPS.³⁸

Technological barriers

2.43 A number of technological barriers were raised in the committee's 2006 report, including:

- internet access;
- accessibility issues;
- library resources for accessing electronic material;
- constant changes in the technology used to generate and read electronic documents; and
- the significant outlay of resources needed to develop the architecture for an online repository.³⁹

2.44 Most of these issues have now been resolved. However, at least two issues remain: accessibility and long-term archival requirements; although the committee considers that these are not insurmountable.

Internet access and data size

2.45 Access to the internet previously raised equity concerns with just over half the Australian population having internet access from their homes in 2005-06. The committee's 2006 report noted that 'large electronic documents can be time consuming to download, difficult to read online and costly to print out'.⁴⁰

2.46 The committee notes that in 2008-09 household internet access had risen to 78 per cent and 62 per cent of these had a broadband connection.⁴¹ This increasing level of broadband connectivity now allows households, among others, to download larger file sizes in shorter timeframes and without difficulty. And, as mentioned above, the internet now appears to be the preferred way to access information.

2.47 However, the NLA argues that internet access is 'by no means universal or unproblematic'. It states:

It is likely that some Australians still experience significant barriers to accessing information in digital form. Reading complex and lengthy

38 JCP, op cit, p. 40.

39 JCP, op cit, pp 33-35.

40 JCP, op cit, p. 33.

41 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *8146.0 – Household use of information technology, Australia, 2008-09*, see <http://abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/8146.0> [cited in Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission 10*, p. 7].

documents such as those in the PPS, and the costs to the public needing to print them present ongoing challenges.⁴²

2.48 On this issue, the State Library of Tasmania advocate that individuals without their own internet access can gain access through public libraries, in much the same way they would currently access print copies of the PPS:

Clients without internet access can use the document delivery service or visit a library where assistance will be provided to access the Papers.⁴³

2.49 Indeed, the committee's 2006 report noted evidence that many public libraries were experiencing greater use of their information technology resources by individuals transacting with and seeking information from government.⁴⁴ This trend is also supported by AGIMO's recent findings in its 2009 report: *Interacting with Government: Australians' use and satisfaction with e-government services*.⁴⁵

2.50 In addition to the increasing levels of household internet connectivity, the use of portable devices to access online content is also on the rise and it is likely to increase further as technology improves and devices become more affordable. The Department of the House of Representatives noted that:

...the rapid uptake of mobile devices which can access the internet, such as smart phones or text readers such as the iPad, may mean that more people may currently access PPS documents electronically than would access hard copy versions.⁴⁶

2.51 Finally, the committee notes comments by ALIA:

The current paper based system has operated for the past 50 years with collections of Parliamentary Papers made available to the public through libraries. In practice only those physically located close to a deposit library with knowledge, time and an awareness of the series have benefited from the collections. This is but a very very [sic] tiny proportion of the population.

Opening up access to these very important documents will enhance access to the Parliamentary Papers in a way that gives a path from all computers with internet access as well as through public libraries as they support their patrons' use of online resources to a very significant extent. Taking away the physical barriers can increase awareness of the consideration of

42 NLA, *Submission 11*, p. 5.

43 State Library of Tasmania, *Submission 7*, p. 1.

44 JCP, op cit, p. 33.

45 AGIMO, *Interacting with Government: Australians' use and satisfaction with e-government services*, Department of Finance and Deregulation, December 2009

46 Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission 10*, p. 7.

important reports by the Parliament and, indeed, the role of the Parliament across the nation.⁴⁷

Resources needed to develop the architecture for an online repository

2.52 The committee's 2006 report noted that there was a significant outlay of resources needed to develop a digital repository before an electronic PPS could be archived.⁴⁸

2.53 The NLA's PANDORA web archive was previously discussed as an option to host a digital repository but the establishment and ongoing costs were considered too high and as a result nothing further was progressed.⁴⁹ In its submission to this inquiry, the NLA maintained:

While the Library has been developing the programs needed for long-term preservation, technology changes over the past five years mean there are significant systems and infrastructure capability and budget issues needing to be addressed before [the NLA could consider providing an online repository for the PPS].⁵⁰

2.54 However, in its submission the Department of the Senate indicated that a digital repository could now be established within the parliamentary information, communications and technology (ICT) network. It stated:

...notwithstanding some upfront capital cost, the department believes such costs to be less today than previously estimated, particularly in terms of establishment costs. The existing information systems in the parliamentary environment could provide the foundation for an online repository thereby greatly reducing development costs.⁵¹

2.55 The Department of the House of Representatives made a similar observation and suggested:

that the parliamentary departments prepare a business case for a central repository in the Parliament, based on the Tabled Papers Register [within ParlInfo Search]...⁵²

47 ALIA, *Submission 4*, p. 3.

48 JCP, *op cit*, p. 34

49 JCP, *op cit*, p. 39; Department of the Senate, *Submission 6*, p. 3; Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission 10*, p. 9.

50 NLA, *Submission 11*, pp 4-5.

51 Department of the Senate, *Submission 6*, p. 3.

52 Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission 10*, p. 8.

Maintenance of electronic records and long-term archival requirements

2.56 A concern about the longevity of technology enabling digital files to be read is an ongoing issue. Obsolete technology or that which is not compatible retrospectively presents risk to long-term availability and access to past years' documents within the series. The NLA suggests that there are four issues at play here, citing:

- The inconsistent format, metadata and other standards being applied by agencies, making content hard to preserve and manage in a rapidly changing technical environment.
- The possibility of underlying data being lost or corrupted if not stored and managed in ways that ensure its ongoing integrity and security.
- The strong likelihood of access to information being lost as the software available for providing access changes over time.
- Inadequate management of programs required to deal with these risks at the scale and over the timeframes needed.⁵³

2.57 The NSW Parliamentary Library stated that inconsistent standards in metadata used to describe content is a problem. It maintains that there is a:

...need to establish uniformity when creating and populating fields, and the necessity of making search options, particularly advanced search options, transparent to users.⁵⁴

2.58 Finally, the Department of the House of Representatives maintains that:

It is essential for the long term access of the electronic PPS that file formats continue to be readable into the future. The principle would be to ensure, whenever technological changes are made to the repository, that the document formats can be migrated and updated at the same time to maintain accessibility. [This] issue would need to be addressed in developing a business case.⁵⁵

2.59 The committee shares these concerns, however it believes these risks can be managed. Concerns raised by the NLA and the NSW Parliamentary Library relating to consistency of metadata over time could largely be addressed by hosting an electronic PPS in the parliamentary environment. (This will be covered in detail below.) Hosting a digital repository for the PPS from a single source should overcome most of the issues mentioned above. The parliamentary institutions are static compared with the wider APS and its record keeping has developed according to sound precedents over a long period of time. It is expected that this practice will continue into the future.

53 NLA, *Submission 11*, pp 3-4.

54 NSW Parliamentary Library, *Submission 12*, p. 1.

55 Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission 10*, p. 7.

2.60 To ensure long-term access and overcome the possibility that specific software is no longer current, the Department of the Senate suggest that 'an electronic PPS should have the necessary technology embedded into it to enable the successful downloading and reading of its digital files into the future'.⁵⁶

2.61 The committee supports the idea of undertaking a business case to investigate these issues further. It also suggests that the NAA be consulted in this process as it has expertise in this area. In its submission, the NAA stated:

Our experience in this area has identified a number of issues relating to the maintenance of records in electronic formats, particularly the long-term archival requirements, to ensure that they will be accessible over decades and even centuries.⁵⁷

Recommendation 2

2.62 The committee recommends that the parliamentary departments undertake a business case to examine issues relating to the maintenance of electronic records and long-term archival requirements that would be required in developing an electronic PPS.

Accessibility

2.63 Many submissions maintained that accessibility is an important factor that should be considered with any development of an electronic PPS. In essence, many submissions pointed to a need for electronic documents to be available in PDF, HTML and/or RTF formats.

2.64 The State Library of Queensland suggested that:

...html documents seem to load more easily and have fewer problems, and PDF could be useful for clients who need to see the exact format of the original publication.⁵⁸

2.65 The Department of the Senate stated that PDF is essential 'so that the virtual copy is a true representation of the tabled [print] copy'.⁵⁹

2.66 The Department of Parliamentary Services noted that accessibility is an important issue, maintaining that:

The papers need to be made available in a way that meets accessibility standards and to enable those with print disabilities [to] read or hear the content of the publications.⁶⁰

56 Department of the Senate, *Submission 6*, p. 4.

57 NAA, *Submission 9*, p. 1.

58 State Library of Queensland, *Submission 2*, p. 1.

59 Department of the Senate, *Submission 6*, p. 4.

60 Parliamentary Librarian (DPS), *Submission 5*, p. 2.

2.67 The Department of the House of Representatives echoed these sentiments, noting standards set by the Australian Human Rights Commission. Again, the department suggested that this matter be included in a business case for the development of an electronic PPS.⁶¹

2.68 Nonetheless, the Department of the Senate notes that:

...an online PPS even in a basic form (ie. PDF only) would make the series significantly more accessible to a wider audience than the current paper copy distribution arrangements.⁶²

2.69 The committee views that an online PPS provided in the formats mentioned above, or at least in PDF and either HTML or RTF, would meet most needs of the community. However, it also shares the view that any provision of the PPS electronically would provide increased access for the Australian community.

2.70 It is the committee's view that when developing an electronic PPS, all reasonable measures should be considered that would provide online access to the greatest number of people in the community.

Options for a digital repository and electronic distribution

2.71 Consideration has been given in the past to various models of delivering a digital repository and providing electronic distribution. The committee's 2006 report provides discussion and analysis regarding these. One model previously considered was to have a central index that hyperlinked to documents on external websites. However, this model is no longer supported.

2.72 The Department of the House of Representatives stated:

The department does not support the option of hyperlinks to existing online documents, principally because long term access to electronic documents on external websites cannot be assured.⁶³

2.73 Similarly, the Department of the Senate noted:

[this model is] especially problematic over time where the dynamic nature of many government websites could result in broken links, adversely affecting the accessibility of documents. The Department of the Senate considers that the risk in this model remains and it is therefore not a viable option.⁶⁴

61 Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission 10*, p. 7.

62 Department of the Senate, *Submission 6*, p. 4.

63 Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission 10*, p. 8.

64 Department of the Senate, *Submission 6*, p. 3.

2.74 As an alternative, the NLA propose that:

The creation of a single, regularly updated, entry point or portal for published government documents would greatly enhance their discoverability.⁶⁵

A digital repository

2.75 The State Library of Queensland stated that it 'would like to see a digital repository for the PPS [on either the] APH or publications.gov.au' websites.⁶⁶

2.76 The Queensland Parliamentary Library insists that a digital repository must provide a search facility that is capable of searching a range of fields, including title, date of tabling, paper number, authoring agency and subject keyword.⁶⁷

2.77 A similar view is held by the UNSW Library. However, it maintains that the publications.gov.au website can only provide basic keyword searches, stating that 'it is often difficult to identify parliamentary papers within search results'.⁶⁸ The Library also notes problems associated with the publications.gov.au website's reliance on information kept on author agencies websites:

Having papers from the series on a distributed network of websites makes it difficult to implement a simple yet powerful search interface.⁶⁹

2.78 Furthermore, the ANAO report highlighted the many difficulties apparent with a decentralised and devolved system for online delivery of documents tabled in the Commonwealth Parliament. As noted earlier, not all documents are loaded to the internet by author agencies.

2.79 Accordingly, it is the committee's view that only a central digital repository could provide the access, including long-term access, and functionality, including search ability, that is required to provide the PPS in electronic format.

2.80 As mentioned above, the chamber departments state that the necessary foundation for developing a digital repository for the PPS may now exist in the Parliamentary ICT architecture.

2.81 In its submission, the Department of the Senate indicated:

The chamber departments currently administer a shared database which has all the metadata required for such a repository and ParlInfo Search, administered by the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS), could

65 NLA, *Submission 11*, p. 2.

66 State Library of Queensland, *Submission 2*, p. 1.

67 Queensland Parliamentary Library, *Submission 8*, p. 1.

68 UNSW Library, *Submission 3*, p. 2.

69 *ibid.*

provide the search functionality together with the necessary hardware infrastructure required to maintain an electronic PPS... The metadata from the chamber departments' shared database is already ingested into ParlInfo Search, making ParlInfo Search a suitable repository.⁷⁰

2.82 The Department of the House of Representatives also indicated:

The Tabled Papers Register was made publicly available on the Parliament House website in April 2010 via the ParlInfo Search engine. The Register provides information on all documents presented to Parliament, including the date of presentation, title, and whether the document is part of the PPS. The parliamentary departments developed the Register through an interface with existing software, the Table Office Papers Database. Although the Register currently does not contain or link to electronic copies of [documents], provision was made to enable this to occur, with minor changes to the database to accommodate certain document types.⁷¹

2.83 The Department of Parliamentary Services, the department responsible for administering ParlInfo Search, also stated that ParlInfo Search is a suitable repository. In addition, the department suggested that:

...a special web page be established to enable access to the resources such as that proposed for Hansard in the new Parliament of Australia web site.⁷²

2.84 The UNSW Library also noted the Tabled Papers Register within ParlInfo Search as being a suitable repository for the PPS:

The Tabled Papers Register index provided by the Department of the Parliamentary Library [sic], provides extensive metadata and an advanced search interface that could be expanded to link to the full text of papers.⁷³

2.85 ParlInfo Search provides users with particular features that could assist with electronic distribution, including the 'ability to save searches and to create alerts based on those searches'⁷⁴ that could notify users when a new parliamentary paper has become available. The committee notes evidence which expressed a desirability for these features.

2.86 The Queensland Parliamentary Library stated:

An email notice by which subscribed clients are notified of all updates as they occur would be most useful, at a minimum an RSS feed should be available for updating purposes.⁷⁵

70 Department of the Senate, *Submission 6*, pp 3, 4.

71 Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission 10*, p. 5.

72 Parliamentary Librarian (DPS), *Submission 5*, p. 2.

73 UNSW Library, *Submission 3*, p. 2.

74 Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission 10*, p. 9.

75 Queensland Parliamentary Library, *Submission 8*, p. 2.

2.87 Similarly, the NSW Parliamentary Library maintained:

...to facilitate accessibility and the currency of information, ideally there would be an alert service which notifies users when new documents ... have been uploaded ... the New South Wales Parliamentary Library would value something like an RSS feed to facilitate notification.⁷⁶

2.88 Finally, the Department of Parliamentary Services indicated that it supports the development of an electronic PPS within the Parliament:

[It] high[ly] recommend[s] the publication of the full text of parliamentary papers through a national repository based in the parliamentary network providing long term access through modern systems supporting full text searching, RSS feeds, alerts and other mechanisms to assist Australians.⁷⁷

2.89 The department further added that:

This would enable Australians to access this great national resource in a single place, without facing barriers of the current environment where some papers are not available electronically and other[s] are extremely difficult to locate... Such a repository would also eliminate the current problems of agencies changing names and web sites and cleansing their web sites of older material.⁷⁸

2.90 As a further measure to ensure long-term access to the documents in a digital repository, the NLA suggested that it could:

...play an important role in mirroring the consolidated content as a backup in case of loss and [as] an alternate mechanism for access.⁷⁹

Recommendation 3

2.91 The committee recommends that the parliamentary departments develop a digital repository for the PPS based in the Parliament.

Additional methods of electronic distribution

2.92 Both chamber departments noted discussion in the committee's 2006 report relating to distribution of the PPS in portable digital formats, including CD and DVD.⁸⁰ The 2006 report noted concerns with the archival properties of these media.⁸¹

76 NSW Parliamentary Library, *Submission 12*, p. 1.

77 Parliamentary Librarian (DPS), *Submission 5*, p. 3.

78 Parliamentary Librarian (DPS), *Submission 5*, p. 2.

79 NLA, *Submission 11*, p.4.

80 Department of the Senate, *Submission 6*; Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission 10*.

81 JCP, *op cit*, p. 34.

In its submission to this inquiry, the Department of the House of Representatives reiterated this concern. Nevertheless, the department noted:

This could possibly be a more cost-effective method of distributing the series [but] it would depend on demand from eligible recipients before [such a] product was offered...⁸²

2.93 The Department of the Senate maintained that this option would depend on demand and perhaps only be provided on a cost recovery basis as a paid subscription service. However, the department indicated that:

Providing the PPS simultaneously in numerous formats (in print, online and DVD) would increase the resources needed to provide the series, jeopardising its future sustainability.⁸³

Costs

2.94 The committee acknowledges that the chamber departments may face some additional costs associated with providing an online PPS as well as maintaining the print version. The committee expects that there will be a transitional period where there may be some additional pressures on resources. However, if demand for the print series diminishes, this should allow for some offsetting of costs and a reallocation of resources.

2.95 The possibility that demand may decline for the PPS print distribution was noted earlier, with the State Library of Tasmania and the UNSW Library both indicating their preference for electronic over print.⁸⁴ The Department of the House of Representatives also noted that although the 'costs have yet to be identified...[some of the additional costs] 'would be offset, or partly offset, for the chamber departments by no longer producing and distributing a hard copy version of the PPS'.⁸⁵ Furthermore, the department noted:

There would also be saving for author agencies which would be required to provide fewer hard copies.⁸⁶

Other documents accessible through a digital repository

2.96 The Department of the House of Representatives raised an issue relating to the scope of documents that could be provided through an online repository, indicating the potential for other tabled documents to be accessible through a repository. The department was mindful, however, that providing an extended service may have

82 Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission 10*, p. 9.

83 Department of the Senate, *Submission 6*, p. 4.

84 See paragraph 2.6

85 Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission 10*, p. 9

86 *ibid.*

further resource implications. Therefore, priority must be given to documents in the PPS.⁸⁷

2.97 The committee's preferred model is for the parliamentary departments to develop a repository using ParlInfo Search supported by the databases used to record documents that are tabled in the Parliament. Electronic versions of documents should be provided to the Parliament at the same time that the print copy is provided for tabling.

2.98 Over time these systems could be further developed and enhanced providing greater access for users of the PPS.

Recommendation 4

2.99 The committee recommends that a business case, referred to in recommendation 2, also include:

- **The scope for other tabled documents not in the PPS to be made available through the repository; and**
- **The costs placed on the parliamentary departments to provide the repository.**

Recommendation 5

2.100 The committee recommends that author departments and agencies be required to provide electronic copies of documents at the same time print copies are provided for tabling in the Parliament.

Recommendation 6

2.101 The committee recommends that a digital repository for the PPS be in production and accessible to users by early 2011, to coincide with the start of the 2011 PPS.

Administration of an electronic PPS

2.102 Since its inception in 1901 the PPS has been administered by the Parliament.

2.103 This administration involves:

- (a) support for this committee and the individual publications committees of each chamber;
- (b) allocating parliamentary paper numbers to each document included in the series;
- (c) maintaining distribution lists;
- (d) liaising with departments and agencies;

87 Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission 10*, pp 8-9

- (e) liaising with the distribution agent;
- (f) indexing; and
- (g) maintaining online information.⁸⁸

2.104 Apart from the parliamentary departments, no other submissions indicated a position on whether another organisation should be charged with the responsibility of the administration of an electronic PPS. In the absence of information to the contrary, the committee assumes that recipients of the PPS believe that the administration of the PPS should remain with the Parliament, through the auspices of the two chamber departments.

2.105 The committee acknowledges that generations of parliamentary officers of the two chamber departments over the years have discharged this responsibility with dedication. At the same time, those officers, with the guidance and approval of this committee and the Presiding Officers, have managed innumerable efficiencies which have enabled the PPS to remain sustainable today.

2.106 It would be derelict of this committee, as gatekeeper of the PPS, and given the chamber departments' responsible guardianship over the years, to suggest that the governance of the series should change when considering a major innovation in the way the PPS is provided now and into the future.

2.107 Both chamber departments have indicated their willingness to support an electronic PPS. The Department of the House of Representatives stated that:

...the department considers that it is time to consider an electronic repository of the PPS to be jointly administered by the chamber departments...⁸⁹

2.108 Similarly, the Department of the Senate stated:

The department believes that, if a single digital repository for the PPS is to be pursued, the responsibility for developing it resides with the two chamber departments.⁹⁰

2.109 The Parliamentary Librarian, Department of Parliamentary Services also stated:

I high[ly] recommend the publication of the full text of parliamentary papers through a national repository based in the parliamentary network providing long term access through modern systems...⁹¹

88 Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission 10*, p. 2.

89 Department of the House of Representatives, *Submission 10*, pp 9-10.

90 Department of the Senate, *Submission 6*, p.5.

91 Parliamentary Librarian (DPS), *Submission 5*, p. 3.

2.110 The committee welcomes the support of the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS) because the functionality of providing an electronic PPS through the Tabled Papers Register (which resides within ParlInfo Search and is managed by the DPS) is fundamental to making the development of a centralised electronic PPS a reality.

Recommendation 7

2.111 The committee recommends that the chamber departments administer a digital repository for the PPS.

Senator Carol Brown

Chair