



AUSTRALIAN SENATE

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18 October 2005

Mr Jason Sherd  
Secretary  
Joint Committee on Publications  
House of Representatives  
Room RG 89  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Sherd

**DISTRIBUTION OF THE PARLIAMENTARY PAPERS SERIES –  
SUBMISSION BY THE DEPARTMENT OF THE SENATE**

Thank you for your letter of 26 September 2005 in which you convey the committee's invitation to provide a submission to the committee for this inquiry.

I hope that the following will be of some use to the committee.

As the committee is aware, the Parliamentary Papers series (PPS) is the only comprehensive series of documents recording the operations of the Australian Parliament and its committees and of the Commonwealth government, and has been printed since federation. It brings together in one series a wide variety of reports which provide researchers with a consolidated record of many aspects of Australian government.

The Department of the Senate considers that the Parliament retains a residual obligation to provide to the public information about the activities of Parliament and of government. It may be that measures which meet this obligation have now been reduced to their minimum, technological advances notwithstanding. Any moves which might tend to reduce the performance of this obligation further should be approached with caution.

I make the following comments in relation to the committee's terms of reference.

***Potential impact of changes to the distribution of the PPS – tightening of eligibility guidelines – executive department libraries on PPS distribution list***

In considering the suggestion to remove the 14 executive department libraries currently on the PPS distribution list, there is a further factor to be taken into account.

Executive departments and their portfolio agencies currently pay for the printing of reports for the PPS. As a response to this measure, such departments could refuse to continue this

practice. The situation could revert to the chamber departments having to pay for those documents. The provision of copies of the PPS to these executive department libraries could be seen as an appropriate exchange for the free copies of reports provided for the PPS by executive departments and agencies.

If executive department libraries were removed from the distribution list and still wanted to maintain a set of the reports in the PPS, they would have to contact author agencies to request copies of reports, a significant duplication of effort and waste of resources. Centralised distribution through the PPS ensures the most effective and efficient whole-of-government access to, and indexing of, the documents.

It may therefore be better to continue to provide copies to those libraries which nominate to receive them.

**Recommendation:** That executive department libraries be asked whether they wish to remain on the PPS distribution list.

### ***Potential impact of changes to the distribution of the PPS – cessation of blister packs***

Although the impact on some recipients of ceasing the provision of blister packs will be mitigated by those recipients being provided with a pamphlet copy, this department, as a recipient of a blister pack set which it subsequently binds, would prefer to continue receiving a blister pack set rather than a pamphlet set, to facilitate the binding of the PPS. There may well be other agencies in the same position.

**Recommendation:** That recipients of blister packs of the PPS be asked if they wish to continue to receive blister pack sets for binding.

### ***Provision of the PPS in digital format***

There is merit in this suggestion, provided that the digital version is easy to produce, with little reformatting or content manipulation and at a cost that is substantially less than the existing administrative costs for the Departments of the Senate and the House of Representatives (as the administrators of the PPS).

It is unlikely that existing costs would be substantially reduced if the digital version were produced as an adjunct to the printed series, as most of the current costs would continue, to which would be added the new costs of producing the digital version.

It is more likely that the existing costs would be substantially reduced only if the digital version were produced as an alternative to the printed series, or in parallel with a phased reduction in the number of printed copies.

**Recommendation:** That the methodology for, and costs of producing, digital format be fully investigated before surveying recipients of the PPS to ascertain whether they would accept a digital version in place of printed copies.

### *Feasibility of a subscription service, either digital or printed*

Until October 2003, standing orders for parliamentary papers were also sold through the Government Bookshop Network. Anecdotal material suggests that there is a market for a subscription service for printed sets of the PPS. A number of tertiary institution libraries have indicated that they would be prepared to purchase sets of the PPS in addition to their free distribution entitlement.

Of the 149 copies of reports (169 for parliamentary committee reports and reports of royal commissions) provided by agencies for the PPS, there are currently 15 spare sets, so there is some scope for a limited subscription service for printed sets of the PPS even without increasing the costs to agencies.

The chamber departments currently operate a bills subscription service in conjunction with CanPrint Communications. A similar service could be established for the PPS, subject to sufficient copies of PPS reports being available. (Should the paid subscription service prove successful the number of copies provided by author agencies might need to be increased to meet demand.)

The feasibility of a subscription service for a digital version of the PPS would be contingent on the outcome of an investigation of the methodology for, and costs of producing, a digital version, and a survey of current recipients of the PPS to ascertain whether they would accept a digital version in place of printed copies.

**Recommendation:** That current recipients that are to remain on the distribution list and current recipients that are to be removed from the list from 1 January 2006 be surveyed to determine whether there is a demand for a subscription service, in addition to the current free distribution, and the preferred format for such a subscription service.

### *Possibility of partial or full cost recovery*

As already suggested, the administrative costs of the PPS should be seen as fulfilling the residual obligation of the Parliament to inform the public.

As author agencies pay for the printing of copies for the PPS, any move to full or partial cost recovery by the chamber departments may trigger requests for a share of the revenue or for payment by the chamber departments of the costs of the reports provided by those agencies for the PPS.

**Recommendation:** That any move to cost recovery encompass only recovery of the administrative costs of the chamber departments.

The Senate Department would be pleased to assist the committee in its inquiry.

Yours sincerely

(Harry Evans)