

The Secretary
Joint Committee on Publications
Parliament of Australia
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Submission - 03

Received
19 OCT 2005
SS

File number: 4578

Dear Sir

The State Library of New South Wales welcomes the opportunity to comment on the distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series provided by the *Inquiry into the Distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series*, as this series is critical to the provision of Parliamentary information to members of the public.

Our response to each of the Terms of Reference is set out below:

- 1. The potential impact of changes to the distribution of the PPS made by the Presiding Officers, namely the tightening of eligibility guidelines and the cessation of blister packs to commence on 1 January 2006**

The State Library of New South Wales advocates reconsideration of the proposals to alter the current distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series (PPS).

Our preference is for the continuing distribution by Parliament of the collated sets in either blister packs or bound format to State and Territory libraries.

Providing information about the business of government is a key part of the State Library's role. The State Library of New South Wales is the library of record for the state of New South Wales and is sited in the centre of Sydney, the largest city in Australia. Library staff answered about 3.8 million enquiries and 630,000 people visited the Library during the year ended 30 June 2005. A significant proportion of enquiries relate directly to government publications, and the PPS is referred to daily. In summary:

- Provision of information services relating to Australian government is a core Library activity, and government publications are a major collection strength of the Library.
- Provision of the PPS as a collated set, which is subsequently bound by the Library ensures access for researchers of the future.
- Access to the range of papers in a collated set provides information contextually side by side with other papers from the year.
- The provision of a collated set supports community access to information, and partially fulfils the responsibility of government to provide open government and access to the business of government.

We understand and support the National Library of Australia's role in holding an archival set of the Parliamentary Papers Series, however as State Libraries have a direct role in supporting information requests from public libraries in each state, it is critical that archival sets are maintained in all State and Territory libraries to enable short and long term access to PPS by members of the public.

2. The provision of the PPS in a digital format, either as an alternative or an adjunct to the hard copy series

As a key collector and provider of information to members of the public, staff at the State Library of New South Wales are aware of the dynamic publishing environment. The Library supports making a wider range of current papers available online for those members of the public with the infrastructure and knowledge to make good use of these. In summary:

- Print is currently the preferred archival format, and it should be maintained until another format is shown to have superior archival qualities.
- Presentation of the series in a digital format on Parliament's website would enable timely access to information by many citizens. We support a redevelopment of the PPS website to provide improved searching and linking to current documents.
- Eventually, when technology supports it, the Library would support ensuring access to the PPS through a permanent digital archive.

3. The feasibility of a subscription service, either in digital or hard copy form

The current proposals include the distribution of pamphlet (loose) copies through CanPrint Communications Pty Ltd. This is unsatisfactory. In summary:

- CanPrint is not an effective supplier of government publications. As a deposit library in the Commonwealth Library Deposit Scheme we have found that CanPrint is only able to supply publications sent to them for distribution by the agency publishing the document. CanPrint fails to supply any other publications claimed under the Scheme. This is an

ongoing issue which has diminished the proportion of Commonwealth government publications and thus the quality of information to be found in deposit libraries and has resulted in duplication of effort across all state libraries.

- It is likely that the completeness of the PPS sets will be compromised, risking the integrity of the PPS as a record of Parliamentary publishing.
- The cost of attempting completeness of the PPS would be duplicated in each state library.
- A digital set of current publications should be freely available on Parliament's website to support current access.

4. The possibility of partial or full cost recovery for the series.

As a key provider of government information and currently a deposit library we anticipate continuing to receive deposit copies. In the current environment government publishers seek to recoup costs through payments or subscriptions.

While it is important to provide cost effectiveness in government, the Parliamentary Papers Series is a foundation stone of government publishing and as such is critical to the provision of information about the business of government to members of the public. In summary:

- Currently the State Library receives blister packs ready for binding, and pays the cost of binding.
- Our preference is for Parliament to take responsibility for collating sets for binding, and if Parliament were to also undertake binding the Library would be prepared to contribute to the binding costs on a cost recovery basis.

The outcome of this inquiry may have far-reaching effects in terms of diminished public access to Parliamentary information, as well as government information generally. As an organisation, the Commonwealth Parliament has a leadership role, and it is a matter of concern that in limiting access to its own information, this may then be considered reasonable practice by other Commonwealth government departments.

Yours sincerely



Elizabeth Ellis
**Assistant State Librarian, Collection Management Services
& Mitchell Librarian**
18 October 2005