



## Joint Publications Committee

### Printing Standards for Documents Presented to Parliament

#### Discussion Paper

April 2007

#### Background

##### *The current inquiry*

On 1 March 2007 the Joint Publications Committee resolved to inquire into the printing standards for documents presented to Parliament. The terms of reference for the inquiry are as follows:

*To inquire into and report on the printing standards for documents presented to Parliament, with particular reference to:*

- (a) *the necessity of the use of colour and illustrations within documents;*
- (b) *the cost of producing documents and whether value for money is being obtained;*
- (c) *the feasibility of sanctions against organisations that do not follow the printing standards.*

This discussion paper has been prepared for the inquiry and is circulated to stakeholders and other interested parties for comment.

##### *What are the current printing standards?*

The current printing standards were prepared by the Committee and can be found online at [http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/publ/printing\\_standards.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/publ/printing_standards.htm). The guiding principle of these standards is that departments and agencies are expected to receive value for money in the production of their reports.

The standards specify the size and quality of paper and stipulate how colour and illustration are to be used. They apply to documents that are included in the Parliamentary Paper Series (PPS). Documents are made Parliamentary Papers by a resolution of either the House of Representatives or the Senate, often on recommendation from the Publications Committee. As this process occurs after presentation, adherence to the standards ensures that all presented documents comply with the requirements of the PPS.

The two documents issued by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet that provide guidance for agencies presenting documents to Parliament, both defer to the Publications Committee's Printing Standards. Both of these documents can be found online at <http://www.dpmc.gov.au/guidelines/index.cfm>. These guidance documents are:

- Requirements for Annual Reports for Departments, Executive Agencies and FMA Bodies: Approved by the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit under subsections 63(2) and 70(2) of the *Public Service Act 1999*, 21 June 2006; and
- Guidelines for the presentation of Government documents to the Parliament (including Government responses to committee reports, Ministerial Statements, annual reports and other instruments), June 2006.

The *Requirements for annual reports* states that it applies to Departments and agencies, Commonwealth authorities and companies. The *Guidelines* for presentation are applicable to all government documents presented to Parliament. There is some uncertainty as to the applicability of both these documents to agencies that come within the Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act.

### ***Previous practice***

Prior to the 40th Parliament, agencies wrote to the Committee seeking exemptions from the Printing Standards in force at that time. These were invariably granted by the Committee. However in 1989 the then Committee Chair was prompted to comment that

“... it would appear that the primary purpose of preparing a report for the scrutiny of the parliament is being overshadowed by a perceived need to produce an elaborate and expensive self-promotional document.” (*House Hansard*, 30 November 1989, p. 3281)

In 2002, due to the increasing number of such exemptions sought, the Committee altered the Printing Standards to remove the need for it to grant these exemptions. The onus was then placed on individual agencies to exercise restraint in the presentation quality of documents.

## **Use of colour and illustrations**

### ***What are the current standards?***

“Government policy encourages restraint in the presentation quality of documents, and, while restraint does not necessarily preclude colour printing, it has implications for the way in which colour is used.

Black ink is to be used for text and illustrations. A colour or colours in addition to black may be used if essential for the proper understanding of information such as complex maps or diagrams. Line drawings, graphs, charts, photographs and other illustrations may be included, provided they are essential to a better understanding of subjects discussed in the text.” (*Printing standards* as at 30 January 2004)

On 30 March 2006, the Committee resolved that the standards be amended to provide for full colour printing of the cover of a report, but limited the text to two colours only. This resolution is slightly more generous than the current standards, which provide for the use of colour only if essential for the understanding of maps or diagrams.

### ***What are the issues?***

The Committee secretariat analysed 344 documents presented between 8 August and 7 November 2006. Of these documents, only 51% used a single colour (including black) in the text of the document. Sixteen percent of documents were printed in full colour.

Almost half (49%) of the documents analysed contained photographs or other illustrations in the body text. While it is open to subjective interpretation of the term ‘essential’ in determining whether a document uses colours or illustrations inappropriately, the Committee is nonetheless concerned at the number of documents containing colour and illustrations.

The primary purpose of these documents is to provide information on agency activities to allow Parliament to make a fully informed judgement on departmental performance (*Requirements for annual reports*, Dept. Prime Minister & Cabinet, 2006). Undoubtedly all annual reports meet this purpose. However, black text only is usually sufficient. The value added by the use of colour and illustration is in some cases questionable. The additional costs, not only in printing the document, but also in time spent sourcing photographs, illustrations and designing the layout of the document may seem hard to justify.

The Committee accepts that Parliament may not be the only audience for many documents; other stakeholders including the media and the general public. The Institute of Public Administration ACT (IPAA) recognise outstanding annual reports with awards using a series of criteria, including presentation. The IPAA acknowledge that “tables, graphics etc” should add to the document rather than simply take up space. It may be necessary for some level of colour and illustrations to be used to assist users in better understanding the content of the documents.

The Committee would welcome comments on the use of, and necessity for, colour and illustrations within documents presented to Parliament.

## **Costs of producing documents and value for money**

### ***What are the current standards?***

“Commonwealth Government agencies are expected to obtain value for money in procuring services to publish and print documents.” (*Printing standards* as at 30 January 2004)

### ***What are the issues?***

The Committee is seeking further information on the costs of printing, especially in relation to colour printing. In early 2006 the Committee obtained indicative printing costs for documents printed in either 2 or 4 colours. This quote showed that the cost of a report printed in 4 colours was over 70% higher than if printed in 2 colours, which is contrary to anecdotal reports from agencies which suggest otherwise.

The Committee acknowledges that the phrase ‘value for money’ is open to interpretation. It will be interested to hear views on what does and does not constitute value for money in the publication of government documents.

The Committee is also interested in gaining information on the environmental cost of documents, including the minimisation of waste. One option to reduce the number of printed copies is to make the document available electronically. This issue was considered by the Committee in its 2006 report into the distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series (available online at <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/publ/pps/report.htm>). Any views from stakeholders on reducing the environmental cost of printing documents or on electronic availability are welcome.

## **Sanctions**

### ***What are the current standards?***

There are currently no sanctions for not adhering to the printing standards. However, if a document does not meet the standards the author agency must bear any costs of reprinting the document to ensure its inclusion in the Parliamentary Papers Series.

In May 2006 the Joint Publications Committee presented its report on the distribution of the Parliamentary Paper Series. The report recommended, among other things, that the printing standards be adhered to and further stated that the Committee would monitor compliance with the standards and report those agencies not adhering to them. This recommendation was supported by both the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Any action that the Committee recommends as a result of this inquiry will be consistent with the approach adopted in the 2006 report.

### ***What are the issues?***

Determining an appropriate sanction against an agency that has not adhered to the printing standards is a challenge for the Committee. Several options are available to the Committee, which range from doing nothing to proposing to alter an agency's appropriation. The best solution for all parties will obviously be somewhere in between.

If the standards relating to colour and illustrations were strictly enforced it would add considerably to the printing costs of those agencies required to reprint their documents.

At present, documents included in the Parliamentary Papers Series (about half of all government documents) that are printed on A4 paper are required to be reprinted on B5 paper to allow for binding and storage. The Committee is aware of at least one agency that prints A4 (full colour) copies for presentation to Parliament and for distribution to other stakeholders, while still providing black and white B5 stock for the PPS. Non-PPS documents printed on A4 are currently not required to be reprinted.

## **Options for Committee action**

There are numerous options for further action available to the Committee. The following list is not exhaustive; other options may be presented during the inquiry process.

- do nothing. Continue to place the onus on agencies to comply with the standards.
- issue new printing standards placing further restrictions on the use of colour and illustrations. Agencies would then need to seek an exemption from the Committee to exceed the standards.
- write to agencies whose documents do not comply with the printing standards, seeking an explanation for the non-compliance and details of the costs of publication.
- name non-complying agencies in an appendix to the Committee's fortnightly report.