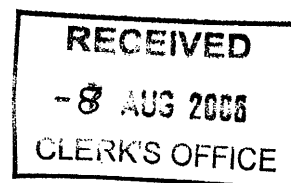




Parliament of Australia
Department of Parliamentary Services

Your ref: rj.proc.com.6055

8 August 2006



Dr Rosemary Laing
Acting Secretary
Senate Procedure Committee
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Dr Laing

Proposed changes to the Senate committee system

1 I refer to your letter of 11 July 2006 requesting advice on the capacity of the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS) to support five concurrent Senate estimates hearings within current resources.

2 As you would be aware, estimates is our most intensive period of the sitting year and is the time when DPS has the least capacity to absorb further work.

3 To provide transcription, broadcasting and security services for the proposed fifth committee DPS would require additional resources to cover costs associated with increased overtime, employing and training additional casual staff, or increased outsourcing of transcription work.

4 The amount of extra resources required would vary according to the timing, location and the specific broadcasting and transcript requirements of the fifth committee.

5 Even using the current staffing and panel arrangements to full capacity, if the Senate committees convene during a House of Representatives sitting period (when a variable and unpredictable number of House committees also convene), it will not be possible to meet current transcript turnaround timeframes. Further research would be needed to determine whether it is possible to extend the present panel arrangements to new companies, but it might also be necessary to re-negotiate transcript turn-around times.

6 If television broadcasting of the fifth committee is required, there may not be a suitable room available. The current four estimates committees are televised from committee rooms 2S1, 2S3, 2R1 and the Main Committee room. The only other committee room that has television broadcasting equipment is committee room 2R3—which is used by the House of Representatives Main Committee. In time, it may be possible to fit out another Senate Committee room to provide televised broadcasting capacity but this work is not currently included in DPS forward work plans, and any such proposal would require appropriate funding support. Alternatively, casual staff could be employed to

provide an audio-only broadcast service for the fifth committee from another Senate committee room.

7 Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the impact of the proposed changes to the committee structures. If you have any questions in relation to my comments above, please contact the Deputy Secretary, Mr David Kenny on (02) 6277 5533 in the first instance or my office on (02) 6277 7100.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hilary Penfold". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Hilary Penfold QC
Secretary