

Output Group 2 – Committee services and parliamentary relations

Committees fulfil their role in the parliamentary consideration of policy and legislation and the scrutiny of government

Productive and amicable international and regional relationships with other parliaments, parliamentary bodies and organisations

Description

Output Group 2 provides advice and support for House committees and joint parliamentary committees administered by the House, and fosters and maintains interparliamentary relations at both the international and regional levels. The functions and services of the output group are performed primarily by the Committee Office and the Parliamentary Relations Office (PRO).

Committee Office staff provided administrative, policy and procedural support for the committee system. They were involved in the conduct of individual inquiries, from advertising to reporting and placing government responses to reports on the website.

During the reporting year 2002–03 the Committee Office supported 22 House and joint committees, with the workload distributed across nine secretariats.¹ The investigative committees supported by the department are listed in Table 3.

¹ In addition, five House committees and a joint committee were supported through Output Group 1.

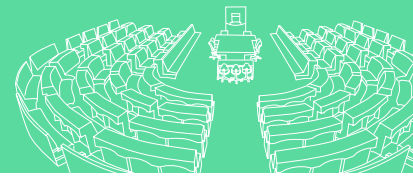


Table 3 Committees supported, 1 July 2002 to 30 June 2003

House committees

Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
 Standing Committee on Ageing
 Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
 Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
 Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration
 Standing Committee on Education and Training
 Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations
 Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage
 Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs
 Standing Committee on Industry and Resources
 Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs
 Standing Committee on Science and Innovation
 Standing Committee on Transport and Regional Services
 Select Committee on the Recent Australian Bushfires (from March 2003)

Joint committees

Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD
 Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
 Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
 Joint Standing Committee on Migration
 Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories
 Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit
 Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works
 Joint Standing Committee on Treaties

The PRO was responsible for organising and managing incoming and outgoing parliamentary delegations and providing support for interparliamentary conferences and for the Clerk in his executive role in the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments. The PRO also supported the training of staff of other parliaments, and advised the Presiding Officers and members on international parliamentary matters.

Actual expenses for the provision of services by Output Group 2 were \$10 million, while the budget allocated was \$9.86 million. Table 1 provides a summary of the financial resources for the output group.

Performance

The year 2002–03 was a busy one for the output group as new inquiries were initiated and the Parliament moved towards the peak of its operational cycle. The Committee Office supported an increased number of committees, without an increase in departmental funding, while the PRO operated under constraints imposed by heightened domestic and international security concerns.

Eighty-five per cent of members surveyed who had used committee services recorded that they were either extremely satisfied (25 per cent), highly satisfied (30 per cent) or satisfied (30 per cent).

2.1 Non-inquiry support services

Providing services to support the general (non-inquiry) activities of committees

Global budgeting

Since the commencement of the Fortieth Parliament, committee secretaries have had increased responsibility for the management of global budgeting for both administrative and staffing expenses, in relation to both Output 2.1 and Output 2.2, and a mix of ongoing and non-ongoing staff has been employed. Some secretaries indicated that they appreciated the increased level of flexibility provided under the new system. The potential advantages in being able to redeploy savings from one budget sector to address shortfalls in other areas were recognised.

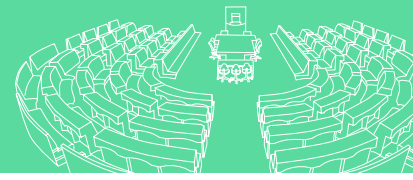
Archiving of committee records

Throughout 2002–03, the department continued the implementation of the recommendations of the 2000 internal review of document management and archiving practices, commenced during the 2001 election period. The department committed further resources in July 2002 to re-sentencing committee files stored at the National Archives of Australia repository in Canberra.

During 2002–03 a team comprising one full-time and two part-time officers reviewed and reboxed some 750 shelf metres of archived files. During this period, 412.02 shelf metres were re-sentenced, and 243.72 shelf metres were culled under National Archives of Australia Records Disposal Authority 1404, in cases where file contents were duplicates, administrative procedural documents, press clippings or non-essential background material.

The team also tried to ensure that all photographs were labelled accurately and stored in the approved archival manner.

In late June 2003, some 350 shelf metres of files were still to be reviewed.



2.2 Inquiry facilitation

Providing procedural, research, analytical and administrative support for the conduct of inquiries and the publication of the final reports

Members' satisfaction

Secretaries reported that oral feedback received from members remained very positive, and members frequently thanked secretaries and staff in statements to the House. As one committee member put it:

I also thank the committee secretariat. Quite often, people forget the enormous amount of work that is put in by the secretariat and they did a great job in collating this report.

House of Representatives Hansard, 14 November 2002, p. 9190

Reports and responses

During the reporting period, the 22 scrutiny committees supported by the department tabled 34 reports, containing a total of 260 recommendations.

At the end of June 2003, the Government had yet to respond to 19 of the total number of reports tabled in 2002–03, but the three-month target time for government responses had not expired in respect of six of these reports. A summary of committee performance figures is provided in Appendix 1.

Two reports that generated particularly widespread comment during 2002–03 were *Boys: Getting it right*, a report by the House Standing Committee on Education and Training, which was tabled in the House on 21 October 2002; and *Human cloning: scientific, ethical and regulatory aspects of human cloning and stem cell research*, tabled on 20 September 2001 by the House Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs.

Boys: Getting it right detailed the findings of an inquiry into the education of boys. The inquiry, notable for both its length and its scope, began in March 2000. Over two years, the committee involved some 21 members of the House, received 231 written submissions and heard evidence from 235 witnesses. The report, which made 24 recommendations supported unanimously by the committee, generated much discussion in the Chamber and the Main Committee, and was the subject of a great deal of public and press attention.

The report *Human cloning: scientific, ethical and regulatory aspects of human cloning and stem cell research* was not tabled during the reporting period. However, it contributed considerably to debates held during the latter part of 2002 on the Prohibition of Human Cloning Bill 2002 and the Research Involving Embryos Bill 2002. The bills resulted from an agreement reached by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in April 2002 to implement nationally consistent legislation in the areas of human cloning and stem cell research. The COAG agreement had been based largely on the findings in the report.

Select Committee on the Recent Australian Bushfires

The workload of the Committee Office was increased during the reporting year by the establishment of the Select Committee on the Recent Australian Bushfires, bringing the total number of committees supported to 22. Existing departmental personnel were redeployed to support the new committee.

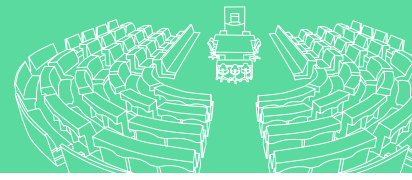
This select committee, established in response to the bushfires that devastated large parts of south-eastern Australia in early 2003, was the first select committee to be established by the House during this Parliament. At the end of the reporting period the inquiry had generated over 300 submissions, demonstrating the level of community concern surrounding the issue. The committee is required to report its findings by 6 November 2003.

Public participation

All investigative committees aimed to become better informed about community concerns and attitudes with regard to the issues under examination. To this end, secretariats sought to facilitate and increase public participation in committee inquiries and solicited input from members of the general public and expert witnesses. This required the coordination of advertising for inquiries, assisted by the department's community outreach and media body, the Liaison and Projects Office, and the organisation of public hearings, seminars, workshops, forums, and surveys. These activities were conducted using a variety of media (see Output Group 1 for more information on initiatives in advertising).

The Committee Office used some innovative methods to increase public participation in inquiries. One such method involved round table hearings where committee members were placed among the public participants to promote free-flowing discussion. Another method involved questionnaires to canvass opinions on particular issues, the responses to which could be returned by email, fax or post. The Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories utilised the immediacy and reach of a televised hearing to good effect by soliciting, during a hearing, email responses to a series of questions on how viewers in the Parliamentary Triangle had travelled to work that morning. This survey generated over 450 responses, giving the committee a useful 'snapshot' of the transport situation on that day.

Secretaries reported that witnesses appearing before committees were grateful for the opportunity to present their views to the Parliament. In a letter to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, one witness thanked members and staff for providing a 'fantastic and all-inclusive opportunity' for participants to express their views. Witnesses also personally thanked secretariat staff for helping them through the sometimes confusing and intimidating process of presenting evidence.



2.3 Interparliamentary relations

Provision of advice and support to facilitate the conduct of the Parliament's international and regional affairs

Delegations and visits

The primary focus of interparliamentary relations continued to be on fostering direct relationships between the Australian Parliament and parliaments of other countries. The department coordinated programs for 31 bilateral visits to other parliaments and 14 visits to the Australian Parliament from other parliaments during 2002–03 (see Appendices 5 and 7). We also provided support for the participation of senators and members in 12 interparliamentary conferences and seminars. Figures relating to the delegations, visits and memberships of interparliamentary organisations can be found in Tables 10 and 12 in Appendix 1. Noteworthy in the outgoing program was the first official visit to Iran since 1992. The visit succeeded in continuing the Australian Parliament's efforts to build and develop strong bilateral relationships with parliaments in the Middle East.

The incoming visits program included the visit of a Canadian parliamentary delegation led by the Hon. Don Boudria MP, the Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the Canadian House of Commons. He examined parliamentary process and procedures in the Australian Parliament as part of his role in the modernisation process of the Canadian Parliament. We prepared a comprehensive program for the delegation members, who were pleased to acknowledge its quality.

International developments significantly affected the work of the PRO throughout the reporting period. Both outgoing and incoming parliamentary delegations required increased attention to security considerations. The impact of global events also affected the management of programs for incoming delegations, as several proposed visits were deferred or rescheduled in response to particular events. The rescheduling of programs and the requirement for heightened security awareness increased the workload associated with the overall management of programs.

Nevertheless, we provided timely administrative support for official incoming and outgoing delegations, including through briefing meetings, debriefing meetings and associated documents. This helped to ensure that delegates were able to both contribute effectively to conferences and seminars and represent the Parliament's and the nation's interests in their bilateral meetings and visits.

The members' survey recorded that 88 per cent of members who had experience of outgoing delegations were extremely or highly satisfied with arrangements made for them. Incoming participants gave very positive feedback on the programs which focused on their expressed areas of interest and also on areas of interest to the Australian Parliament and the nation.

Support for other parliaments

The Parliament began its official contact with the Parliament of East Timor when the Australian National Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union agreed to fund a training program for

parliamentary staff from East Timor. With the support of Australian diplomatic representatives in Dili, arrangements were made for two Timorese staff to participate in a comprehensive two-week training program involving the Australian Parliament and the parliaments of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory.

The department also contributed to the development of democratic institutions in Kosovo. Over a six-month period, two staff members served as consultants to the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo. The staff members took turns to act as Head of the Department of Legal Advice and Procedural Advisory Services in the Assembly of Kosovo and helped train the procedural and committee staff of the fledgling assembly.

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

The Parliament continued to maintain and develop relationships with parliaments in the Pacific region, particularly through its membership of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA). This involved a range of bilateral visits, and training and equipment were also provided to these regional parliaments in various ways. The Australian Parliament provided a regional secretariat to assist both the Australian and the Pacific regions of the CPA, and the Regional Secretary provided support for training, seminars, conferences and visits at both the regional level and individual branch levels.

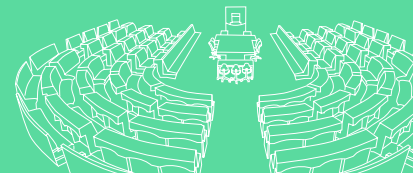
The CPA Education and Training (Trust) Fund – monitored by trustees from each of the parliaments in the Australian Region of the CPA and administered by the Regional Secretary – financially supported training of parliamentary staff and provided equipment to seven Pacific region parliaments in 2002–03.

Interparliamentary study program

The second interparliamentary study program was held from 7 to 17 October 2002. Senior staff of the national parliaments of Canada, Chile, Cook Islands, Germany, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Namibia, New Zealand, Samoa, Scotland, Sweden, Tanzania and Zambia, and the state parliament of Victoria, participated.

The program was launched in 2001, with the following objectives:

- to streamline and make more effective the administration of the visits program for officials from overseas parliaments
- to offer the participants the opportunity to mix widely, establish contacts and exchange views on a variety of parliamentary and political systems
- to give an opportunity to the participants to consider the role and the working of their own parliament, and observe the relevance of Australian management practices to the administration of their legislature
- to offer to the participants an overview of Australia's system of government; the functioning of the Australian Parliament, including its key players, administration, and publications; how laws are made; how committees operate; what occurs on a parliamentary sitting day; and the functions of the parliamentary departments.



The program was evaluated both by participants and presenters. Participants agreed unanimously that the program was a success and gave them a good insight into the workings of the Australian Parliament, and nominated a number of areas with potential for improvement. Presenters also suggested some changes to the format for the next program.

Improving performance

As discussed, the Committee Office particularly sought to improve its performance in 2002–03 by encouraging and facilitating greater participation in parliamentary committees by members of the public. Anecdotal evidence suggested that efforts to increase public participation in the inquiry process were appreciated by both committee members and the broader community.

Committee secretariats also sought to add value to their websites by offering additional background documents and links to relevant external sites. Such innovations have transformed the committee website from a passive advertising medium for inquiries to a useful source of information on the issues under investigation.

Secretaries reported that, while still a significant budget item, newspaper advertising for committee inquiries had been more cost-effective since regular advertisements had been placed in *The Australian* to advertise the forthcoming inquiries of all committees. The effectiveness of the strategy in terms of public response was more difficult to gauge, but it was reported to be at least as useful as conventional, single-inquiry advertisements.

During 2002–03, the department initiated a program of briefings for staff on procedural and practical issues relevant to the work of committees. The seminars gave staff opportunities to learn from and discuss practice and arrangements for the conduct of inquiries and the execution of general duties outside their immediate work areas.

The interparliamentary study program continued, following its successful introduction in 2001. There is now a comprehensive training program in place for overseas and interstate parliamentary staff, resulting in fewer ad hoc visits, ensuring higher quality programs and utilising staff resources more effectively than in the past.

The review of processes and procedures for the support of interparliamentary delegations continued and the relevant manuals continued to be updated. Programming of both incoming and outgoing delegations was much more actively managed in 2003 in order to ensure that visits were spread more evenly throughout the year. There was limited success, due to a significant increase in activity, and further refinements will be made to the approval process during preparations for 2004 programs. The improvements will enhance the effectiveness of visit programs and the utilisation of resources.

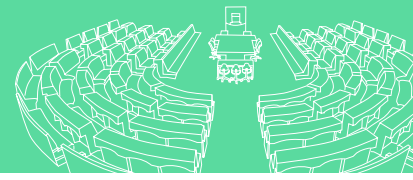
Outlook

The 2003–04 reporting period will see the peak of the Fortieth Parliament's cycle, particularly its committee activity, resulting in increased demands on both committee support elements of the output group. The Committee Office will continue to support the additional select committee during this period within existing resources, and to use a mix of ongoing and non-ongoing staff. Emphasis will be given again to the development of staff skills.

Attention will be given to feedback from the June 2003 members' survey.

In view of the successful training program undertaken in 2002–03 for parliamentary staff from East Timor, the PRO anticipates that a similar exercise will be undertaken during 2003–04. An exchange of parliamentary delegations with East Timor is also planned for next year.

The Fifteenth Joint Australian and Pacific Regional Parliamentary Seminar is due to be held in September 2003, and the program of incoming and outgoing delegation work is expected to reach high levels of activity.



Output Group 3 – Members’ services

Members receive approved services to fulfil their parliamentary duties in a secure and accessible environment

Description

Output Group 3 provides advice, services and support for members. Its activities include the payment of salaries and allowances, the upkeep of accommodation and furniture at Parliament House, and the delivery of office and communication services such as maintaining information technology facilities and printing.

Services to members are provided by the Finance Office, the People Strategies Office, the Information Systems and Publishing Office, and the Serjeant-at-Arms’ Office.

The Presiding Officers accepted the recommendations of the Podger review relating to the security management function. This function is therefore now administered by the Joint House Department under the oversight of the Security Management Board through a purchaser–provider arrangement. The Serjeant-at-Arms represents the department on that board. Funding for this function remains with the Chamber departments.

The actual expenses for the provision of services by Output Group 3 were \$16.70 million, while the budget allocated was \$13.37 million. A summary of the financial resources for the output group is provided in Table 1.

Performance

This output group performed well throughout the year, with members giving positive feedback both formally and informally. Changing work practices and staffing arrangements enabled some savings to be made on service provision in some areas.

3.1 Policy advice

Provision of advice to the Speaker, members and others on members’ entitlements and support

All offices supporting the output provided advice on members’ entitlements to the Speaker, members and others.

3.2 Salary and entitlements

Processing of members' salaries and entitlements in accordance with legislation and administrative decisions

All performance targets were met during the year with all salary variations completed when required and within the 99 per cent accuracy target. The cost per transaction rose from \$4.76 to \$5.44.

One pay rise was processed during the year, increasing the members' rate of pay to \$98,800 per annum with effect from 1 July 2002. Officeholders' additional salaries were also adjusted in accordance with the formula outlined in the parent determination. Feedback received from members indicated that 68 per cent were extremely or highly satisfied and 32 per cent were satisfied with services in relation to their base salary, electorate allowance and deductions.

3.3 Facilities and services

Provision of facilities and services in accordance with administrative decisions

Information services

Four editions of the members' bulletin *House Update* were published during the year to help keep members and their staff informed about developments in the House. In addition, a seminar for new staff of members was held to familiarise them with the work of the House and the services available to assist them in their work. The annual series of briefings on procedural and other developments in relation to the House continued. Feedback indicated that members and their staff valued the regular updates they received from the department.

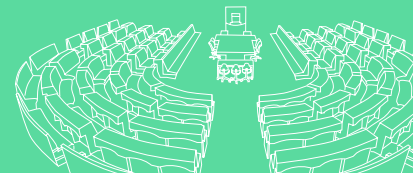
Accommodation services

Twelve members were relocated during the reporting period. The relocation requests were responded to in a timely manner and to the satisfaction of the members.

During the reporting period we received 602 requests for the supply or movement of furniture. Of those requests, 99.88 per cent were processed within the agreed target time. Our agreed target was to satisfy priority 1 tasks within three hours, priority 2 tasks within 12 hours, priority 3 tasks within 24 hours and priority 4 tasks within two to five days.

Maintenance, access and transport services

The Serjeant-at-Arms' Office coordinated the responses to requests for both emergency and routine maintenance works. During the reporting period the office processed 367 emergency requests, attending to 99.75 per cent within five minutes of receipt. The office passed to the Joint House Department 334 routine maintenance requests for repairs or alterations to suites or



common areas. These requests often resulted from our procedure of checking all suites at the end of each sitting period.

During the reporting period the office received and dealt with 203 requests for telephone support. Of those, 37 related to faults and were reported within five minutes of receipt to telephone support officers, who actioned them all within the agreed 45 minutes.

The Serjeant-at-Arms' Office processed 764 individual applications for access to suites. The office processed a further 97 multiple requests (requests for access to all members' suites).

The Hyatt Catering Service made 223 requests for access to Parliament House facilities, such as the Great Hall, the Mural Hall and the private dining rooms. The office returned 93 of these with requests for further information. The office considered every request within one working day of its receipt, and granted all but one.

The Serjeant-at-Arms' Office coordinated transport services for members, including the members' shuttle service available during sitting weeks. Our agreed target was to conduct the transport service without error; we achieved a 99.85 per cent success rate for the year, out of approximately 4,500 bookings.

Information technology services

The Information Systems and Publishing Office completed a rollout of new laptop computers for members during the year. The new laptop is a lighter and smaller model, more suited for use in the Chamber and while travelling, and was well received by members. After having the hard drives erased, the department donated 14 of the superseded laptops to the Rural Fire Services of the Australian Capital Territory and New South Wales to assist them in their duties.

A new computer operating system (Windows XP) was tested and will be rolled out to members early in the new financial year. The system has already been implemented for departmental users. It offers several advantages in improved productivity, being more stable, easier to use and better performing than the obsolete platform. A particular advantage for remote and mobile users is that it will provide more consistent access to services and information.

Following their successful implementation in committee offices, trialling of new multifunction devices for members' suites took place during the year. These devices replaced photocopiers that had come to the end of their working lives, and will provide increased functionality.

Departmental staff participated in an interparliamentary working group planning the implementation of a new parliamentarians' intranet.

Messenger services

The agreed target for messenger services was to provide the services within the periods specified in the service charter. No complaints were received and the service charter approach adopted by the messengerial attendants continued to be very successful.

The messenger services continued to be staffed by a small core group of full-time ongoing staff supplemented by part-time or sessional staff as the need arose. There were fewer full-time staff in 2002–03, and the strategy resulted in considerable salary savings compared with salary costs in 2001–02.

Printing services

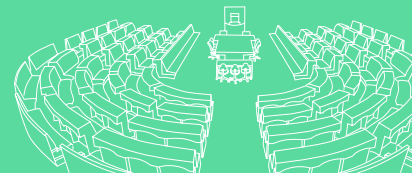
The department's in-house printing centre continued to print those documents that were needed within short time frames for the efficient running of the House. The overall print room output was in the order of 14.76 million impressions. While this is an increase on the total reached in the previous reporting period, which included an election break, it is just over half the number of impressions made in the corresponding period in the last parliamentary cycle. The decrease in impressions was due to a change in work practices, primarily in the Table and Committee Offices, whereby more information was provided in electronic format or by print-on-demand. The increase in the number of documents provided electronically was facilitated by the installation of multifunction devices in work areas. These enabled work groups to turn their hard copy into portable document format (PDF) documents that they could send electronically or publish on the intranet or website.

During 2002–03, 6.57 million impressions were printed for members as part of their in-house printing allowances. This represents an increase of 20 per cent on the total reached in 2001–02, an election year. The average turnaround time for this work was fewer than seven working days, representing a 30 per cent improvement in service provision. The improvements were due to changes made to work practices during the year and the training of printing staff in the use of Digipath, software used in the pre-press stage of printing. Members indicated that they were satisfied with the in-house printing service, 70 per cent being either highly or extremely satisfied and another 25 per cent being satisfied.

Internet services

An upgrade in the members' homepage generator software resulted in members' homepages being updated in a more timely manner. Improvements were also made to the electronic processing of our *List of Members*, making it available in PDF format on our website rather than in hard copy.

During the year, a new web server was built and implemented by the Department of the Parliamentary Reporting Staff, resulting in improvements in the security and performance of our internet site.



Security services

Security continued to be an important focus for all parliamentary departments, following the terrorist incidents in the United States on 11 September 2001 and in Bali on 12 October 2002. A heightened level of threat existed during the reporting period. Enhanced security measures were progressively introduced to ensure that security at Parliament House was adequate to meet the heightened threat level whilst maintaining the accessibility expected of the nation's parliament building.

The success of the new security arrangements was partly demonstrated by the absence of unwelcome incidents during the year. The adequacy of security measures was also tested internally, through a program of random checks on staff members' performance against the agreed security procedures and protocols. Of the members surveyed, 50 per cent were either extremely or highly satisfied, and 45 per cent were satisfied, with their experience of the security service.

In addition, in May 2003 a national counter-terrorist exercise was conducted, with a major aspect taking place in the parliamentary precincts, in order to practise and validate national counter-terrorist management arrangements and test and develop counter-terrorist capabilities. Parliamentary security services played a significant role in the exercise, which achieved its objectives.

As noted in last year's annual report, the Podger review recommended changes to improve the administration and management of parliamentary security. Following the acceptance by the Presiding Officers of those recommendations, considerable work was undertaken on their implementation. The detail of the changes is discussed below.

Management and administration

The implementation of the Podger review recommendations will significantly improve governance and administrative arrangements in relation to security. During 2002–03 the interim Security Management Board (SMB), established in response to the review last financial year, became a permanent body with overall responsibility for security at Parliament House. The SMB, which meets at least monthly, comprehensively reviewed security arrangements in Parliament House and advised the Presiding Officers on enhancing security measures.

The transfer of the security function and all security staff from the departments of the Senate and the House of Representatives to the Joint House Department, as recommended by the Podger review, is proceeding. Responsibility for the management of the administrative and managerial security staff was transferred to the Joint House Department in April 2003. We expect responsibility for operational security staff to be transferred early next financial year. The concentration of the security function in a single department will enable better coordination of security and a single, consistent approach to staffing the security service.

The departments of the Senate and the House of Representatives will continue to fund the security function, and a memorandum of understanding has been developed to cover the terms of the provision of the security service by the Joint House Department. The memorandum specifies the service levels and standards expected of the service.

Operational enhancements

Significant operational enhancements resulted from the SMB's comprehensive ongoing review of security arrangements at Parliament House. Physical security around the building was considerably enhanced, including through:

- installing permanent gates and barriers at the ministerial entrance, to restrict vehicle access
- installing electronically controlled boom gates at the Senate and House of Representatives underground car park entrances
- increasing restrictions on parking and leaving vehicles unattended at the Senate and House of Representatives entrances
- restricting pedestrians' access to the roof of Parliament House via the grassed ramps (pedestrians can still gain access from inside the building, having undergone security screening)
- installing barriers across the forecourt and main entrance at the front of Parliament House, to restrict vehicle access
- increasing the number of Australian Protective Service officers deployed in the precincts of Parliament House, and introducing explosive-detection dogs and specially trained bicycle patrol officers.

The SMB developed protocols and procedures for handling suspect mail items and for allowing access to members' and senators' suites, and the department sought to raise awareness of those protocols and procedures among all staff.

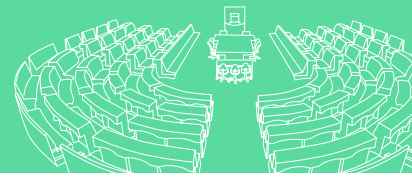
Events in the precincts

There were 42 events held in the Parliament House assembly area during the year, ranging from large demonstrations to solitary vigils. Although many of the events attracted considerable interest – from members, senators, the press and the general public – all protest activities and events were contained within the protest area and proceeded without disrupting the Parliament.

The Presiding Officers' *Guidelines for the conduct of protests and demonstrations in the Parliamentary Precincts* were redrafted during the year, to make them more readable and up-to-date. The major amendment restricted protest activities to the hours between sunrise and sunset, and arose from some protest participants' attempts to camp at Parliament House overnight.

Visits by foreign dignitaries

The Security Controller's Office – which until it was transferred to the Joint House Department in April 2003 was responsible to the Serjeant-at-Arms – consulted extensively with law enforcement and intelligence agencies regarding security for 127 visits by foreign dignitaries and many other formal visits to Parliament House during the year. The Parliamentary Security Service and Australian Protective Service provided personnel to facilitate all the visits of foreign dignitaries, which proceeded without any security incidents. The Ceremonial and Hospitality Branch of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, which arranges such visits, commented favourably on the efficiency and cooperation shown by the Parliamentary Security Service.



Improving performance

The in-house printing service improved its performance during 2002–03, particularly in relation to its services for members. Printing staff were trained in the use of Digipath, enabling greater flexibility in staffing arrangements, and the trialling of new staffing arrangements in the publishing office resulted in the streamlining of the flow of work to the printing service.

The process of reviewing and refining the presentation of information on the House of Representatives website will be assisted by the implementation of the latest version of Webtrends – a web usage analysis tool – and specialised training undertaken by staff. Staff from the Information Systems and Publishing Office were recently trained as Webtrends administrators and will be able to assist work areas in the department to generate and analyse web usage reports. This should improve the information provided to members and the public on our website.

During the year, several work areas were staffed by ongoing staff members supplemented by part-time or sessional staff as needs arose. This strategy resulted in considerable savings and the ability to match staffing arrangements to our clients' needs.

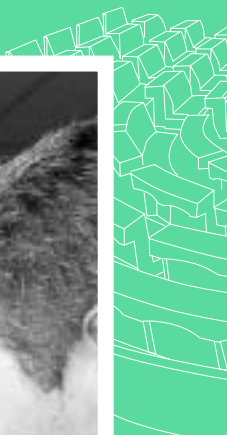
Finally, as outlined previously, the security arrangements at Parliament House were significantly enhanced during the year.

Outlook

It was noted last year that a more effective system would be devised and implemented for obtaining regular feedback from members about their needs and their expectations of the department's services. As mentioned in the Clerk's review, the first of the new-style annual surveys of members was completed in 2002–03 (more detail is provided in the Management and Accountability chapter). The survey provided, and will continue to provide in future years, valuable information that will enable us to cater even more effectively for the needs of members.

An upgrade to the department's intranet software is planned for the coming year. This will streamline the log-in process and improve functionality for all users of the system, with particular benefits for our publishing staff.

The challenge in the security area will be to sustain the increased security effort for the foreseeable future, perhaps in the face of an even more serious threat. The changes in the governance of parliamentary security made during 2002–03 place us, together with the other parliamentary departments with responsibility for security, in a strong position to respond to future challenges.



Andres Lomp demonstrates the House for the Nation touchscreen kiosk.