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# CLERK'S REVIEW

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The department exists to serve the national Parliament, principally by supporting the work of the House of Representatives, the work of House and joint committees, and members in the performance of their parliamentary duties. The financial year saw the dissolution of the House, a general election, the opening of a new parliament and the commencement of the work of a new House and re-established committees. Those features of the parliamentary cycle necessarily had a significant impact on our work. More complete information is set out in the sections of this report that detail the performance of the output groups, but it is appropriate that I comment here on the department as a whole.



*Ian Harris  
Clerk of the House  
of Representatives*

The most important and pleasing comment to make is that all areas of the department responded well to the uncertainties and pressures associated with the end of one parliament and the opening and establishment of the next. I was glad to receive many positive comments from retiring and defeated members of the Fortieth Parliament, and also to be told by new members how helpful they found the assistance provided by the department. Such observations were consistent with the result of the June 2005 members' survey, which revealed that all members surveyed were satisfied with the department's support in helping them fulfil their parliamentary duties. Overall, members reported a 98 per cent satisfaction rate (97 per cent in 2003–04).

## STAFFING AND FINANCES

As noted in the 2003–04 annual report, we always seek an appropriate staffing balance. In 2004–05, while we engaged most employees on an ongoing basis, we also employed some non-ongoing staff and engaged others from a temporary employment register established in 2004. The advantages of this approach have been evident: additional help was available to meet short-term needs, and we achieved savings during the greater than usual fluctuations in the annual workload associated with the dissolution and the election period. The extent and ease of collaboration between work areas were positive features of the year and undoubtedly also helped

us to manage workloads efficiently and economically. We undertook significant recruitment activity later in the year to ensure that reasonable numbers of staff were available, in particular to meet the needs of re-established committees.

The department ended the year in a satisfactory financial position, recording an operating surplus of \$2.54 million. As expected, the dissolution, the election break and the period before the resumption of usual levels of committee and legislative activities reduced our expenditure on salaries, printing, advertising of inquiries and travel. Expenditure on interparliamentary relations was also down, with only 11 official incoming delegations being received. Our ability to fund the department's activities during the years of higher expenditure in the parliamentary cycle depends in part on reducing expenditure in election years, but we also need prudent financial management to ensure that needs in the years of higher activity can be met.

We took full advantage of the time between parliaments to provide intensive staff training and development activities. We ran a series of in-house sessions, supported staff attendance at external programs, and gave 13 employees the opportunity to undertake external placements. Formal and informal feedback confirmed that our staff regard the department's training activities very highly. The training program continued in the new parliament; departmental officers and other experts presented sessions on subjects ranging from specialised procedural matters to wider workplace issues. We were pleased to encourage attendance by staff of the other parliamentary departments at appropriate sessions, and took pleasure in welcoming colleagues from the Office of Parliamentary Counsel to a presentation on 6 May by Emeritus Professor Geoff Lindell on the implications of section 109 of the Constitution.

## INNOVATIONS AND DEVELOPMENTS

Two innovations by the department during the year are worthy of particular note. Members, their staff, and other users now have an improved Events in Progress captioning system. This service enables details of the issue before the House or the Main Committee to be displayed on television monitors in the building. Users appreciate the ease with which they can access accurate information about proceedings at any time, and have commented positively on the much improved service. We are also pleased that the Department of the Senate and the Department of Parliamentary Services joined in this system redevelopment, which was also applied to Senate proceedings.

A second innovation was the development of the CommDocs system. This is a service by which members will be given online access to papers relevant to committees on which they serve. Approved staff will also be able to use the system and will be able to access it from electorate offices or other external locations. This innovation will allow easier, quicker and better targeted access to papers. It may also offer savings in printing and distribution costs, although the provision of a better service was the focus for development of the system. We demonstrated the planned system to chairs and deputy chairs of committees and to staff of the departments of the Senate and Parliamentary Services. The system was also of interest to Microsoft Australia. By 30 June, most of the first phase of development of the system was effectively complete.

June 2005 saw the publication of the fifth edition of *House of Representatives Practice*, the department's key contribution to parliamentary scholarship. While we had updated the text during 2003–04 to cover significant new precedents and developments, the operation of redrafted and reorganised standing orders from the opening of the Forty-first Parliament necessitated further full revision of the text and much additional editing. We completed these tasks in April 2005. Copies of the new edition became available in June, and the full text was published on the Parliament's website.

Robyn McClelland, Clerk Assistant (Table), completed work on a comprehensive assessment of departmental printing services. She gathered extensive information about expected requirements, developments and trends in printing and publishing, and studied options for provision of the service. Departmental staff were encouraged to contribute to the review and to decisions to be taken on its report. The departments of the Senate and Parliamentary Services also contributed information about their printing requirements. Agreed recommendations centred on the maintenance of an in-house service, which would be required to contain unit costs and encouraged to innovate in product delivery.

## OUTLOOK

We expect 2005–06, as a middle year in the parliamentary cycle, to be a year of higher levels of activity. Legislative work, committee activities and our work on interparliamentary relations are all expected to increase from 2004–05 levels. The challenge for the department will be to deploy our staff to ensure that the House, the Main Committee and parliamentary committees have sufficient support, and that this support is of a high standard.

I am again confident of success in 2005–06 because of the skills and commitment of my departmental colleagues, the quality of leadership and training across the department and the ability of staff to work creatively and collaboratively.

With the departments of the Senate and Parliamentary Services, we will undertake a scoping study and business analysis on redevelopment of the Parliament's bills systems, Bills in Progress and BillsNet. These systems manage the text of all bills, amendments to bills and associated material, thereby supporting the legislative function of the Parliament, and make it easier to publish this material online.

We will take the CommDocs service to the trial stage with a small number of committees in August, with the expectation that the facility will be made available to all committee members during 2005–06.

Agreed recommendations of the review of our printing service will be implemented. The service will acquire some new printing equipment, and work to contain unit costs while still meeting user needs.

The department will address long-term knowledge management, particularly through work on records management. The new file classification structure to be implemented in 2005–06 will be immediately useful for hard-copy records, and we will develop a better management approach for electronic records with the assistance of an officer from the National Archives of Australia.

One major management task will be a fifth round of agreement making, the current certified agreement having a nominal expiry date of 31 December 2005. We completed preliminary work to 30 June on schedule, and are confident that proposals will be available for staff to consider well before the current agreement expires.

While much favourable comment has been made about the department's training and development program, for example in regular leadership surveys, we will review our leadership development activities to assess their ongoing suitability and potential for improvement, and devote some attention to leadership development for staff below executive level.

The department will continue to use flexible and short-term staffing arrangements to meet workload peaks, and support part-time and job-sharing arrangements when they are suited to our needs.

Of course, we will continue to work collaboratively with the Department of the Senate and the Department of Parliamentary Services to ensure that we strike appropriate balances between desirable service levels and efficiency in those matters where each department has a role.

During 2005–06, I will complete my term as President of the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments (ASGP). In this role, I have seen at first hand the high level of interest in processes and models that can be considered for use in those many countries where democratic government can be strengthened. The Commonwealth Parliament, and our department, will continue to be seen as having much to offer the wider parliamentary—or potentially parliamentary—world. It has been a great pleasure to participate personally, and to support the participation of colleagues, in such work. Financial year 2005–06 will undoubtedly see good use made of approaches and materials developed by the department in collaboration with the ASGP and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. We will also maintain our commitment to, and benefit from, participation in the activities of the international Society of Clerks-at-the-Table and the Australia and New Zealand Association of Clerks-at-the-Table (ANZACATT).

The wider interests of the department will be served within Australia by the continuation of our lecture, seminar and publications programs, by planned improvements in web accessibility and by developments in the online publication of information about the House and its committees.

I am as optimistic about the value of the department's interparliamentary and outreach activities as I am about our traditional services. My optimism is based on the same foundation: the professional knowledge possessed by departmental colleagues; the leadership, support and training available; and the widespread commitment to providing high-quality and useful services—services that meet immediate needs but also serve important longer term responsibilities to the parliamentary institution.

Ian Harris  
Clerk of the House of Representatives



*The Official Secretary to the Governor-General reads the proclamation dissolving the House of Representatives and proroguing the Parliament (31 August 2004).  
Picture courtesy of AUSPIC*



*The first day of the Forty-first Parliament (16 November 2004).  
Picture courtesy of AUSPIC*



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# DEPARTMENTAL OVERVIEW

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## PURPOSE

The purpose of the Department of the House of Representatives, as set out in its Corporate Plan, is:

To support the House of Representatives and the Parliament by providing advice and services of the highest possible standard.

## ROLE AND FUNCTIONS

The Department of the House of Representatives has existed since 1901. It is established under the *Parliamentary Service Act 1999* and is one of three departments supporting the Australian Parliament. The other two departments, the Department of the Senate and the Department of Parliamentary Services, report separately to the Parliament.

In the 2004–05 financial year, the department continued to support the work of the House of Representatives, its members, its committees and certain joint committees. The department also supported the Parliament in its community and international relations.

By working in cooperation with the other parliamentary departments, the Office of the Official Secretary to the Governor-General, and executive agencies, the department ensured that the outcomes of parliamentary proceedings were processed and recorded on time and accurately.

## ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

In financial year 2004–05, the departmental structure remained constant. It comprised nine offices managed by the Executive of the department: the Clerk, the Deputy Clerk, the Clerk Assistant (Committees), the Clerk Assistant (Table) and the Serjeant-at-Arms.

Figure 1 shows the department's organisational structure at 30 June 2005. Figure 4 shows the relationship between the organisational structure and the department's output structure.

Figure 1 Organisational structure, 30 June 2005

<b>Clerk of the House</b>		
<i>Ian Harris</i>		
<b>Deputy Clerk</b>		
<i>Bernard Wright</i>		
<b>Clerk Assistant</b>	<b>Clerk Assistant</b>	<b>Serjeant-at-Arms</b>
Table	Committees	<i>David Elder</i>
<i>Robyn McClelland</i>	<i>Robyn Webber</i>	
Table Office	Committee Office	Serjeant-at-Arms' Office
Chamber Research Office	Parliamentary Relations Office	People Strategies Office
	Liaison and Projects Office	Finance Office
		Information Systems and Publishing Office

## OUTCOME AND OUTPUT STRUCTURE

The department contributes to a single outcome:

The House of Representatives fulfils its role as a representative and legislative body.

The outcome and output structure and reporting framework for 2004–05 remained broadly consistent with those described in the department's 2004–05 Portfolio Budget Statements. The output structure was adjusted slightly in December 2004 to align it more closely with the department's organisational structure. The numbered output level has been removed and there are now five output groups, two new groups having been established from existing output groups.

What was Output Group 1 (Chamber, Main Committee and community awareness) was split to form output groups 1.1 (Chamber and Main Committee) and 1.2 (Community awareness). What was Output Group 2 (Committee services and interparliamentary relations) was split to form output groups 1.3 (Committee services) and 1.4 (Interparliamentary relations). The former Output Group 3 became Output Group 1.5 (Members' services).

The purpose of the adjustment was to enable the provision of more reliable information to users of the department's Portfolio Budget Statements and annual report. The department's previous outcome and output structure is shown in Figure 2 and the current structure is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 2 Outcome and output structure, July–December 2004

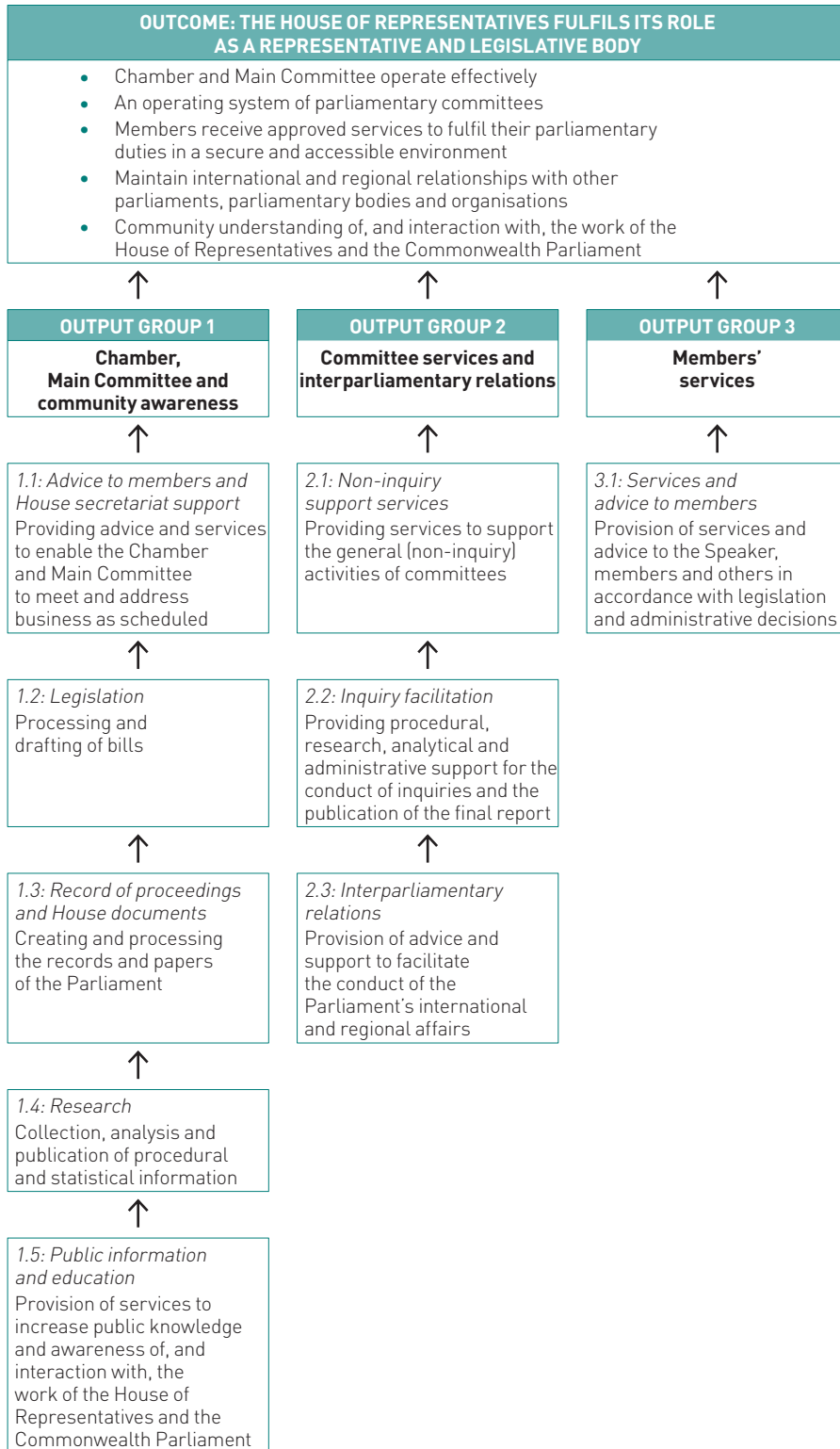


Figure 3 Outcome and output structure, 30 June 2005

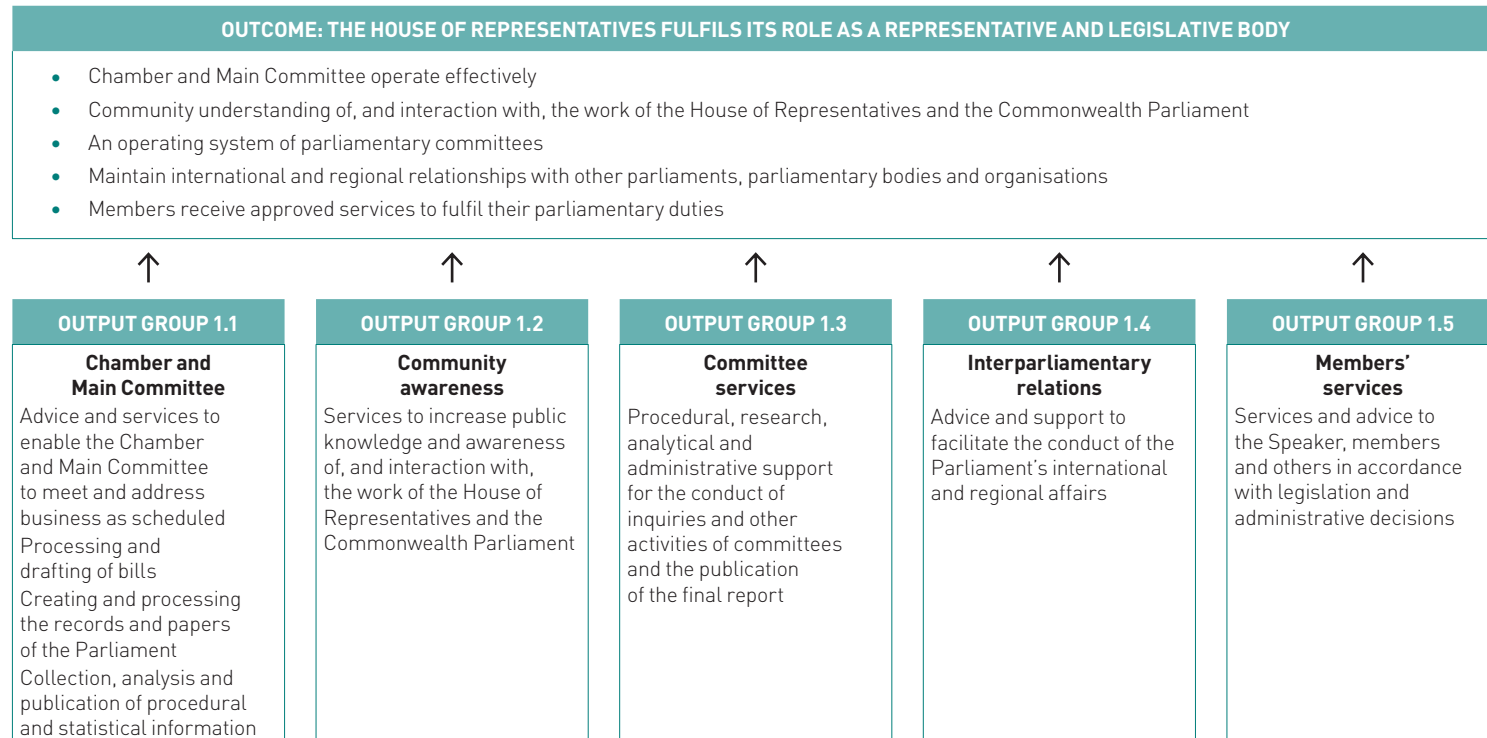
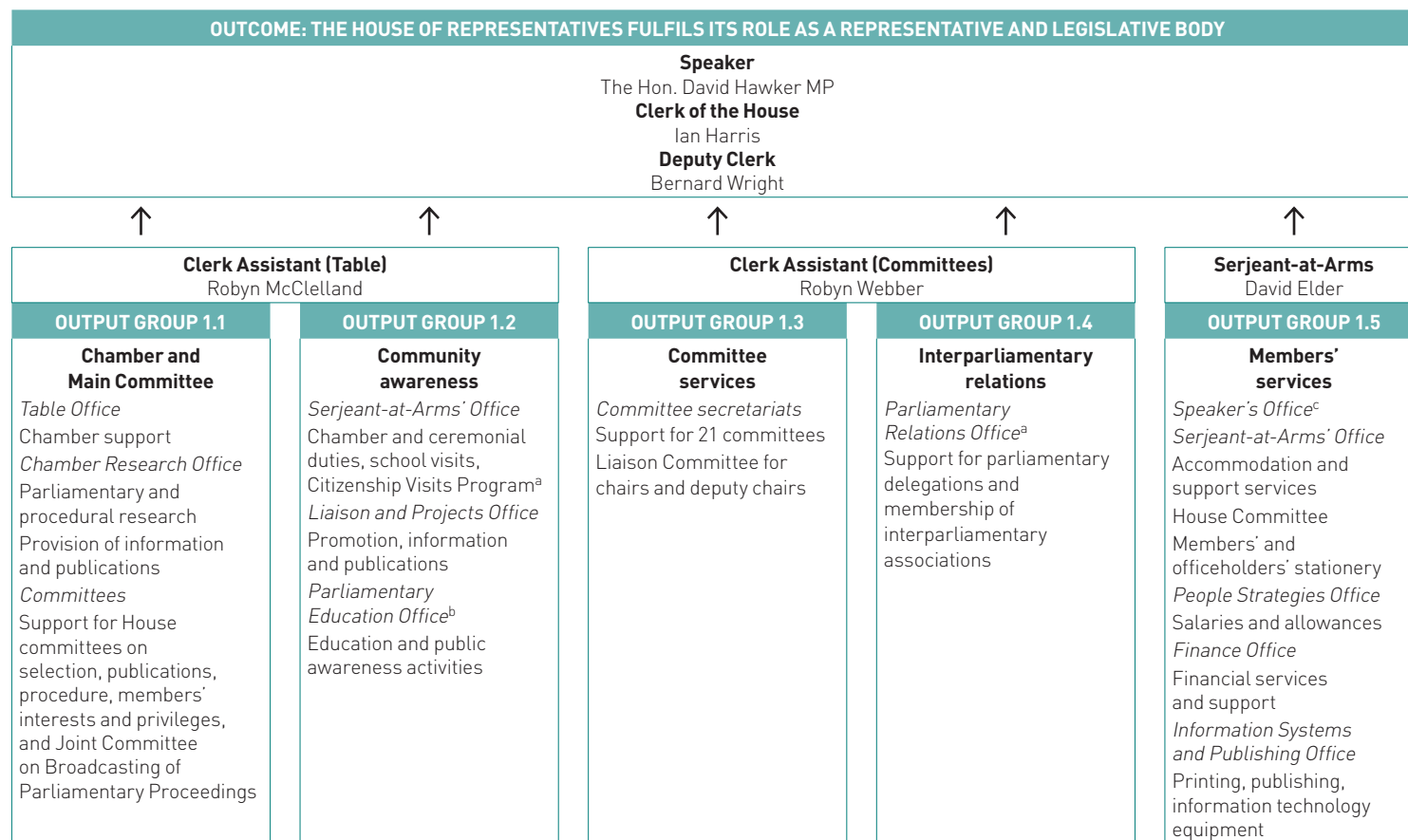


Figure 4 Relationship between output structure and organisational structure, 30 June 2005



a Jointly funded by the department and the Department of the Senate.

b Jointly funded by the department and the Department of the Senate and administered by the Department of the Senate.

c Included in this output group for budgetary purposes.



## FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

The 2004–05 Financial Statements show a surplus of \$2.5 million. This level of surplus is not unusual in an election year when there are reduced activities across the department. The surplus will enable the department to fund corresponding higher levels of activity during the Forty-first Parliament.

Overall revenue and expenses were significantly lower in 2004–05 than in 2003–04 because security funding was transferred to the Department of Parliamentary Services. This lower funding base may put additional pressure on the department's finances in the future, especially in the area of employee expenses, which now represent a significantly higher proportion of the department's total expenses.

During 2004–05 the department received additional funding for the Citizenship Visits Program. There continues to be a higher demand for this program, with most of the 2005–06 budget being committed.

Figure 5 Financial performance, 2000–01 to 2004–05

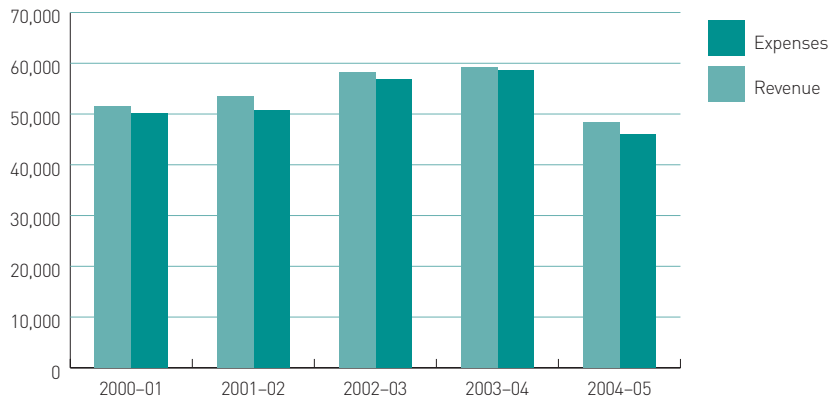


Table 1 Summary of resources for Outcome 1

<b>Outcome 1</b>	<b>Budget 2004-05 \$'000</b>	<b>Actual 2004-05 \$'000</b>	<b>Variation \$'000</b>	<b>Budget 2005-06 \$'000</b>
<b>Total administered expenses</b>	23,071	22,902	(169)	24,177
<b>Price of departmental outputs</b>				
Output groups				
1—Chamber and Main Committee	4,117	3,142	(975)	4,167
2—Community awareness	1,125	1,269	144	1,139
3—Committee services	10,732	9,352	(1,380)	10,863
4—Interparliamentary relations	1,923	1,977	54	1,946
5—Members' services	3,546	3,168	(378)	3,590
<b>Revenue from government (appropriations) for departmental outputs</b>	21,443	18,908	(2,535)	21,705
<b>Revenue from other sources</b>	250	118	(132)	297
<b>Resources received free of charge</b>	4,003	3,978	(25)	4,000
<b>Total price of departmental outputs</b>	25,696	23,004	(2,692)	26,002
<b>TOTAL FOR OUTCOME 1</b>	<b>48,767</b>	<b>45,906</b>	<b>(2,861)</b>	<b>50,179</b>
Staff	166	153	(13)	166

