



DEPARTMENT  
OF THE SENATE

# Corporate Plan

**2015–2019**

The 2015–19 Corporate Plan for the Department of the Senate is published to meet the requirements of paragraph 35(1)(b) of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* for the reporting period 2015–16.

# From the Clerk

The Senate department is the secretariat to the Australian Senate. All of our functions derive from this purpose and our work is substantially driven by the requirements of the Senate and senators.

We facilitate meetings of the Senate and its committees. We succeed when the Senate and its committees meet in accordance with their decisions, and when senators and others receive the advice and support they need to participate in those meetings.

We have for many years produced a corporate plan outlining our objectives, our role and structure, the environment in which we operate, and our approach to maintaining the capabilities of our key resource: our staff. The requirement in the PGPA Act sees this evolve into a rolling four-year plan. Over the next four years we expect to:

- support the work of the Senate and its committees for the remainder of the 44th Parliament, and plan for and support the 45th
- provide procedural, administrative and logistical advice and support for the transition to a new Senate from 1 July 2017 (or at any other time following simultaneous dissolutions of the Houses)
- use the capability provided by the parliamentary website to reach out to the Australian community in more informative ways and to support more engaging and effective communication between the community and parliamentary committees and their members
- make improvements in the services we provide to the Senate, its committees and senators and the way we provide them, working constructively with our colleagues across the parliamentary service to serve the Parliament as a whole.

Any four-year period will cover a complete electoral cycle, encompassing milestones such as the opening of a new parliament, the first meeting of a new Senate and the intake of a new 'class' of senators. Our immediate focus, however, is the current year; the second full year of the 44th Parliament.

Rosemary Laing

# Role and structure

In planning terms, the department's purpose is expressed as a single outcome – to provide advisory and administrative support services to enable the Senate and senators to fulfil their representative and legislative duties.

In doing so we support the operations of the Senate and its committees, and promote public awareness of their role and work.

We provide services in four areas:

**Senate support** – advice and secretariat support for the Senate

**Committee support** – advice and secretariat support for Senate and some joint committees

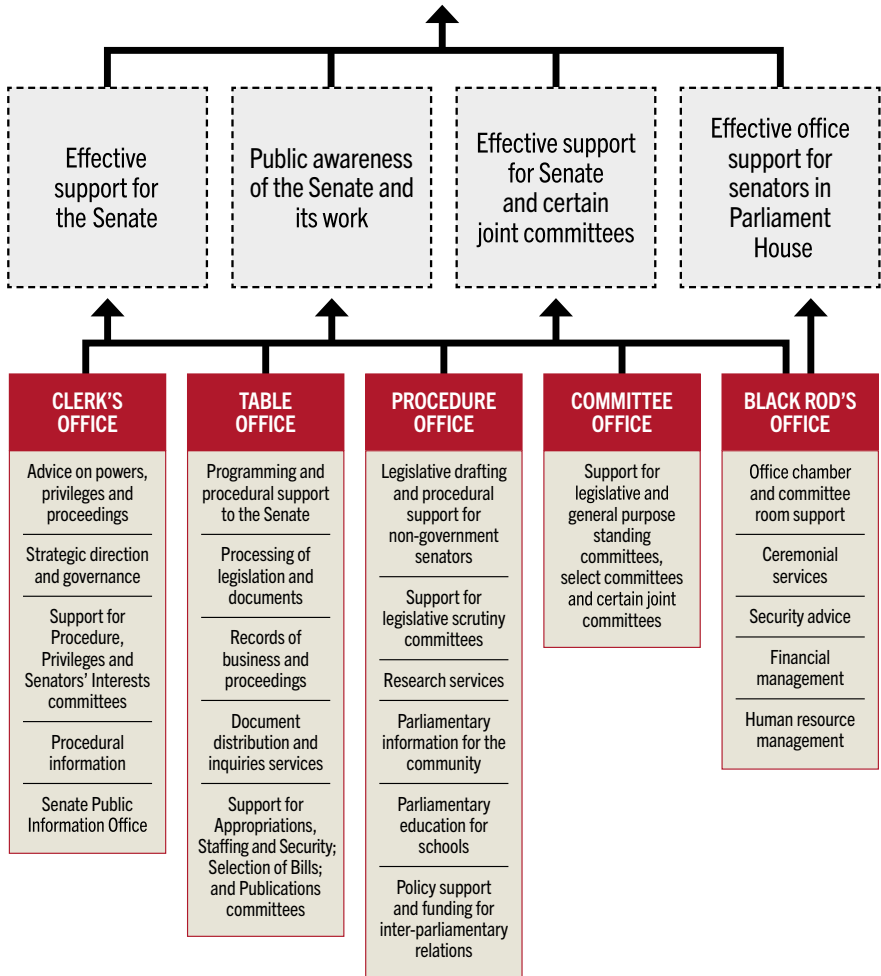
**Senators' services** – office services and other support services to senators and Senate officeholders in Parliament House

**Public education and awareness** – promotion of public knowledge and awareness of the role and work of the Senate and its committees.

Details of the resources allocated for these purposes are set out each year in our portfolio budget statements.

The department delivers its outcome through a single departmental program which comprises the services provided by its five offices. [Figure 1] illustrates the relationship between the department's organisational and program structures.

**ADVISORY AND ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT SERVICES TO  
ENABLE THE SENATE AND SENATORS TO FULFIL THEIR  
REPRESENTATIVE AND LEGISLATIVE DUTIES.**



# Objectives

In undertaking our work, we strive to deliver services with innovation and efficiency, and to manage risks and resources effectively and accountably.

The department is subject to the same financial pressures faced by other public sector agencies. The need for innovative, productive responses to reducing budgets and changing expectations of senators poses particular challenges.

Across the department, our objectives under this plan are to:

- continue to develop our expertise in the constitutional and procedural bases of the Senate and its committees
- maintain and improve services to the Senate, its committees, senators and other users of departmental resources, using efficient and up-to-date technology
- ensure the highest standard of accurate and prompt procedural advice
- publish a range of practical, procedural resources on the work of the Senate and the Parliament and maximise awareness of and access to these resources
- produce and deliver effective education and information programs, and
- ensure our workforce planning, recruitment and staff development practices deliver a highly skilled, knowledgeable and motivated workforce.

The roles and responsibilities of each office, section and secretariat – and their approaches to achieving those tasks – are set out in annual work plans.

The department also participates on a range of interdepartmental committees through which the parliamentary departments coordinate common and joint activities. Chief among these are quarterly meetings of the heads of the four parliamentary departments; the Parliamentary Administration Advisory Group; the Security Management Board; the Presiding Officers' ICT Advisory Board; and numerous boards managing joint projects and endeavours such as the implementation of the Parliament's Reconciliation Action Plan.

# Capability

Our capability to provide the highest standards of advice and support to senators, the Senate and its committees is founded upon the knowledge, skill, motivation and professionalism of our staff.

It is supported by our learning and development framework; our approach to workforce planning and recruitment; our priorities in negotiating and implementing employment frameworks; and effective governance structures.

Although difficult to measure, the goal here is institutional continuity. This lies in the recruitment of exceptionally capable staff, in numbers commensurate with workload and within budgetary constraints; the provision of ongoing staff training and support; and the production of authoritative procedural guides and reference works. Together these maintain a continuous focus on our capacity to advise and support senators.

We uphold the values set out in the *Parliamentary Service Act 1999*, which are embedded into our systems, practices, procedures and culture, and support our relationship with the Parliament and public. They are essential to the department's performance and support good administration. Our values also underpin our relationships and behaviour and establish the way work is completed.



# Environment

The department occupies a unique place in the machinery of government in supporting an independent House of Parliament, the Senate, established by Part II of Chapter 1 of the Australian Constitution.

We work together with the other parliamentary departments, but our perspectives necessarily differ. Our work is determined by the Senate and its committees. The character of our work reflects the constitutional role of the Senate as a constituent part of the Parliament, in which the legislative power of the Commonwealth is vested. Our day-to-day tasks have evolved along with the processes the Senate has developed for scrutinising governments' policies, operations and legislative proposals.



The department is responsible, not to the government of the day, but to the Senate and all senators, and maintains complete impartiality in serving equally senators from all political parties and independent senators. Our approach and values arise from the need to provide non-partisan advice and support to each senator, to each committee on which senators serve and to the Senate as an institution.



# Performance

The department's portfolio budget statements provide for program-based annual reporting.

In reporting against its outcome in any year, the department would seek to demonstrate that it:

- provided comprehensive, timely, high-quality and cost-effective support to senators, the Senate and its committees, as well as prompt and accurate procedural advice and legislative support
- published a range of materials on the role and work of the Senate and the Parliament, and delivered effective education and information programs
- managed its staff in accordance with its enterprise agreement and other obligations, and provided learning and development opportunities to maintain the department's capabilities
- delivered its services within budget and in accordance with accountability requirements.

The department has taken the approach of adjusting rather than overhauling its reporting arrangements for 2015–16. The department will report against the performance indicators contained in its portfolio budget statement tabled in the Senate in May 2015, which have evolved over a number years. Those indicators have two dimensions, comprising an assessment of the demand for the department's services and an evaluation of the department's performance in delivering those services.



A constant in our planning and reporting has been the recognition that much of the demand for our services shifts in line with levels of Senate legislative and committee activity. Demand is overwhelmingly driven by decisions of the Senate and its committees.

Each year, significant factors include:

- the political dynamics of the Senate;
- the number of days and hours, and distribution, of the sittings of the Senate;
- the legislative workload of the Senate; and
- the number of committees, and their workload.

In 2015–16 – the second full year of the 44th Parliament – we expect a period of sustained legislative activity, along with a continuation of the very high levels of committee activity which have typified this parliament to date. The composition of the Senate – including its large and varied cross bench – is expected to continue to affect the demand for advice on the operations of the Senate and committees, and for drafting procedural and legislative material.

Evaluation of the department’s performance is based upon the degree to which its services meet the requirements of the Senate and its committees, and senators, principally measured against criteria centred on:



**accuracy**

—frequently assessed by considering whether advice or documents were demonstrated to be inaccurate



**timeliness**

—particularly whether advice, documents or services were provided in time to meet the purpose for which they were sought



**satisfaction of senators**

(including committees of senators).

The particular criteria which apply to the department as a whole, and to each office, are described in the department's portfolio budget statements and in the performance summary tables in each year's annual report.

The department monitors its performance through formal and informal channels, including letters, emails, phone calls, seminar evaluation forms and outputs from management information systems. Much of the department's work involves contact with senators and their staff, presenting the most direct means of eliciting feedback about services and performance, and an avenue for addressing concerns as they are raised. Senators' comments about the department and its staff, placed on the public record during Senate and committee proceedings, constitute another valuable source of performance information.

Senate committees also provide opportunities for senators and others to monitor the department's performance. The Clerk and other officers appear at estimates hearings of the Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee during each round of Senate estimates. This provides an important accountability mechanism by which senators may test advice provided by departmental officers and evaluate the department's performance in a public forum. The Appropriations, Staffing and Security Committee also has a specific role in relation to the department's appropriations as well as matters concerning the department's structure, staffing and ICT and security arrangements. Quarterly reports on the department's financial performance are provided to the President of the Senate and the Appropriations, Staffing and Security Committee.

An ongoing internal audit exercise on performance measurement is expected to lead to revision of the department's portfolio budget statements in relation to the next reporting period, which will be reflected in next year's corporate plan. The exercise is expected to result in a schedule of significant services and outputs against which the department will report its performance.

# Assurance and accountability

Behind the department's services sits its management and accountability arrangements.

These facilitate the department's work and provide assurance to the Clerk, as its accountable authority, in fulfilling her accountability obligations to the Senate, and under the *Parliamentary Service Act 1999* and the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*.

The department's corporate governance mechanisms include two senior management committees, the Program Managers' Group and the Audit Committee (previously the Audit and Evaluation Committee), each chaired by the Deputy Clerk. These committees provide advice and support to the Clerk to ensure that statutory responsibilities for the management of the department are met.

The department's Senate Management Advisory Group provides advice and assistance to the Program Managers' Group. The department also has a Workplace Consultative Committee through which formal consultation on workplace relations occurs between the department and staff.

We report on the activities and outcomes of these entities in our annual reports.

The department's activities are also scrutinised by both an internal audit service provider and the Australian National Audit Office. In conjunction with this scrutiny, the reconstitution of the



department's Audit Committee this year under a new charter, and with increased independent membership, is expected to lead to changes in the way the department examines and reports on its performance.

These changes will, again, be reflected in the department's portfolio budget statements and corporate plan for 2016–17.



The department has established appropriate risk management tools and processes including:

- a risk management plan, policy and monitoring process;
- a fraud control plan and risk assessment process;
- Clerk's Instructions and delegations; and
- the articulation of risk management practices in departmental policies relating to matters such as recruitment, procurement, records management and travel.

Risk mitigation strategies and the assessment of existing risk controls are regularly considered by senior management and routinely reported to the Audit Committee, on whose agenda fraud control and risk management are standing items.

ICT and administrative systems underpin our ability to support the Senate, committees and senators, and to publish and share information about their work. Support for these systems is largely provided by the Department of Parliamentary Services. The possibility that a failure in ICT systems may interrupt the core work of the Senate and services to senators is recognised as a significant risk. This is mitigated through additional arrangements, including service agreements with DPS, business continuity planning and participation in cross-agency forums including user groups and management committees, and strategic oversight through the Presiding Officers' ICT Advisory Board.

Through our risk management strategies, the department aims to ensure that we have in place robust planning and decision making practices that will sustain the department into the future. The department also works within a strong ethical framework guided by the Parliamentary Service Values, Parliamentary Service Employment Principles and the Parliamentary Service Code of Conduct set out in the Parliamentary Service Act.

The Audit Committee reports, as required, to the Clerk and produces an annual report, which is provided to the President of the Senate and the Appropriations, Staffing and Security Committee as part of the department's accountability arrangements.

# Compliance with the PGPA Act

Matters to be included in a Commonwealth entity's corporate plan.

<b>Item</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Matters to be included</b>	<b>Page reference</b>
<b>1</b>	Introduction	The following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a statement that the plan is prepared for paragraph 35(1)(b) of the Act</li><li>• the reporting period for which the plan is prepared</li><li>• the reporting periods covered by the plan.</li></ul>	2–3
<b>2</b>	Purposes	The purposes of the entity.	4–6
<b>3</b>	Environment	The environment in which the entity will operate for each reporting period covered by the plan.	8
<b>4</b>	Performance	For each reporting period covered by the plan, a summary of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• how the entity will achieve the entity's purposes</li><li>• how any subsidiary of the entity will contribute to achieving the entity's purposes; and</li><li>• how the entity's performance will be measured and assessed in achieving the entity's purposes, including any measures, targets and assessments that will be used to measure and assess the entity's performance for the purposes of preparing the entity's annual performance statements for the reporting period.</li></ul>	9–11
<b>5</b>	Capability	The key strategies and plans that the entity will implement in each reporting period covered by the plan to achieve the entity's purposes.	7
<b>6</b>	Risk oversight and management	A summary of the risk oversight and management systems of the entity for the each reporting period covered by the plan (including any measures that will be implemented to ensure compliance with the finance law).	14

