



DEPARTMENT  
OF THE SENATE

# Corporate Plan

2016–2020

The 2016–20 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 2016–17.

# From the Clerk

The role and aims of the Senate department remain constant, although the context of our work is dynamic and the demand for our services can be changeable.

We provide the secretariat to the Senate – enabling its legislative and accountability activities – and to dozens of parliamentary committees, whose work encompasses the Senate’s scrutiny functions and its exercise of Parliament’s broad investigative powers. In doing so, we provide expert, impartial advice about Senate and committee operations, encompassing their powers, privileges and immunities, and reflecting well over a century of procedural precedent.

With our colleagues from across the Parliamentary Service we also provide specialised advice and logistical support to senators so they may undertake their duties. We publish the Senate’s records, and produce an array of information resources so that people may understand and engage in its work. These public information activities enhance the transparency of government and, by contributing to a better-informed electorate, promote Australia’s democracy.

Our capacity to meet the needs of senators and the Senate rests on our people. One of our key objectives is therefore to recruit well and to enhance the skills and knowledge of our staff through targeted learning and development activities, and by mentoring them in the specialised work we undertake.

We strive to ensure adherence to public governance, performance and accountability requirements, and to meet our accountability obligations to the Senate and senators. Our work must pass what might be called the ‘estimates test’ – a standard both public officials and the public would instinctively understand. Our daily interaction with senators also provides a constant performance measure.

It is senators themselves who determine our workload, by the decisions they make, individually and collectively, in undertaking their legislative, investigative and representative roles, and the legislative work of the Senate has involved supporting senators drawn from the parties of government and opposition, as well as a large and diverse cross-bench. The lion’s share of the Senate’s work is delegated to its network of committees, and facilitating those committees in gathering evidence, deliberating and reporting their findings has grown to be our largest function. In recent years we have supported record numbers of committees and inquiries, and expect that the high levels of committee activity witnessed in recent years will continue.



Rosemary Laing  
Clerk of the Senate

Following the first dissolution of the Senate in nearly 30 years and the July 2016 election, the period covered by this plan commences with the opening of a new Parliament, the first meeting of a new Senate, the intake of a new 'class' of senators, and the swearing-in of a Senate cross-bench further enlarged by the election of a record number of minor party senators.

Each year, the overarching measure of our success is that the Senate and its committees are able to meet in accordance with their decisions, with the advice and support they require. We look forward to meeting this test, and satisfying the evolving requirements of the Senate and all senators, throughout the period covered by this plan, provided we have adequate resources to discharge this obligation.

**Rosemary Laing**

# A plan for 2016–2020

This plan outlines 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.

Its publication coincides with the opening of a new Parliament, the first meeting of a new Senate and the intake of a new ‘class’ of senators. While these milestones constitute our immediate focus, this will quickly shift to our enduring role in support of legislative and committee activity as it gathers pace with the electoral cycle. Over the next four years we expect to:

- provide procedural, administrative and logistical advice and support to senators and their staff
- support the Senate and its committees throughout the 45th Parliament and publish formal and informal records of their work
- produce and deliver effective education and information programs
- enhance the engagement between the community and Parliamentary committees and their members
- work constructively with our colleagues across the Parliamentary Service to serve the Parliament as a whole.

Every 4-year period contains a full electoral cycle, so our 4-year plan also encompasses our planning for and support the opening of the next Parliament, the 46th since Federation.

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
- ensure the highest standard of accurate and prompt procedural advice
- maintain and improve services to the Senate, its committees, senators and other users of departmental resources, using efficient and up-to-date technology
- publish a greater range of information about the Senate’s role and work, faster and in a variety of accessible formats
- ensure our workforce planning, recruitment and staff development practices deliver a highly skilled, knowledgeable and motivated workforce.

# The Senate Secretariat

The Senate department is the secretariat to the Australian Senate. All of our functions derive from this purpose.

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.

## 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.

These services are provided through a single program:

**Program 1 – Advice and support** – Secretariat support for the Senate and its committees, and advice and support to enable senators and others to participate in their meetings.

**Delivery** – Program 1 comprises services and activities in the following areas:

- Advice about Senate and committee proceedings
- Secretariat support for the Senate
- Secretariat support for committees
- Administrative advice and support for senators
- Public information and parliamentary education
- Capability, governance and accountability.

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

- provided comprehensive, timely, high-quality 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, in a cost-effective manner, and in accordance with accountability requirements.

The department's performance reporting framework is summarised under the heading, *Performance*.

Each of the department's five offices contribute to this program. Their roles and responsibilities are set out in annual work plans.

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

### Clerk's Office



- Advice on powers, privileges and proceedings
- Strategic direction and governance
- Support for Procedure, Privileges and Senators' Interests committees
- Procedural information
- Senate Public Information Office

### Table Office



- Programming and procedural support to the Senate
- Processing of legislation and documents
- Records of business and proceedings
- Document distribution and inquiries services
- Support for Appropriations, Staffing and Security; Selection of Bills; and Publications committees

### Procedure Office



- Legislative drafting and procedural support for non-government senators
- Support for legislative scrutiny committees
- Research services
- Parliamentary information for the community
- Parliamentary education for schools
- Policy support and funding for inter-parliamentary relations

### Committee Office



- Support for legislative and general purpose standing committees, select committees and certain joint committees

### Black Rod's Office



- Chamber, committee room and office support
- Ceremonial services
- Security advice
- Financial management
- Human resource management

The department’s portfolio budget statements provide for program-based annual reporting. From 2016–17, the department will report its results against its program components, rather than on an office-by-office basis.

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.

We look forward to implementing this year with our colleagues across the Parliamentary Service a strategic plan for parliamentary administration, to better coordinate and prioritise the delivery of services and support for the work of the Parliament.

## 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. The achievement of this goal 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 strategies 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. These place the highest value on impartial service to the institution of Parliament. 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.

### SENATE OFFICERS





# 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. We also value our relationships with other parliaments, both nationally and internationally.

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. These challenges can be particularly pressing because there is no intrinsic connection between the demand for the department's services and the resources proposed for their delivery. The department supports efforts led by the President of the Senate to enhance the independence of the budget model for the Parliamentary Service.

Finally, we work in accordance with the broad public governance and accountability arrangements which apply across the public sector, and at the same time we strive to meet our accountability obligations to the Senate and senators.

# Performance

The department will report against the performance indicators contained in its portfolio budget statements, which are tabled in the Senate.

## Planned performance – 2016–20

### PURPOSE

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.

### OUTCOME 1

Advisory and administrative support services to enable the Senate and senators to fulfil their representative and legislative duties

### DELIVERY

The department's outcome is delivered under a single program, comprising services and activities in the following areas:

- Advice about Senate and committee proceedings
- Secretariat support for the Senate
- Secretariat support for committees
- Administrative advice and support for senators
- Public information and parliamentary education
- Capability, governance and accountability.

### ASSESSMENT

The department's activities enable the Senate and its committees to meet in accordance with their decisions – *target*: secretariat support is provided for all meetings

Senators (and others) have the advice and support they require to participate in those meetings – *targets*: advice and support are sound and timely; satisfaction of senators

Senators are satisfied with the administrative advice and support that fall within the department's responsibilities

Accountability obligations to the Senate are met

Public governance and accountability obligations are met

*Adapted from portfolio budget statements, Department of the Senate, 2016–17*

## Evaluation

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 the following criteria:



The department will also report on the extent to which it has met its key targets, including:

- its success in ensuring that the Senate and its committees are able to meet in accordance with their decisions
- its success in meeting relevant governance and accountability requirements.

## Factors influencing demand

The department will also report on the demand for its 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.

## Monitoring and assessment

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.

With the introduction of the Annual Performance Statement this year, program managers are adopting a more formal process for recording and providing feedback to the Clerk, to provide assurance for her certification of the statement.

For many years the department undertook a wide ranging survey of senators and their staff to assess their satisfaction with the advice, support and services they receive. The survey routinely reflected high levels of satisfaction with the department's core services. We have determined the need to reintroduce a survey or develop another formal mechanism to assess senators' satisfaction with the advice, support and services they receive. The opportunity to undertake such a process this year was overtaken by changes to the sitting pattern, and the dissolution of the Senate on 9 May 2016.

The process to be undertaken in 2016–17 will provide a baseline for future assessments.

# Assurance and accountability

We strive to deliver services with innovation and efficiency, and to manage risks and resources effectively and accountably. Our services are enabled by our governance and accountability arrangements.

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

## Governance forums

The department's corporate governance mechanisms include two senior management committees, the Program Managers' Group and the Audit 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. These activities underpin the activities of the department's Audit Committee, which was reconstituted under a new charter in 2015–16, with increased independent membership.

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.

## Risk management

The department has established appropriate risk management tools and processes, centred around an ongoing risk monitoring process. Risks to the department may arise from circumstances which introduce uncertainty into its capacity to meet its purpose. The main vehicle for monitoring and treating risks is a risk assessment scorecard, developed by management in conjunction with the department's internal auditors. The scorecard provides a focus for talking about risk and incorporating appropriate mitigation activities in our governance and business processes. It also forms the basis of reports to the Audit Committee and a focus for the department in developing its annual internal audit program.

The following table provides a snapshot of the four risk categories highlighted and treated by this process, as at 30 June 2016. The risk rating relates to the adequacy of treatment strategies and controls.

Risk	Risk rating
<b>1 Workforce capability</b> The risk that the department’s workforce may not have the skills, capacity or experience to provide the advice and support required by the Senate, committees and senators	Adequate/ reasonable
<b>2 Failure of IT systems</b> The risk that IT systems supporting senators, the Senate, committees and the department fail and lead to an interruption to core business	Adequate/ developing
<b>3 Inadequate resourcing</b> The risk that further budget cuts adversely affect provision of services	Adequate/ developing
<b>4 Breakdown in key controls</b> The risk that inadvertent errors or fraud not prevented or detected leads to significant legislative non-compliance (eg. PGPA Act, WHS, etc.)	Adequate/ reasonable

More broadly, the department’s management of risk includes:

- a fraud control plan and fraud 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
- a range of guidance material used by different program areas to promote accuracy and consistency of work standards.

Senior management routinely reports on fraud risk and risk mitigation strategies to the Audit Committee, on whose agenda fraud control and risk management are standing items. The department assessed its risk controls as improving during the last year in two of its four monitored categories.

ICT and administrative systems underpin our ability to support the Senate, committees and senators, and to publish and share information about their work. Because 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 shared risk. This is mitigated through service agreements with DPS, business continuity planning, participation in user groups and management committees, and strategic oversight through the Presiding Officers’ ICT Advisory Board. There were no significant interruptions to our core services during 2015–16. We have also worked closely with DPS in the past year to update parliamentary business systems and develop closer cooperation in administering them. We have therefore formally recorded an improvement to our risk assessment in the area.

A similar change was made in relation to the fourth category: the risk of breakdown in key controls. The assessment of treatment strategies in this area was increased in recognition of consistently strong results in relation to compliance and the findings of relevant internal audits.

In 2016–17 the department will update its risk management policy and surrounding framework, with a focus on formalising a statement of risk appetite and tolerance, reviewing whether the risk categories currently identified remain an appropriate focus, and better embedding risk awareness in our business processes at all levels.

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.

## Compliance with the PGPA Act

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

Item	Topic	Matters to be included	Page reference
1	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>	1–3
2	Purposes	The purposes of the entity.	3–7
3	Environment	The environment in which the entity will operate for each reporting period covered by the plan.	7
4	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>	8–10
5	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.	3–7
6	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).	11–12

