



Outcome 1— Effective provision of services

Outcome

The Department of the Senate has a single overarching outcome.

Outcome 1—Effective provision of services to support the functioning of the Senate as a House of the Commonwealth Parliament.

To achieve this, the department ensures that the Senate, Senate committees, the President of the Senate, other senators, and members of the public are provided with a broad range of advisory and support services. The department is responsible to the Senate and all senators, and maintains complete impartiality in serving equally senators from all political parties and independent senators.

The department's four main areas of service provision are reflected in the following intermediate outcomes:

- effective support for the Senate chamber
- public awareness of the Senate and its work
- effective support for Senate and certain joint committees
- effective office and information technology support services for senators in their Parliament House offices.

Overall performance

The department's performance in achieving Outcome 1 is assessed using indicators that cover all the department's activities, as well as indicators that are specific to particular output groups. The department-wide assessment indicators covering quality, timeliness, quantity and price are outlined in the table below. The report on performance for each output group begins with a similar table.

REPORT ON PERFORMANCE – OUTCOME 1

Outcome 1

Effective provision of services to support the functioning of the Senate as a House of the Commonwealth Parliament

	Performance indicators	Performance results
Quality	The degree of satisfaction of the President, Deputy President and senators, as expressed through formal and informal feedback mechanisms, with the accuracy, quality and timeliness of advice and support and the achievement of key tasks.	<p>Feedback from the President, Deputy President, committee members and senators about the quality and timeliness of advice and the achievement of key tasks indicated ongoing high levels of satisfaction.</p> <p>The department's regular senators' survey—the main formal feedback mechanism—was conducted in early 2007, and confirmed senators' high levels of satisfaction with the quality and timeliness of support.</p> <p>All advices, documents, publications and draft reports remained of a high standard and none was shown to be inaccurate.</p>
Timeliness	<p>Advice or material given on request of a senator in time to be used for the purpose for which it was required.</p> <p>Key business documents for the Senate and its committees, including minutes, agendas, messages and schedules of amendments and reports, produced in accordance with predetermined requirements and the requirements of the Senate and its committees.</p>	All business documents were produced, and advice was given, in accordance with predetermined requirements and agreed timeframes, in time to serve the purposes for which they were prepared.
Quantity	On the basis of recent experience, in 2006–07 the department would expect to support the Senate on approximately 70 sitting days and committees in accordance with their requirements.	Recent reports have noted a trend to fewer than 70 sitting days each year. In 2006–07 the department supported the Senate on 62 sitting days. The department supported estimates committees on 17 days, with four committees meeting each day, and other committees in accordance with their requirements.
Price	The total price of the department's outputs in 2006–07 is estimated to be \$39.3 million (\$25.3 million departmental).	The actual cost of the department's outputs in 2006–07 was \$34.9 million.

Analysis

Operational performance

The department provided comprehensive, timely, high-quality and cost-effective support for the operations of the Senate and its committees during 2006–07.

Many of the performance indicators for quantity are based on the expected number of sitting days. Previous reports have noted a reduction in the number of sitting days. While the long-term average for a normal, non-election year has been around 70 days, the average in recent years has been around 60, and the figure for 2006–07 was 62.

The number of days set aside for estimates hearings and the requirements of individual committees relating to their other inquiries determine much of the demand for departmental services. Procedural and advisory support services provided by the department are highly concentrated on estimates hearing days. The number of estimates days was 17, with four committees meeting each day. The department maintained its high levels of efficiency in delivering a range of services throughout the year, including on the many days when committees met.

The department assists senators in performing their roles by providing advice on a broad range of subjects, in response to and in anticipation of senators' requirements. The quantum of advice sought and given, and the level of satisfaction with that advice, remained high. Further details are provided in the report on Output Group 1.

The department's support for the conduct of Senate business met all indicators for accuracy and timeliness. Staff produced documentation for meetings of the Senate before each sitting and published minutes and other records of proceedings promptly in accordance with requirements. Staff also produced documents to expedite the Senate's consideration of legislation, and processed that legislation to exacting standards. Amendments and private senators' bills were drafted for non-government senators, and some government backbench senators, in accordance with their requirements, as were other procedural documents.

The department also provided research services, produced information documents on the work and role of the Senate and its committees and published comprehensive statistics on the business of the Senate. In providing training and outreach programs, the department presented seminars and development programs for a wide range of internal and external audiences, developed and presented parliamentary education services and hosted delegations of officers and staff of other parliaments. A particular focus in these programs is raising public awareness of the work and the role of the Senate and its committees within the framework of Australia's parliament and system of government. These matters are reported under Output Group 2 and Output Group 3.

Much of the work of the Senate is undertaken through its extensive committee system. The department continued to support Senate and certain joint committees as they conducted and reported on inquiries, with a strong focus on legislative matters, through bills inquiries, and accountability, through the usual comprehensive program of estimates hearings. The tight deadlines and uneven workload reported in 2005–06 persisted, again requiring increased flexibility in the deployment of secretariat staff. These matters are principally set out in the report on Output Group 4.

The department continued to provide office services and information technology support to senators. Staff undertook numerous accommodation moves for senators and were involved in planning and managing refurbishments across the department. The department

REPORT ON PERFORMANCE – OUTCOME 1

undertook a review of equipment and work arrangements in the printing and desktop publishing area, while the area continued to meet tight deadlines and produce quality work. The department also undertook asset management and replacement programs, while IT innovations included improvements to senators' home pages. Further details are provided in the report of Output Group 5.

Financial performance

The income statement discloses total operating revenue of \$24.4 million, total operating expenses of \$22.5 million and a net operating surplus of \$1.9 million. This compares to a surplus of \$3.4 million reported in the previous year. The department estimates that a fuller staffing complement and the commencement of various projects that are currently in the planning stages, will mean a much tighter financial outcome in 2007–08.

Table 1 **Total resources for Outcome 1, 2006–07**

	(1) Budget 2006–07 ^a \$'000	(2) Actual expenses 2006–07 \$'000	Variation (column 2 minus column 1) \$'000	Budget 2007–08 ^b \$'000
Administered expenses				
<i>Parliamentary Entitlements Act 1990</i>	1,592	343	(1,249)	1,472
<i>Parliamentary Superannuation Act 2004</i>	291	290	(1)	400
<i>Remuneration and Allowances Act 1990</i>	12,251	11,701	(550)	12,591
Total administered expenses	14,134	12,334	(1,800)	14,463
Price of departmental outputs				
Output Group 1—Clerk's Office	1,213	1,085	(128)	1,223
Output Group 2—Table Office	3,349	2,966	(383)	3,376
Output Group 3—Procedure Office	7,016	6,215	(801)	7,073
Output Group 4—Committee Office	9,362	8,294	(1,068)	9,438
Output Group 5—Black Rod's Office	4,404	3,962	(442)	4,440
Total price of outputs	25,344	22,522	(2,822)	25,550
TOTAL FOR OUTCOME 1				
(Total price of outputs and administered expenses)	39,478	34,856	(4,622)	40,013
			2006–07	2007–08
Average staffing level			150	157

^a Full-year budget, including additional estimates.

^b Budget before additional estimates.

Evaluation

Satisfaction with services

The principal medium for formal evaluation of the services provided by the department is the survey of senators' satisfaction (the *senators' survey*), conducted every two years—most recently in early 2007. The survey enables structured feedback from the Senate department's key client

group: senators themselves. The survey was substantially revised in 2005 to align with the department's outcomes, and was conducted in 2005 and 2007 by Eureka Strategic Research. The report of the 2007 survey was tabled in the Senate on 13 June 2007.

The survey consistently reports high levels of satisfaction with the advice and services provided by the department, and very few negative comments are received. This year's survey very much followed that pattern, with the headline result stating '100 per cent of senators surveyed indicated that they were satisfied overall with the services provided to them by the Department'. In the 2005 survey this figure was already high at 94 per cent. The survey results are discussed in more detail in the reports on the performance of individual output groups.

Another important mechanism for evaluation is the appearance of senior departmental officers at estimates hearings, which are scheduled three times a year. These hearings are used by senators both to scrutinise, and to provide comment on, the activities of the department. Further details are provided under 'Scrutiny of activities', below.

There are also significant formal and informal feedback opportunities involving the President, Deputy President and other senators in their daily dealings with the Clerk and Deputy Clerk, program managers, committee secretariats and departmental staff at all levels. This feedback also continued to indicate high levels of satisfaction.

The performance of individual staff members was evaluated through the performance communication scheme, in accordance with the certified agreement. All departmental staff were assessed overall as 'effective or better'.

Scrutiny of activities

The department's annual appropriations and proposals for changes to the structure and responsibilities of the parliamentary departments continued to be scrutinised by the Senate Standing Committee on Appropriations and Staffing.

Departmental officers were questioned on the department's activities by members of the Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee at the supplementary budget estimates hearings on 30 October 2006, the additional budget estimates hearings on 12 February 2007 and the 2006–07 budget estimates hearings on 21 May 2007. Major issues considered included the cessation of the Citizenship Visits Program and the administration by the Department of Education, Science and Training of the replacement program; outcome budgeting and the ordinary annual services of the government, and the adequacy of portfolio budget statements in distinguishing between ordinary annual services and newly established programs; the workload of Senate committees and trends in the referral of bills for inquiry; advice on parliamentary privilege given by the Clerk of the Senate to the Tasmanian Legislative Council; and the transfer of senators' printing entitlements to the Department of Finance and Administration.

The department's activities also continued to be scrutinised by our internal auditors and the Australian National Audit Office. Much of the department's Audit and Evaluation Committee's work revolved around reviewing some of the department's major control mechanisms. For further details, see 'Audit and Evaluation Committee' and 'External scrutiny' in the 'Management and accountability' section.