

Table Office

Output Group 2

Provision of programming and procedural support to the Senate.

Processing of legislation.

Processing of tabled documents and maintenance of safe custody of Senate records, and provision of a document distribution and inquiries service.

Preparation of records of Senate business and proceedings.

Dissemination of information on the work of the Senate.

Provision of secretariat support to the Appropriations and Staffing, Selection of Bills and Publications committees.

	Performance indicators	Performance results
Quality	<p>The degree of satisfaction of the President, Deputy President, committee members and senators, as expressed through formal and informal feedback mechanisms, with the quality and timeliness of advice and support and the achievement of key tasks.</p> <p>Key business documents are accurate and of a high standard.</p>	<p>The 2009 senators' survey reported high levels of satisfaction with the advice and support provided, consistent with the findings of earlier surveys.</p> <p>Informal feedback and direct contact between senators and staff also indicated continued high levels of satisfaction.</p> <p>Business documents remained of a high standard, with none shown to contain significant inaccuracies.</p>
Timeliness	<p><i>Order of Business</i> finalised and distributed prior to sittings and advice prepared proactively or as required.</p> <p><i>Journals of the Senate</i> for the previous day and <i>Notice Paper</i> for the current day available prior to sittings; statistical and other documentation available as required or in accordance with predetermined requirements.</p> <p>Running sheets available as soon as practicable; proposed amendments distributed in accordance with requirements; schedules of amendments and prints of bills available in accordance with predetermined requirements.</p> <p>All inquiries answered and documents stored or distributed on a timely basis.</p> <p>Meetings held, documentation provided and reports produced within timeframes set by the Senate or the committee, as relevant.</p>	<p>The <i>Order of Business</i> was distributed in advance of all sittings. Advice was given proactively or as required.</p> <p>The <i>Journals of the Senate</i> and the <i>Notice Paper</i> were available as required.</p> <p>The <i>Dynamic Red</i> was updated in a timely manner during each sitting day and the <i>Senate Daily Summary</i> was published promptly after each sitting day. Requests for statistics were responded to promptly.</p> <p>Statistical summaries were produced after each sitting week and comprehensive statistics were published on the website after each sitting fortnight.</p> <p><i>Business of the Senate</i> and <i>Questions on Notice Summary</i> were tabled twice, in accordance with agreed timeframes.</p> <p>Running sheets were available for use in the chamber as required.</p> <p>Government amendments were distributed as required.</p> <p>Schedules of amendments, prints of Senate bills and legislative support documents were available as required.</p> <p>All documents were distributed in a timely manner. All inquiries were responded to and 92% were completed within five minutes.</p> <p>Committee meetings were held, and documents and reports were provided, within agreed timeframes.</p> <p>The senators' survey confirmed high levels of satisfaction with the provision of these services.</p>
Quantity	<p>As required to facilitate proceedings; quantities meet predetermined distribution requirements or are accessible electronically or both.</p>	<p>Feedback indicated continued high levels of satisfaction among senators with the provision of documents by the Table Office.</p> <p>All distribution and publishing targets were met.</p>

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Analysis

The Table Office comprises three sections, as outlined in Figure 5. It is led by the Clerk Assistant (Table), who performs duties as a clerk at the table in the Senate chamber. The two directors in the Table Office also perform chamber duties.

Figure 5 **Elements and responsibilities of the Table Office**

<p>Executive and Programming <i>Maureen Weeks, Clerk Assistant</i> Procedural advice Business programming Production of the Senate <i>Order of Business</i> Secretariat services to the Selection of Bills Committee</p>	
<p>Legislation and Documents <i>Sue Blunden, Director</i></p>	<p>Journals and Notice Paper <i>Neil Bessell, Director</i></p>
<p>Processing of legislation and preparation of supporting documentation Processing and custody of Senate records Inquiries and document distribution services Secretariat services to the Publications and Joint Publications committees</p>	<p>Production of the <i>Notice Paper</i>, the <i>Journals of the Senate</i> the <i>Dynamic Red</i> and the <i>Senate Daily Summary</i> Collection and dissemination of statistical information Processing of questions on notice and petitions Secretariat services to the Appropriations and Staffing Committee</p>

During 2008–09, the office provided effective support for the Senate chamber by:

- providing procedural and programming advice and documentation to facilitate and expedite chamber proceedings
- preparing and publishing formal and informal records of Senate business, including the *Notice Paper*, *Journals of the Senate*, the *Order of Business* (daily program) and the associated *Dynamic Red*, the *Senate Daily Summary* and a range of statistical records
- processing legislation and producing documents to assist in the legislative process
- processing and archiving tabled papers and other Senate records
- responding to inquiries and undertaking document distribution services.

The Table Office also supported Senate committees by providing secretariats to three domestic committees and by liaising with Senate and joint committee chairs and secretariats to facilitate interaction between the chamber and those committees.

Staff in the Table Office participated in the orientation program for the 14 new senators whose terms commenced on 1 July 2008. The training preceded the swearing in of the senators at the first meeting of the Senate on 26 August 2008. The Table Office provided the procedural support for the swearing in.

Table Office staff continued to make a significant contribution to the seminar program administered by the Procedure Office and to the training and development of departmental staff. In addition to contributing to departmental training programs, the office conducted ‘field trips’ to give colleagues an insight into the operation of the Table Office. This year the

program was open to staff of other parliamentary departments; those who attended provided positive feedback.

The cost of the Table Office in providing procedural and administrative support for the conduct of Senate business was \$2.8 million (\$2.4 million in 2007–08).

Workload and staffing

Requirements for advice, statistics and documentary support for the Senate are determined largely by the sittings of the Senate. Specific factors include:

- the number of days and hours of the sittings of the Senate
- the nature of the proceedings undertaken in the Senate, and the scheduling of those proceedings
- the legislative workload, including the number of bills passed, the number and complexity of amendments to bills and the complexity of negotiations between the houses
- the number of documents tabled
- the number and complexity of questions and notices from senators
- the number and complexity of inquiries and requests for information from clients.

The Table Office supported the Senate on 56 sitting days in 2008–09, a significant increase compared with 36 in 2007–08 (which included an election period). Although the number of sitting days increased, the distribution of sitting days was skewed towards the first half of the reporting period—the Senate sat for 31 days from August to December 2008 and 25 days from February to June 2009. This sitting pattern together with the commencement of the new Senate (in which no party holds a majority) in 2008 made for a particularly busy first half of the financial year.

In the same period, the Director, Journals and Notice Paper took six months leave, providing an opportunity for the Journals Officer (after a selection process) to gain experience working at the director level. The subsequent vacancy also provided an opportunity to introduce an officer from the Committee Office to the procedure and practice of the Table Office.

In the absence of the Director, Journals and Notice Paper, the duties of the Secretary to the Australian Delegation to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), funded by the Procedure Office, were performed in the Committee Office. On resuming his position in early March 2009, the Director also resumed these duties.

As foreshadowed in the 2007–08 annual report, staff were occupied with the development of two key information systems:

- ParlInfo Search provides internet access to a range of parliamentary documents. While the Parliamentary Library administers ParlInfo Search, the Table Office provides access to certain parliamentary publications through the system.
- The Bills System provides online publishing for bills and associated documents, including the ability to track the progress of bills through the legislative process.

In the second half of 2008, when the Senate was not sitting, most of the office's staff participated in testing of the new systems.

Several Table Office staff members conducted research, wrote entries and checked references to assist the Deputy Clerk with the production of an annotated edition of the *Standing Orders and Other Orders of the Senate*, due to be published in August 2009.

The full-time equivalent staffing level for the office was 17 (the same number as in 2007–08).

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Programming and procedural support

The Table Office provided programming and procedural support for the operation of the chamber, and met the needs of senators and others for accurate and timely documentation and assistance by:

- providing procedural advice to the Leader of the Government in the Senate, the Manager of Government Business in the Senate and other ministers, government senators, party whips and committee chairs
- preparing 1,288 procedural scripts for use in the chamber, an average of 23 each sitting day (19 in 2007–08)
- preparing draft and final editions of the *Order of Business* (daily program) to assist whips and other senators before and during the sittings of the Senate
- providing a broadcasting captioning service for Senate proceedings
- liaising with committee chairs and secretariats to facilitate interaction between the Senate and its committees
- maintaining the roster of temporary chairs of committees
- updating and reprinting the *Standing Orders*.

Staff also arranged for the presentation of documents by ministers, the Auditor-General and committees when the Senate was not sitting. This procedure has become an increasingly useful avenue for the timely publication of material of interest to the parliament. In 2008–09, 404 documents were presented this way—a 29 per cent increase on the 2007–08 total of 313.

The increase is significant, given that 2007–08 included a lengthy caretaker period when parliament was not sitting. The 2008–09 figure reflects a greater use of the process by departments and agencies tabling their annual reports out of sitting so that they would be available for the supplementary budget estimates hearings in October 2008, and by joint committees tabling reports.

The 2009 senators' survey revealed that 33 per cent of respondents were highly satisfied, and 61 per cent were satisfied, with programming services, including provision of procedural scripts, broadcast captions and the *Order of Business* (the 'Red'), while 6 per cent were neutral.

Legislation

The office responded to the legislative requirements of the Senate and the needs of senators and others for related information by:

- processing all bills considered in the chamber
- preparing legislative documents, including procedural scripts, running sheets, schedules of amendments, third reading prints and messages
- recording the progress of legislation
- preparing assent and Act prints, and processing assent messages and proclamations.

The charts in figures 6 to 8 indicate the level of legislative activity in recent years and the effect this has had on the work of the office. With the number of sitting days returning to close to the historical average, an average number of bills was passed by both houses in 2008–09.

Figure 6 **Senate legislative activity, 2004–05 to 2008–09**

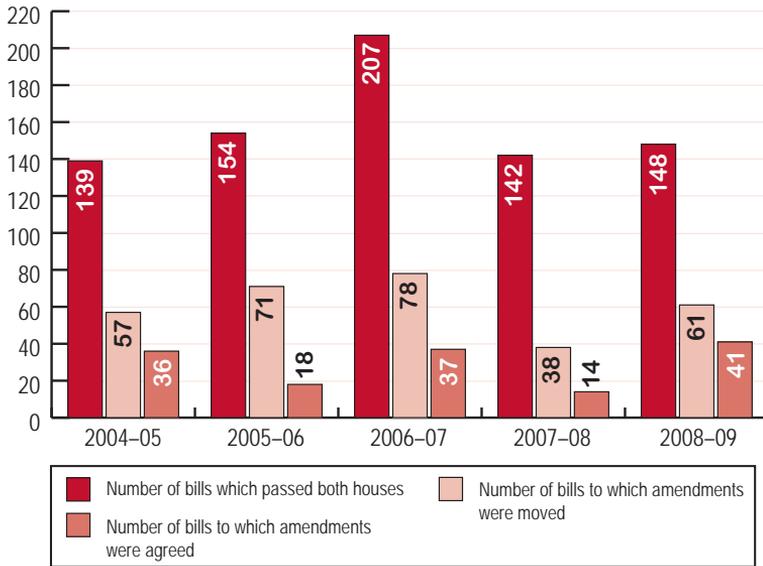
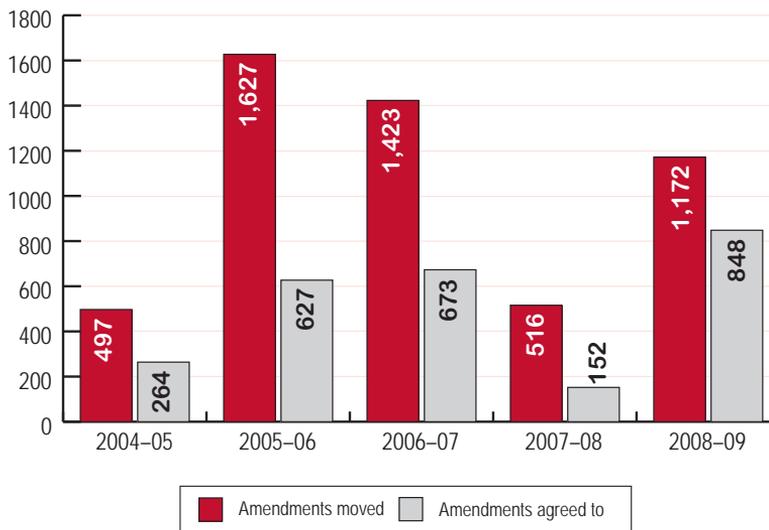


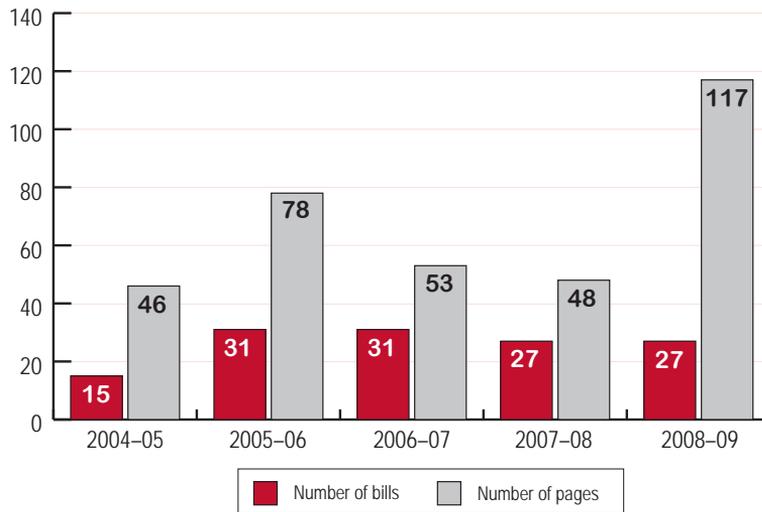
Figure 7 **Amendments moved and agreed to by the Senate, 2004–05 to 2008–09**



Note: The figures for amendments also include requests for amendments and proposals to omit clauses or items from bills.

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Figure 8 Running sheets, 2004–05 to 2008–09



The level of activity relating to the number of amendments moved returned to average during the year. The proportion of amendments agreed to in 2008–09 (72 per cent) was a significant increase over previous years (47 per cent in 2006–07 and 39 per cent in 2005–06), not including election years. Almost 27 per cent of the amendments agreed to were made to the Fair Work Bill 2008 (228 amendments), the majority of which were moved by the government. These increases may reflect the new composition of the Senate from 1 July 2008, and the government’s willingness to negotiate with minor parties to progress its legislation program.

The office is responsible for preparing the formal ‘messages’ by which the two houses communicate on legislative and other activity. In 2008–09, 181 messages were prepared (163 in 2007–08). Of those messages, 154 related to the passage of bills, and 27 were administrative in nature (for example, relating to joint committee membership).

Running sheets facilitate the orderly and efficient consideration of all circulated amendments in committee of the whole. They are prepared when more than one set of amendments from more than one political party are circulated for consideration. Running sheets are revised when amendments are circulated after a running sheet is published. They are also revised to include outcomes and minor revisions when the consideration of a bill is complex and carries over a number of sitting days.

The number of bills for which running sheets were prepared in 2008–09 remained consistent with the historical average, but there was a significant increase in the number of pages of running sheets, as reflected in Figure 8. A number of revised running sheets were prepared to facilitate the chamber’s consideration of the Fair Work Bill 2008, and this work accounted for almost half (46 per cent) of the number of pages of running sheets for the period. Excluding the Fair Work Bill 2008, the average number of pages of running sheets at 63 pages is still above the historic average (an average of 45 pages for the period from 2004 to 2008). Running sheets are now provided electronically through the *Dynamic Red*.

The Bills System, in addition to providing online publishing for bills and associated documents, enables basic procedural information about each bill to be loaded to the relevant bill homepage. This information outlines the progress of a bill in the legislative process.

The Bills System has increased both the accessibility and profile of this information. Users accessing the homepages have indicated that they rely strongly on the accuracy and currency of the procedural detail, and this reliance placed administrative pressure on the legislation subsection. The increase in workload needed to meet users' expectations has required the subsection to review its work practices to ensure that its core work is not unduly affected.

The Table Office continued to provide detailed information about the progress of legislation in the Senate *Bills List* and *Daily Bills Update*. The *Bills List* was updated and published online after each sitting day to reflect legislative activity in both chambers. The requirement to keep these printed documents current while inputting procedural data into the Bills System resulted in a duplication of information and a considerable increase in workload. A review to consider whether it is necessary to continue to publish the *Daily Bills Update* will be undertaken in the next caretaker period.

The 2009 senators' survey indicated that 45 per cent of participants were highly satisfied, and 52 per cent were satisfied, with support for the legislation process, including the provision of running sheets, while 3 per cent were neutral. The survey highlights that, in comparison to the 2007 survey, there was a 'statistically significant increase (from 77 per cent to 97 per cent) in the proportion of participants who declared themselves either 'satisfied' or 'highly satisfied' with 'support for the legislative process, including the provision of running sheets'.

Formal and informal records of business

The office met the needs of senators and others for accurate and timely documentation and information by:

- producing and publishing the *Notice Paper* and the *Journals of the Senate*
- maintaining the *Dynamic Red* and publishing the *Senate Daily Summary*
- compiling and publishing statistical information relating to the Senate
- responding to requests for statistics on the work of the Senate
- maintaining information systems to help produce Table Office documents.

Formal records

To meet the requirements of senators and others, the Table Office publishes the Senate's principal parliamentary documents online—both on the department's website and through ParInfo Search—and in hard copy.

The *Notice Paper*, the formal agenda of Senate proceedings, provides essential information including the current and future business of the Senate and committee matters. Two versions of the *Notice Paper* were published before each sitting day: an abridged printed version, averaging 51 pages (43 pages in 2007–08), and a 'full' online version. The *Notice Paper* expands during the course of each parliament as unfinished business accumulates and the number of unanswered questions on notice increases.

The *Journals of the Senate* are the 'minutes of the meeting' and the official record of decisions made by the Senate. During 2008–09, proof *Journals* were published online shortly after the end of each sitting day, and printed versions were distributed the next morning. Staff produced and published 56 proof *Journals*, each averaging 27 pages (26 pages in 2007–08).

Informal records and statistics

The *Dynamic Red* was made available on the department's website. Conceived as an online version of the Senate's *Order of Business* (the 'Red'), the *Dynamic Red* provides real-time

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information on the progress and outcomes of business on each sitting day. This assists senators, parliamentary staff, government departments and agencies, and the general public to monitor Senate proceedings. The publication is an invaluable tool to monitor the proceedings of the chamber and attracts a wide audience.

In 2008–09, the *Dynamic Red* was enhanced to include useful links to chamber-related documents such as notices of motion, legislation running sheets and the homepage for each bill under consideration.

Information transferred from the *Dynamic Red* assists with the timely production of the *Senate Daily Summary*, a more considered summary of the previous day's proceedings in the Senate. The summary contains links to primary sources such as the *Journals*, Hansard, committee reports and committee membership. It is an indispensable tool for those who work in, or observe, the Senate. The *Senate Daily Summary* is also produced during estimates hearings, providing links to committee programs and other relevant information.

Statistical summaries of business conducted by the Senate were produced after each sitting week. A more comprehensive set of statistics was also maintained online, providing timely access to the most commonly sought statistics on the work of the Senate. Staff also produced two volumes of *Business of the Senate*, which has recorded statistics on the work of the Senate for more than 30 years.

The office promptly met many requests for statistics from senators, parliamentary staff and other clients. In 2008–09, the Table Office produced statistics on matters such as:

- number of bills passed by the Senate
- allocation of time for government business
- private senators' bills dealt with on Thursdays, as provided for under Standing Order 57, from 1970 to the present
- number of committees given leave to sit during sittings of the Senate
- number of bills exempted from the provisions of Standing Order 111 (the 'cut-off') allowing them to be considered in the current period of sittings
- questions on notice and response times.

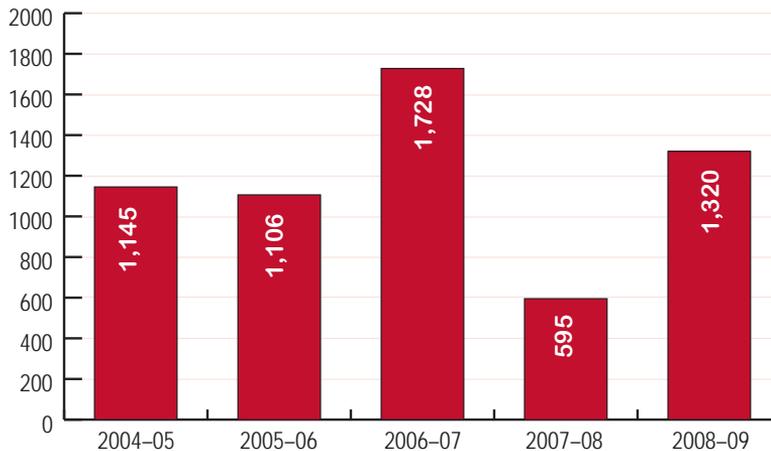
The 2009 senators' survey records that 69 per cent of survey participants were highly satisfied with the preparation of records of the Senate, and 23 per cent were satisfied.

Questions on notice, notices of motion and petitions

Senators continued to use questions on notice—written questions to ministers on the administration of public policy—as an important accountability mechanism.

During 2008–09, staff processed 1,320 questions on notice. The *Questions on Notice Summary* records statistics and other information relating to these questions, including response times. Figure 9 shows the trend in the numbers of questions on notice in recent years.

Figure 9 Questions on notice, 2004–05 to 2008–09



Notices of motion are a means by which senators indicate their intention to move particular motions on specified days. They are integral to the Senate's business. Notices are drafted by senators, the Table Office and the Procedure Office. In 2008–09, Table Office staff drafted or edited and processed 500 notices of motion that appeared in the *Notice Paper* and *Journals of the Senate*.

During 2008–09, senators presented 45 petitions (59 in 2007–08), collectively representing 82,198 signatories. The office continued to provide advice to senators and members of the public on whether proposed petitions, including electronic petitions, conformed to the requirements of the Senate Standing Orders. All conforming petitions were processed promptly and presented in the Senate.

A high level of satisfaction with processing questions on notice, notices of motion and petitions was also recorded in the 2009 senators' survey, with 49 per cent indicating that they were highly satisfied and 43 per cent that they were satisfied.

Documents and inquiries

The Table Office processed the 7,675 documents presented to the Senate during 2008–09, and recorded them in the *Journals of the Senate* and the *Index of Papers Presented to the Parliament*. Copies of all documents were made available through the inquiries and distribution services.

All the original documents presented to the Senate since its first meeting in 1901 are stored in Parliament House under archival conditions. The area available for storing these documents is limited and under increasing pressure as the collection grows. A major rationalisation project reduced the holdings of duplicate copies of certain tabled documents. The rationalisation enabled an additional basement area to be used exclusively for the original documents. Also, there is now the capacity to store original documents for approximately another five years.

The work to establish the former stationery store as a supplementary storage area was completed. The area now contains the bound master sets of *Journals of the Senate*, Senate *Notice Papers*, bound volumes of Hansard and other miscellaneous material.

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In previous reports it was noted that there was an increase in the number of Clerk's documents presented to the Senate due to the requirements of *Legislative Instruments Act 2003*. This trend did not continue in 2008–09. Although the number of disallowable instruments as a percentage of Clerk's documents increased (57 per cent of Clerk's documents in 2008–09 compared to 42 per cent in 2007–08), the number of Clerk's documents as a percentage of the total number of documents presented decreased. In 2008–09, 78 per cent of documents presented to the Senate were Clerk's documents, representing a decrease of 6 per cent over the previous year. As would be expected, the number of other types of documents tabled increased. The number of committee documents tabled increased by 25 per cent and miscellaneous documents tabled (for example, returns to order) increased by almost 150 per cent over the previous reporting period.

Statistics collected by staff answering inquiries indicate that 7,615 inquiries were responded to during 2008–09. Most of the inquiries (92 per cent) were responded to within five minutes. The remainder of the inquiries were answered by staff in timeframes agreed on with clients. Most inquiries came from senators and their staff or departmental staff.

The ability of office staff to respond effectively to inquiries is supported by the use of the Document Movement System or 'telelift', an automated, rail-based system which conveys containers throughout Parliament House. The system is maintained by the Department of Parliamentary Services. The Table Office uses the telelift to distribute documents in response to inquiries from clients, and to carry out routine distributions of documents. The ability of the telelift to move varying quantities of documents simultaneously and immediately is essential to the high-quality, reliable distribution and inquiries services provided to senators and their staff and departmental staff.

The 2009 senators' survey indicated that 39 per cent of participants were highly satisfied with the inquiries service and document distribution (a 9 per cent increase from the 2007 survey), 55 per cent were satisfied and 6 per cent were neutral.

Digital imaging project

The office is using digital imaging to copy, preserve and ensure access to the collection of all documents presented to the Senate. This major project consists of two streams of work: making digital images of the documents presented to the Senate since 2002 and creating digital images from the microfilm record of the documents from the Senate's first century. The digital images are stored in an electronic 'web repository' available through the department's website.

During 2008–09, the digital imaging team performed quality assurance processes on 17,000 images prior to loading the images to the web repository. This considerable effort resulted in a significant increase in the number of documents available online. The digital imaging team also scanned 6,374 documents and undertook associated preservation and indexing work.

The conversion of microfilm to digital images, which began last year, is now complete. The images are being processed for loading to the web repository. Documents (containing approximately four million images) presented to the Senate during 25 per cent of the parliaments between 1901 and 2001 and most of the Forty-first Parliament (2004 to 2006) are now available online.

Secretariat support for various committees

During the year, the Table Office provided secretariat support for all meetings and reports of the Selection of Bills Committee, the Standing Committee on Appropriations and Staffing, the Senate Publications Committee and the Joint Committee on Publications.

Over the budget estimates period, the Selection of Bills Committee met twice, having been given authority by the Senate on 14 May 2009 to report to the President, making recommendations for the referral of certain budget-related bills to committees for inquiry and report. The aim of the motion of 14 May was to ensure that the legislation committees had the opportunity to consider the bills prior to the June sittings, when the legislation would be required to be passed. The motion provided for the automatic referral of the bills to committees on introduction to the House of Representatives, with the Selection of Bills Committee acting as an arbiter. The committee met and made changes to the bills references as determined by the resolution. In the main, these changes had the effect of withdrawing references. The committee did not agree to all proposals considered and the questions on which no agreement could be reached were resolved by the Senate when it sat again.

All meetings were held, and documents provided, within agreed timeframes.

Factors, events and trends influencing performance

Factors influencing workload and staffing levels are set out in the ‘Analysis’ section.

As in other areas of the department, the effectiveness of the Table Office in supporting the work of senators, the Senate and its committees is heavily dependent on the expertise of staff. During 2008–09, a number of staff in the office undertook challenging new roles. Their success in doing so, particularly given the composition of the new Senate and the pace of the sittings, is testimony to their abilities, their training and the support they receive from their colleagues.

All staff in the office also met the challenge presented by major changes in the information technology underpinning their work. The technical hiccups that accompany such rollouts were met with a positive approach and there were no resultant interruptions to the work of the office. The usual high standard in both work quality and productivity was maintained.

Evaluation

The principal medium for evaluating the Table Office’s services is the biennial survey of senators’ satisfaction with the services provided by the department. The most recent survey was conducted in the first half of 2009.

The 2009 senators’ survey again revealed high levels of satisfaction among senators with the advice, documents and services of the office, comparable with levels reached in earlier surveys, and did not suggest any areas of major concern.

Particularly high levels of satisfaction—97 per cent—were recorded in relation to the support for the legislative process. The result is particularly significant as this was the one area of the office that received a satisfaction level below 90 per cent in the 2007 senators’ survey. Satisfaction with both programming and inquiries services and document distribution continued to be high (94 per cent). The other activities of the office, including the preparation of records of business and the processing of procedural material such as notices and questions were also highly rated, with a satisfaction level of 92 per cent. No dissatisfaction was recorded.

The office also monitors its own performance; for example, by keeping track of response times for inquiries. This monitoring provides useful benchmarks for the provision of its services.

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Finally, much of the office's work involves direct contact with senators, their staff and other clients. This presents an ongoing opportunity for feedback about the office's services. Such informal feedback continues to be very positive.

Performance outlook

In 2009–10, the Table Office will continue its core work relating to the sittings of the Senate. In particular, staff will provide advice and produce documents to facilitate chamber proceedings and the legislative process; prepare formal and informal records of Senate business; process and archive tabled documents; provide inquiries and document distribution services; and support the work of committees.

In the context of the Senate's sitting demands, the first half of the 2009–10 financial year also promises to be one of intense activity, with the consideration of major government legislation already programmed.

The office is examining the interactions between workflows, practices and information technology systems, with a view to establishing a plan for upgrading those systems.

Staff, together with colleagues in the Department of the House of Representatives, will continue to contribute to the Bills System project. A number of technical issues were identified in the warranty period and some still require rectification.

The office is also reviewing options for streamlining further work on the digital imaging project and making the documents available more accessible to those interested in parliament. Staff are examining possible changes to work practices to more closely integrate the preparation of documents for digitising into the routine workflow of tabled documents. It is intended that any changes will result in a more logical sequence of processes underpinning the tabled documents workflow, to reduce tabled document handling across a number of office processes. This will provide both digital imaging project and whole-of-office efficiencies.