

Committee Office

Output	
Provision of secretariat support to the Senate legislative and general purpose standing committees, select committees and certain joint committees.	
Performance information	Performance results
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.	Formal and informal feedback mechanisms show that senators consider the support provided by the Committee Office to be effective.
Advice, documentation, publications and draft reports are timely, accurate and of a high standard. Tabling deadlines met in all but extraordinary circumstances.	Accurate advice, documentation, publications and draft reports were provided to committees in accordance with committee requirements. Reports were drafted and presented to the Senate in accordance with the timeframes set by committees and deadlines set by the Senate.
Documentation is sufficient for committee purposes and material available to the public is available promptly, online or in hard copy.	Committee staff provided committee members, witnesses and others with documents in accordance with secretariat procedures, orders of the Senate and committee requirements. On tabling, reports were promptly published.

Overview

Committee Office secretariats support legislative and general purpose standing committees, select committees and certain joint committees. This role includes providing procedural advice and administrative support to committees by arranging meetings and public hearings, analysing evidence from submissions, drafting reports, and assisting witnesses and the general public.

The Committee Office is led by the Clerk Assistant (Committees). The cost of the Committee Office in 2012–13 was \$8.1 million (\$8.8 million in 2011–12), with staff salaries comprising approximately 90 per cent of the budget. The remaining costs were administrative (for example, advertising inquiries, venue hire, transport and accommodation).

The Committee Office overwhelmingly met its required targets during the

year, and often exceeded expectations under pressure. Clear and accurate procedural advice to chairs and committee members, thorough and efficient inquiry management and the meeting of strict reporting deadlines were a feature.

As has been reported previously, comments made in the chamber when a committee report is tabled or debated are a primary source of information to use when evaluating performance. Senators were particularly positive in their comments during the year. Informal feedback from senators and witnesses indicated high levels of satisfaction with their dealings with secretariat staff. The department also continues to furnish the Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee with a specific report on matters concerning the work of Senate committees and the Committee Office prior to its appearance at each round of estimates. This report is then published by that committee on the Senate website.

The full-time equivalent staffing level in the Committee Office in 2012–13 was 57 (59 in 2011–12). While many staff possess specific skills and knowledge, committees are mostly supported by generalists, making for a versatile and flexible workforce. In 2012–13, the Committee Office managed as many as 60 inquiries at once and prepared over 200 reports.

Management and leadership

Committee secretaries met regularly throughout the year to discuss departmental and office management issues and procedural matters encountered by secretariats.

Under standing order 25(10) a Chairs' Committee, comprising the chairs of standing committees and Senate select committees, may be convened by the Deputy President to discuss any matter relating to their operations. The Clerk Assistant (Committees) is the secretary. During 2012–13, this committee met three times and considered issues such as the role of the newly established Parliamentary Budget Office and the output, staffing and workloads of Senate committees.

Figure 9 Elements and responsibilities of the Committee Office

Executive		
Chris Reid, Clerk Assistant		
Jackie Morris, Senior Clerk of Committees		
Procedural advice and training		
Planning and coordination		
Secretariat staffing and resources		
Statistics and records		
Legislative and general purpose standing committee secretariats	Joint statutory committee secretariats	Select committee secretariats
<i>Community Affairs</i> Ian Holland <i>Economics</i> Tim Bryant <i>Education, Employment and Workplace Relations</i> Tim Watling <i>Environment and Communications</i> Sophie Dunstone (A/g) <i>Finance and Public Administration</i> Christine McDonald <i>Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade</i> Kathleen Dermody <i>Legal and Constitutional Affairs</i> Julie Dennett <i>Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport</i> Stephen Palethorpe	<i>Corporations and Financial Services</i> Richard Grant (A/g) <i>Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity</i> Fiona Bowring-Greer <i>Law Enforcement</i> Fiona Bowring-Greer	Ongoing <i>Senate select</i> –Cyber Safety Christine McDonald <i>Joint select</i> –Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Tim Bryant –DisabilityCare Australia Lyn Beverley Ceased during 2012–13 <i>Senate select</i> –Australia’s Food Processing Sector ¹ Richard Grant (A/g) –Electricity Prices ² Sophie Dunstone (A/g) <i>Joint select</i> –Gambling Reform ³ Lyn Beverley

- 1 Ceased on 16 August 2012
- 2 Ceased on 1 November 2012
- 3 Ceased on 30 June 2013

Activity levels

The overall workload for 2012–13 was high, with the greater volume of inquiries, many intense and complex, being managed in the second half of the reporting period. For example, Senate committees conducted inquiries into legislation to establish the National Disability Insurance Scheme, the effects of the global financial crisis on the Australian banking sector, the Foreign Investment Review Board national interest test, and the government's response to the DLA Piper review of allegations of sexual and other abuse in Defence. Joint committees examined and reported on issues such as the constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, family businesses in Australia, and the prevention and treatment of problem gambling.

As an indication of the level of committee activity, tables 3 and 4 compare the number of reports produced in recent years.

Table 3 Reports presented by legislative and general purpose standing committees, 2008–09 to 2012–13

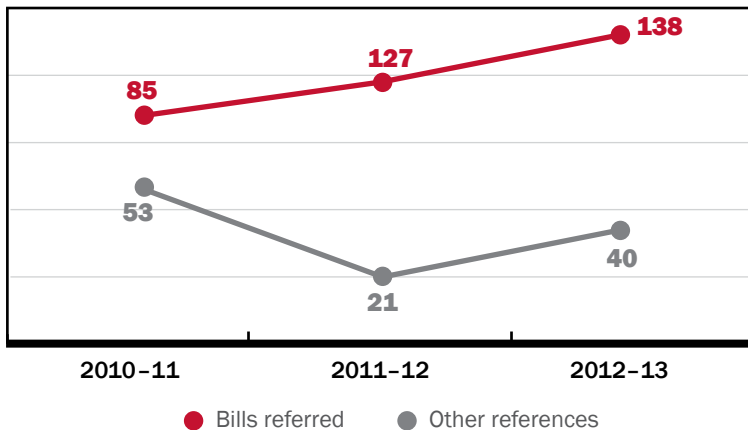
Reports presented	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12	2012–13
Bills	86	83	82	73	94
Interim reports (bills)	15	9	10	2	6
References	29	33	41	26	32
Interim reports (references)	13	18	29	14	16
Reports on annual reports	16	15	15	16	16
Estimates	16	16	15	17	16
Total	175	174	192	148	180

Table 4 Reports presented by select and joint committees, 2008–09 to 2012–13

Reports presented	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12	2012–13
Senate Select	11	8	9	2	2
Joint Select	0	0	2	5	6
Joint Statutory	7	10	6	19	23
Total	18	18	17	26	31

Bill inquiries continue to be a primary source of work. Of the 281 bills introduced into the Parliament in 2012–13, 138 (or 49 per cent) were referred as single bills or packages of bills to committees supported by the Senate department. Increased numbers of references to joint committees administered by the department over the past two years have seen necessary adjustments made to staffing in these secretariats. Figure 10 indicates the number of references over recent years.

Figure 10 Number of references to committees, 2010–11 to 2012–13



Legislative and general purpose standing committees

The Senate has eight pairs of legislative and general purpose standing committees established pursuant to standing order 25. Each pair of committees comprises a legislation and references committee, which continue for the life of a parliament and are re-established at the commencement of each new parliament. While legislation committees are responsible for considering bills, budget estimates and the annual reports and performance of government agencies, matters referred to references committees typically relate to broader policy issues with longer timeframes in which to conduct inquiries.

The usual cycle of estimates hearings was conducted and reported on by legislation committees during the year, commencing in October 2012 with a week of supplementary hearings for the 2012–13 Budget. A week

of additional estimates hearings was held in February 2013. The main estimates hearings for the 2013–14 Budget took place between 27 May and 7 June 2013.

Senate select committees

During 2012–13, the Committee Office supported three Senate select committees. Two of those, the Select Committee on Australia’s Food Processing Sector and the Select Committee on Electricity Prices presented final reports. The Senate Select Committee on Cyber Safety was established on 27 June 2013 and is due to report by 30 August 2013.

Joint committees (including joint select committees)

During 2012–13, the Committee Office supported three joint statutory committees: Corporations and Financial Services, the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity, and Law Enforcement.

Three joint select committees operated during 2012–13. One of those, the Joint Select Committee on Gambling Reform, presented its final report on 30 June 2013. The work of the Joint Select Committee on the Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and the Joint Select Committee on DisabilityCare Australia continued into 2013–14.

Submissions, public hearings and witnesses

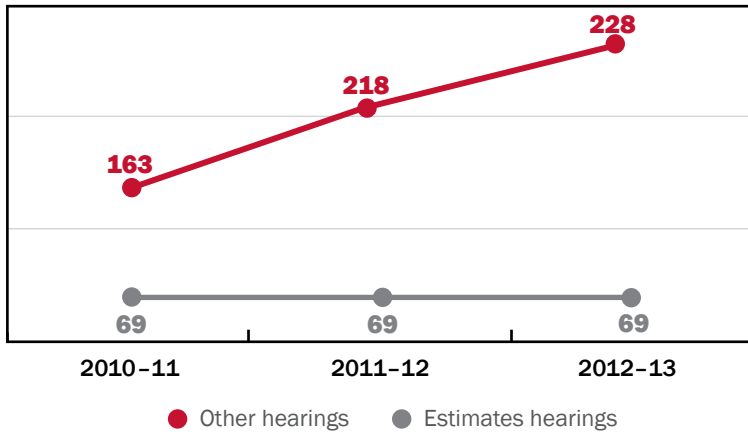
In 2012–13, the Committee Office processed 12,706 submissions, organised 297 public hearings (of these, 69 were estimates hearings) and arranged for 7,650 witnesses to provide evidence (of these, 4,727 appeared at an estimates hearing). Secretariats also arranged approximately 550 private meetings. Figure 11 shows the number of hearings held in recent years.

Specialist advice

Two requests for specialist advice were made by Senate committees during 2012–13. One was for a risk assessment report commissioned by the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee, at a cost of \$1,988, for its inquiries into the importation of pineapples, ginger and potatoes. The other was for translation services provided to witnesses by

the Community Affairs References Committee, at a cost of \$1,099, for its inquiry into the involuntary or coerced sterilisation of people with disabilities in Australia.

Figure 11 Number of committee hearings, 2010–11 to 2012–13



Information management

An area of growing need and focus concerns the provision of information to the public about the work of Senate committees. The Committee Office worked closely with Senate Public Information Office during the year to bring committee activity to the attention of the general public through enhancements to website information and greater use of social media. Another priority is to enhance the Senate Centralised Information Database (SCID) to, among other things, provide more functionality to committee webpages. It is expected that these enhancements will be delivered early in 2013–14.

International engagement

In 2012–13, Committee Office staff served as secretaries to outgoing parliamentary delegations (including the Committee Exchange Program) and also acted as presenters for international delegations visiting Australia. The office also supported the Pacific Parliamentary Partnerships program by seconding a Principal Research Officer to assist the Samoan Legislative Assembly for three months, from April to June 2013.

Performance outlook

The Committee Office demonstrated great capability and resilience during the year, often by producing high quality outcomes set against tight deadlines. The ability to maintain this level of performance, however, will be largely dependent on the nature and the volume of matters referred to committees by the Senate, as well as the ability of the department to keep adapting to, and with, a changing workforce and an unpredictable budget.