

Table Office

Outputs

Provision of programming and procedural support to the Senate.

Processing of legislation.

Preparation and publication of the record of proceedings of the Senate; records of current and outstanding business, and statistical information on the business of the Senate.

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

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

	Performance indicators	Performance results
Quality	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. Key business documents are accurate and of a high standard.	Informal feedback and direct contact between senators and staff indicated continued high levels of satisfaction, consistent with the results of the 2009 survey of senators. Business documents remained of a high standard, with none shown to contain significant inaccuracies.
Timeliness	<i>Notice Paper</i> for the current day and <i>Journals of the Senate</i> for the previous day available prior to sittings; statistical and other documentation available as required or in accordance with predetermined requirements. <i>Order of Business</i> finalised and distributed prior to sittings and advice prepared proactively or as required.	The <i>Journals of the Senate</i> and the <i>Notice Paper</i> were available as required. 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. Statistical summaries were produced after each sitting week and comprehensive statistics were published on the website after each sitting period. <i>Business of the Senate</i> and <i>Questions on Notice Summary</i> were tabled biannually, in accordance with agreed timeframes. The <i>Order of Business</i> was distributed in advance of all sittings. Advice was given proactively or as required.

Timeliness	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. All inquiries answered and documents stored or distributed on a timely basis. Meetings held, documentation provided and reports produced within timeframes set by the Senate or the committee, as relevant.	Running sheets were available for use in the chamber as required. Government amendments were distributed as required. Schedules of amendments, prints of Senate bills and legislative support documents were available as required. All documents were distributed in a timely manner. Committee meetings were held, and documents and reports were provided, within agreed timeframes.
Quantity	As required to facilitate proceedings; quantities meet predetermined distribution requirements or are accessible electronically or both.	All distribution and publishing targets were met.

Overview

The Table Office is led by the Clerk Assistant (Table) and has three functional areas, as shown in figure 5. The Clerk Assistant (Table) and the Director, Legislation and Documents also perform duties as a clerk at the table in the Senate chamber.

Figure 5 Elements and responsibilities of the Table Office

Executive and Programming <i>Maureen Weeks, Clerk Assistant</i> Procedural advice Business programming Production of the Senate <i>Order of Business</i> Secretariat support to the Selection of Bills Committee	
Legislation and Documents <i>Sue Blunden, Director</i>	Journals and Notice Paper <i>Bronwyn Notzon, Director</i>
Processing of legislation and preparation of supporting documentation Processing and custody of Senate records Inquiries and document distribution services Secretariat support to the Publications and Joint Publications committees	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 support to the Appropriations and Staffing Committee

During 2009–10, the office consolidated its staff numbers through several recruitment processes. For the fourth quarter, the full-time equivalent (FTE) staffing level for the office was 16, due to ongoing selection processes. The staff numbers were complemented in sitting weeks by employing additional staff to assist the office to maintain the high standard and output of the office.

By 30 June 2010, staff were working in their substantive positions and training for new staff was underway. The average FTE for 2009–10 remained at 17.

The cost of the office for 2009–10 was \$2.5 million (\$2.8 million in 2008–09).

Work of the office

During 2009–10, the office provided effective support for the Senate chamber by:

- providing procedural and programming advice and documentation to facilitate and expedite chamber proceedings
- processing legislation and producing documents to assist in the legislative process
- preparing and publishing formal and informal records of Senate business, including the *Notice Paper*, the *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 and archiving tabled papers and other Senate records
- responding to inquiries and undertaking document distribution services.

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

Staff in the Table Office continued to be involved in the department's education activities.

Projects with the other parliamentary departments were initiated and progressed. The business case for the redevelopment of the document production system was prepared jointly with staff of the Department of the House of Representatives. Work was also undertaken with the other parliamentary departments on the Tabled Papers Register.

All staff in the office contributed positively to the structural review being conducted in the department. Two half-day meetings were held and attended by all in the office to put forward suggestions as to how it could continue to meet the requirements of the chamber, senators and their staff and other sections of the department. Staff in the office also contributed in other fora.

A number of the staff in the office also participated as bargaining representatives in the negotiations on the new enterprise agreement to establish the terms and conditions of employment following the expiration of the collective agreement made in 2006.

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 intricacy of questions and notices from senators
- the number and difficulty of inquiries and requests for information from clients.

The Table Office supported the Senate on 52 sitting days in 2009–10, a decrease compared with 56 in 2008–09. The distribution of sitting days was again skewed towards the first half of the reporting period—the Senate sat on 28 days from August to December 2009 and 24 days from February to June 2010. In the number of days represented in the first half of the reporting period, there are three hidden days (27 November and 1 and 2 December 2009) on which the Senate sat as a continuation of the sitting day of 26 November and 30 November 2009, respectively. It is not unusual for the Senate to extend a sitting day to the next day. However, two consecutive extensions are unusual. These three extended days do not account for the reduction in the number of sittings days, as the Senate sat for two hidden days in the first part of the previous year.

Programming and procedural support

The Table Office provided 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 1,192 procedural scripts for use in the chamber, an average of 23 each sitting day (which is the same as in 2008–09)
- preparing draft and final editions of the *Order of Business* (the 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.

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 2009–10, 440 documents were presented this way—a 9 per cent increase on the 2008–09 total of 404. This partly reflects an increasing trend for Senate legislation committees to be required to report on bills prior to the commencement of a sitting period. It also reflects the full-year operation of the orders of the Senate requiring information on departmental and agency appointments, vacancies and grants to be provided prior to the scheduled estimates hearings.

The timely provision of advice to the Manager of Government Business and other senators assists the efficient conduct of the business of the Senate and therefore is an important aspect of the work of the Table Office. During the year, advice was provided on a range of matters, including ways to deal with bills expeditiously given the time available for debate (including the application of standing order 142, colloquially known as the guillotine), condolence motions, orders for the production of documents and motions to vary the routine of business. Staff provided this advice, both in response to requests and proactively, in a timely

manner. Staff also produced accurate, high-quality documents on or ahead of time.

Legislation

The office responded to the requirements of the Senate and the needs of senators and others concerning legislation and 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 levels of legislative activity in recent years.

Figure 6 Senate legislative activity, 2005–06 to 2009–10

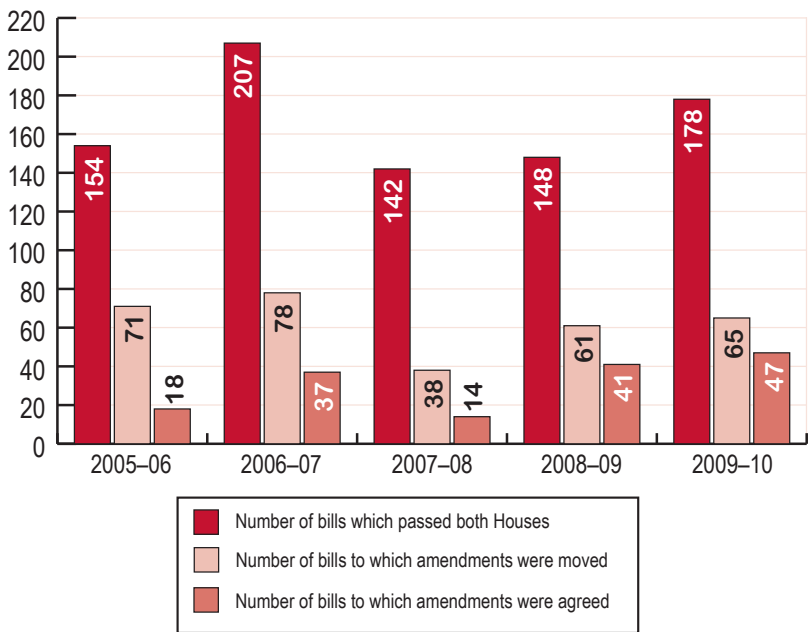
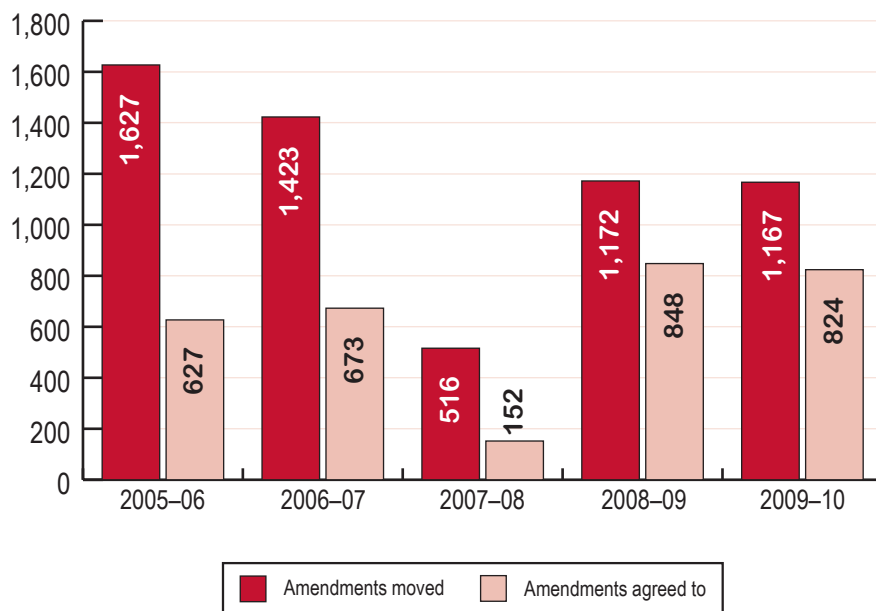
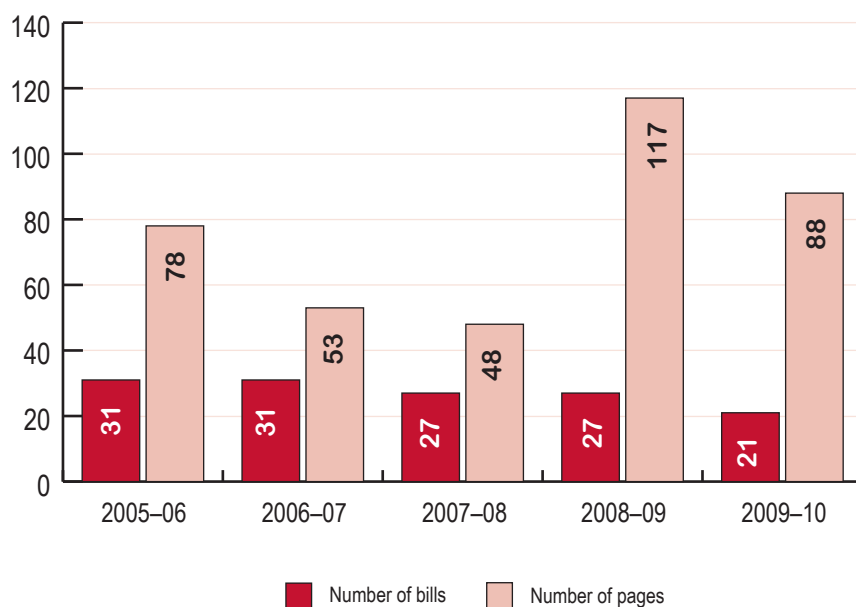


Figure 7 Amendments moved and agreed to by the Senate, 2005–06 to 2009–10

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

Figure 8 Running sheets, 2005–06 to 2009–10

The number of amendments moved was almost identical to the number moved in the previous period. The number of amendments agreed to was also comparable. A quarter of the amendments moved (301) and agreed to (202) related to the second consideration of the carbon pollution reduction scheme bills introduced by the Government in late 2009. This number of amendments generates a demanding workload for the legislation subsection. As well as preparing running sheets to facilitate the consideration of these bills in the chamber (see below), the subsection checks and proofreads each amendment in preparation for possible inclusion in schedules of amendments. Although this work was completed in anticipation of the bills passing the Senate, the bills were finally negatived at the third reading stage in December 2009 and the schedules were not required.

Of the total number of amendments agreed to (824), 89 per cent (733) were amendments moved by the Government. This may reflect the Government's willingness to negotiate with the Opposition and the minor parties to progress its legislative program.

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 source are circulated for consideration. Running sheets are revised when further 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. Running sheets are provided electronically through hyperlinks in the *Dynamic Red*.

The number of bills for which running sheets were prepared in 2009–10 remained relatively constant with the historical average. The number of pages prepared decreased compared to the previous year (88 compared with 117). One-third of the running sheets were prepared for consideration of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Bill 2009 [No. 2] and the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2009 [No. 2].

The office is responsible for preparing the formal 'messages' by which the two Houses communicate on legislative and other activity. In 2009–10, 205 messages were prepared (181 in 2008–09). Of those messages, 193 related to the passage of bills, and 12 were administrative in nature (for example, relating to joint committee membership).

Bills system

The bills system is a document management system that enables bills and associated documents to be loaded to ParlInfo Search (to bills homepages), and metadata to be collected that reflects the progress of bills through both chambers.

The system is jointly administered by the table offices of the chamber departments and supported by the Bills System Advisory Group (BSAG). Staff from the chamber departments and the Department of Parliamentary Services are members of the group.

The group met for the first time in September 2009 and has met on two occasions since. The group's main focus is to ensure the ongoing maintenance of the system and to implement changes as required. The secretariat for the group will alternate between the chamber departments. The Department of the House of Representatives undertook that responsibility for the remainder of the 42nd Parliament.

The bills system has proven to be reliable and effective. When an unanticipated demand was placed on the system on two occasions in 2009–10—to accommodate a second identical print of certain bills—the developer was supportive in providing a short-term workaround. The advisory group has recommended that the system be changed to readily accommodate two identical prints of bills in future.

Version 12 of the system, including the homepage revision, went into production in mid-October 2009. Considerable work was undertaken by staff to revise the presentation of bills homepages. Staff are now concentrating on 'backcapturing' data for the system. This involves inputting the data for events and identifying the appropriate documents to be loaded. As a number of the documents are not available in electronic format, BSAG has been requested to implement a change to enable PDF versions to be loaded through the system. Reasonable progress has been made on the backcapture due to assistance being provided by a staff member from another subsection in the office. Further progress will be made during the upcoming election period.

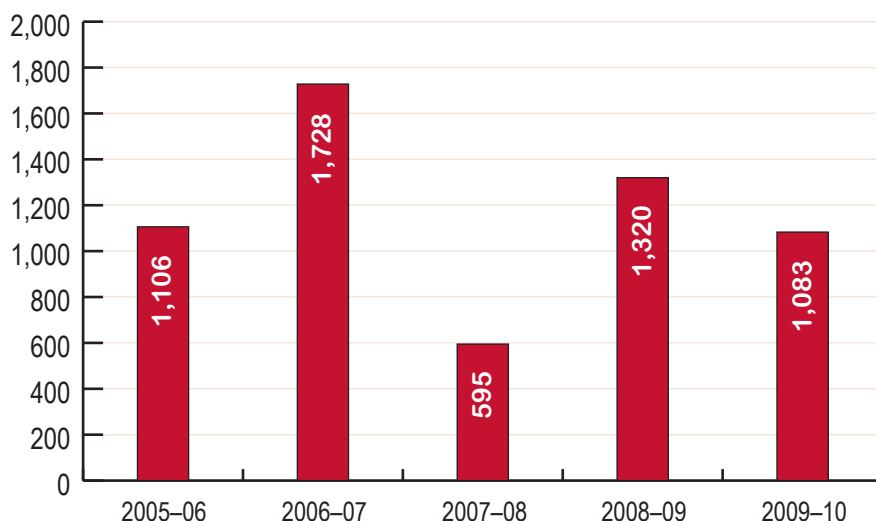
The legislation subsection has continued to endeavour to meet the high expectations of users of the bills homepages. In 2009–10, 6,423,042 queries were made of the bills and legislation collection through ParlInfo Search. This represents 21 per cent of the total queries made through ParlInfo Search during that time.

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 2009–10, staff processed 1,083 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, 2005–06 to 2009–10



Notices of motion (used by senators to indicate their intention to move particular motions on specified days) are drafted by senators, the Table Office and the Procedure Office. In 2009–10, Table Office staff drafted or edited and processed 486 notices of motion, which were then included in the *Notice Paper* and the *Journals of the Senate*. This is a slight decrease compared to 500 in 2008–09.

During 2009–10, senators presented 43 petitions (45 in 2008–09), collectively representing 136,083 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.

Formal and informal records of business

The office met the needs of senators and others for accurate and timely records 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

The Table Office publishes the Senate's principal parliamentary documents online—both on the department's website and through ParlInfo Search—and in hard copy.

The *Notice Paper*, the formal agenda of Senate proceedings, provides essential information on the current and future business of the Senate and committees. Two versions of the *Notice Paper* were published before each sitting day: an abridged printed version, averaging 74 pages (51 pages in 2008–09), 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 official record of decisions made by the Senate. During 2009–10, 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 52 proof *Journals*, each averaging 30 pages (27 pages in 2008–09).

Informal records and statistics

The *Dynamic Red*, available on the department's website, provides real-time information on the progress and outcomes of business on each sitting day. Relevant bills homepages, amendments and running sheets can be accessed via the *Dynamic Red*. The *Dynamic Red* is a valuable tool to monitor the proceedings of the chamber and attracts a wide audience including senators, parliamentary staff, government departments and agencies, and the general public. It continues to receive favourable feedback from users.

Information transferred from the *Dynamic Red* assists with the timely production of the *Senate Daily Summary*, a more considered review of the previous day's proceedings. The summary contains links to primary sources such as the *Journals of the Senate* (which records, among other things, changes to committee memberships), Hansard and committee reports. It is an essential 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 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 biannual volumes of *Business of the Senate*, which has recorded statistics on the work of the Senate for more than 30 years.

The office has noticed that the number of statistical inquiries it receives is decreasing as awareness of the online statistical collection increases. However, in 2009–10, information not available on the website was still sought by senators, parliamentary staff and other clients, and these requests were dealt with promptly. The Table Office produced statistics on matters such as:

- allocation of time for government business
- suspensions of standing orders
- time spent on the consideration of government documents and open-ended adjournment debates
- successful rearrangements of government programming.

Inquiries

Copies of all documents presented to the Senate are made available through the inquiries and distribution services provided by the office. The office also responds to inquiries relating to the work of the Senate and acts as an information 'hub' for senators, their staff, government departments and agencies and the general public.

Statistics collected by staff answering inquiries indicate that 6,762 inquiries were responded to during 2009–10. Most of the inquiries (92 per cent) were responded to within five minutes. The remainder of the inquiries were responded to by staff in timeframes agreed on with clients.

While the majority of inquiries originate from senators, their staff and departmental officers, the services of the inquiries subsection are used

extensively by other government departments and agencies (26 per cent of all inquiries), media representatives and legal organisations (21 per cent) to obtain copies of documents and advice on processes and outcomes from the Senate chamber.

The Table Office continued to use the Document Movement System or ‘telelift’ (an automated transportation system) to convey large quantities of documents, often simultaneously, throughout Parliament House. This system is essential to the prompt and reliable distribution by the Table Office of documents to senators, members and others in Parliament House, particularly documents required prior to the sitting of the Senate.

A pneumatic tube operates between the chamber and the Table Office. On a sitting day this device, as old-fashioned as it is, plays a vital role in transporting critical documents between the two places of work. The ‘tube’ and the ‘telelift’ are efficient means of transporting documents, saving both time and staff resources.

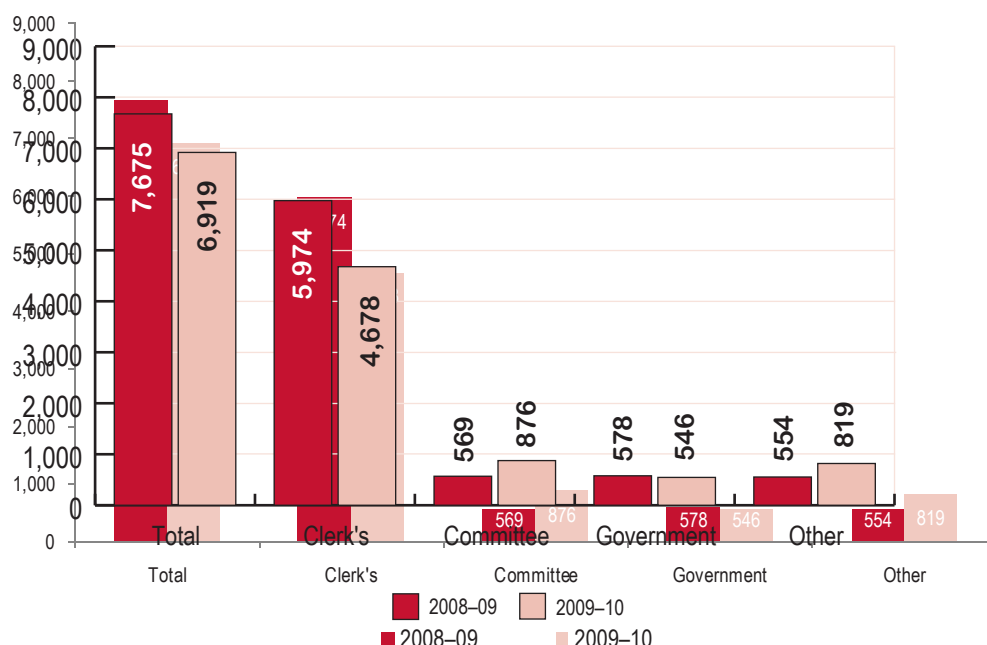
Documents

The Table Office processed the 6,919 documents presented to the Senate during 2009–10, and recorded them in the *Journals of the Senate* and the *Index to the Papers Presented to Parliament*. Figure 10 shows the number and type of documents tabled in the Senate in 2008–09 and 2009–10.

Three trends in relation to documents that were identified in 2008–09 continued in 2009–10:

- the number of Clerk’s documents decreased—4,678 documents were tabled in 2009–10, a decrease of 22 per cent (from 5,974 in 2008–09)
- the number of committee reports tabled increased, by 54 per cent (25 per cent in 2008–09)
- the number of miscellaneous documents tabled increased, by 48 per cent (representing an increase of almost 200 per cent since 2007–08).

Figure 10 Documents tabled in the Senate, 2008–09 and 2009–10



The papers database is a joint system maintained by the two chamber departments. The database facilitates the processing of documents and generates reports. One of the generated reports enables the production of the *Index to the Papers Presented to Parliament*. The index is published through the Senate website and is printed at the end of each parliament. In response to an approach from the Parliamentary Library, the index now has been made available through ParlInfo Search as the Tabled Papers Register. There is potential for this database to be developed further in future, including the possibility of providing the text of some documents to which the index refers. The development was acknowledged in the Joint Committee on Publications report into the development of a digital repository and electronic distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series.

Digitisation and preservation of tabled papers

The office is using digital imaging to copy, preserve and ensure access to the collection of all documents presented to the Senate. There are two streams of work: making digital images and microfilm 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.

In 2009–10, the digital imaging team concentrated on resolving a number of technical issues that were delaying the loading of images to the web repository. This work resulted in the documents presented to the Senate in 29 of the 39 parliaments until 2001 being available online. Documents from 2001 until the current parliament are also available online. Of the 5,317,579 images loaded to the repository, 1,241,895 were loaded in 2009–10.

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. Last year's annual report mentioned a major rationalisation of stock and the acquisition of the former stationery store, which increased the document storage capability. This year the office has acquired another space in the basement, which will be dedicated to the storage of budget-related material such as portfolio budget statements. This will free up considerable space in the main basement document storage area.

Secretariat support for various committees

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

The office provided some secretariat support to the Standing Committee on Appropriations and Staffing. However, because of temporary vacancies further support was undertaken by another office in the department for six months.

The staff in the legislation subsection and the programming section also assisted committees by determining 'time critical bills'. On 13 May 2010, the Senate passed a motion referring time critical bills (those with commencement provisions that could take effect before 1 July 2010) to the relevant committee for consideration. The aim of the motion was to ensure that legislation committees had the opportunity to consider the provisions of bills introduced into the House of Representatives when the Senate was not sitting, prior to the June sittings when the legislation would be required to be passed. The motion expressed the Senate's view that a committee could consider a bill and report to the Senate that no inquiry was warranted. The bills were also considered by the Selection of Bills Committee in accordance with the provisions of the Standing Orders.

The Joint Committee on Publications held an inquiry into the development of a digital repository and electronic distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series. The report of the committee was tabled on 24 June 2010. The committee recommended that a digital repository be developed within the Parliament, following the preparation of a business case to address issues raised in the report, mainly relating to archive and preservation concerns. The committee further recommended that the repository be ready for implementation in early 2011. Staff from the office will be involved in the development of the business case and subsequent implementation of the digital repository.

All committee meetings were convened, and documents were provided, within agreed timeframes.

Education activities

Staff in the Table Office continued to contribute to the training and development of departmental staff by presenting sessions in the department's training programs and offering 'field trips'.

The field trips are half-day sessions for small groups to give departmental staff and staff from other parliamentary departments the opportunity to learn more about the work of the Table Office. Those who have attended field trips have provided positive feedback that the sessions increase awareness of the services offered by the office.

The contribution by staff in the Table Office to the seminar program administered by the Procedure Office continued throughout the year, despite staffing difficulties.

Factors, events and trends influencing performance

Factors influencing workload and staffing levels are set out in the 'Overviews' section.

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. The finalisation of various recruitment processes in 2009–10 means that staff are now working in their substantive positions and training for new staff is underway. On-the-job training is a fundamental component of this training and existing staff have been generous in sharing their knowledge, supporting the office to meet its objectives. The usual high standard and output of the office have been maintained.

All staff have also contributed to the initial work for the redevelopment of the document production system and the structural review being undertaken by the department. In various meetings ideas have been shared and discussed, resulting in a strong understanding of the focus the office needs to have to maintain its high standard of service to senators, the Senate and its committees.

Evaluation

The principal medium for evaluating the services of the Table Office is the biennial survey of senators' satisfaction with the services provided by the department. The next survey is due in 2011. As reported previously, the 2009 survey revealed high levels of satisfaction among senators with the advice, documents and services of the Table Office. Satisfaction with the work of the office has remained high across a number of surveys and the office aims to maintain the quality of its service.

To assist the office in evaluating its services, it also monitors its own performance. This monitoring in 2009–10 indicated that the high level of service was being maintained and there were no areas of major concern.

Much of the work of the Table Office involves direct contact with senators and their staff, as well as other clients. This presents an ongoing opportunity to receive feedback about the services provided by the office. Informal feedback continues to be positive and supports the office's self-evaluation.

Performance outlook

In 2010–11, the Table Office will continue its core work relating to the sittings of the Senate. The election break will provide an opportunity for the office to focus on enhancing its operations.

Work undertaken on the redevelopment of the document production system will be furthered in cooperation with staff from the Department of the House of Representatives. It is hoped that work on this project in the next 12 months can progress to the stage of identifying priorities and establishing timeframes within which to achieve those priorities.

The development of an electronic Parliamentary Papers Series may also proceed in cooperation with the other parliamentary departments. Again, this will build on work that commenced this year.

Staff from the departments of the House of Representatives and the Senate will continue to work on the bills system, refining the system so

that it continues to meet the needs of senators and their staff, parliamentary staff and persons outside the Parliament.

The office also plans to use the election period to examine the proposals made in its submission to the department's structural review. Some of these proposals related only to the Table Office, and may be implemented once the review has been completed. One such proposal is to revitalise the public interface of StatsNet.

Finally, following the election, there will be a new parliament and staff in the office will be involved in the preparations for the first sitting day of the new parliament.