

## 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 and other 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 information	Performance results
<i>Order of Business</i> finalised and distributed prior to sittings and advice prepared proactively or as required to ensure senators can meet their duties.	The <i>Order of Business</i> was distributed in advance of all sittings. Advice was given proactively or as required.
Accurate running sheets available as soon as practicable; proposed amendments distributed in accordance with requirements; accurate schedules of amendments and prints of bills available in accordance with predetermined requirements.	Accurate running sheets were available for use in the chamber as required. Government amendments were distributed as required. Accurate schedules of amendments, prints of Senate bills and legislative support documents were available as required.
<i>Notice Paper</i> for the current day and <i>Journals of the Senate</i> for the previous day available prior to sittings; accurate statistical and other documentation produced to meet required timeframes.	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. <i>Estimates at a glance</i> was published promptly after the completion of estimates hearings. Requests for statistics were responded to promptly and to meet required timeframes. Statistical summaries were produced after each sitting week and comprehensive statistics were published on the Senate website after each sitting period. <i>Business of the Senate</i> and <i>Questions on Notice Summary</i> were tabled biannually, in accordance with required timeframes.
All inquiries answered and documents stored or distributed on a timely basis.	All documents were distributed in a timely manner.
Meetings held, documentation provided and reports produced within timeframes set by the Senate or the committee, as relevant.	Committee meetings were held, and documents and reports were provided, within agreed timeframes.

## 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) also performs duties as a clerk at the table in the Senate chamber and as a committee secretary, and is a member of the department's executive responsible for a range of governance matters. The two directors also perform duties as clerks at the table.

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

<b>Executive and Programming</b> <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	
<b>Legislation and Documents</b> <i>Sue Blunden, 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	<b>Journals and Notice Paper</b> <i>James Warmenhoven, Director</i> 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 2010–11, the staff numbers fell early in the year. The full-time equivalent (FTE) staffing level for the office hovered around 16 until the selection process for a permanent position was completed. During the year, there was also one person on rotation to the Table Office from the Procedure Office.

By 30 June 2011, all positions were filled and new staff were undertaking the necessary training. The average FTE for 2010–11 remained at 17.

The cost of the office for 2010–11 was \$2.7 million (\$2.5 million in 2009–10).

## Work of the office

During 2010–11, 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 learning and development activities, both as presenters and participants.

Projects being undertaken in conjunction with the other parliamentary departments progressed. The Project Board for the Table Office Production System (TOPS) (which is the replacement project for the Document Production System) was established and met. The business case for a digitised Parliamentary Papers Series (known as the e-PPS) was prepared in line with the Presiding Officers' response to the Joint Committee on Publications 2010 report on the Parliamentary Papers Series (PPS). Subject to any insurmountable concerns raised by the business case, the implementation of the digital repository is expected to occur in 2011–12.

All staff in the office contributed positively to the redevelopment of the Commonwealth Parliament website, working constructively with colleagues from the Department of the House of Representatives. The website publication of Table Office documents is an important means of disseminating information about the work of the Senate and staff used the opportunity to think creatively about how this material is displayed and what additional information could be provided. Staff have also considered possible Table Office contributions to the work of the newly created Senate Public Information Office (SPIO).

Staff have also been active on the department's Workplace Consultative Committee and other forums.

The Table Office supported the Senate on 37 sitting days in 2010–11, a decrease compared with 52 in 2009–10. The marked decrease in the number of sitting days is a consequence of the 2010 election and the commencement of the new parliament at the end of September 2010.

## 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, both written and oral, 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 868 procedural scripts for use in the chamber, an average of 23 each sitting day (which is the same as in 2009–10)
- 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 2010–11, 515 documents were presented using this procedure—a 17 per cent increase on the 2009–10 total of 440. This is the second consecutive reporting period for which the number of documents presented using this procedure has increased.

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 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, suspensions of standing orders, motions to establish joint and

select committees 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.

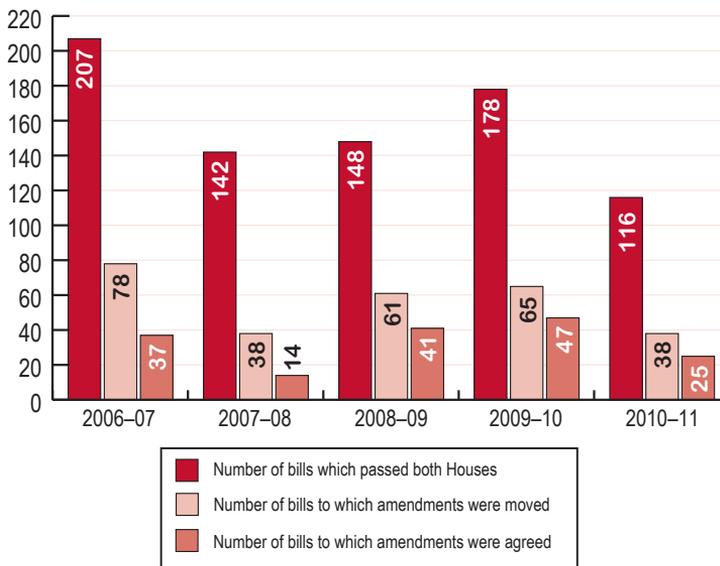
## Legislation

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

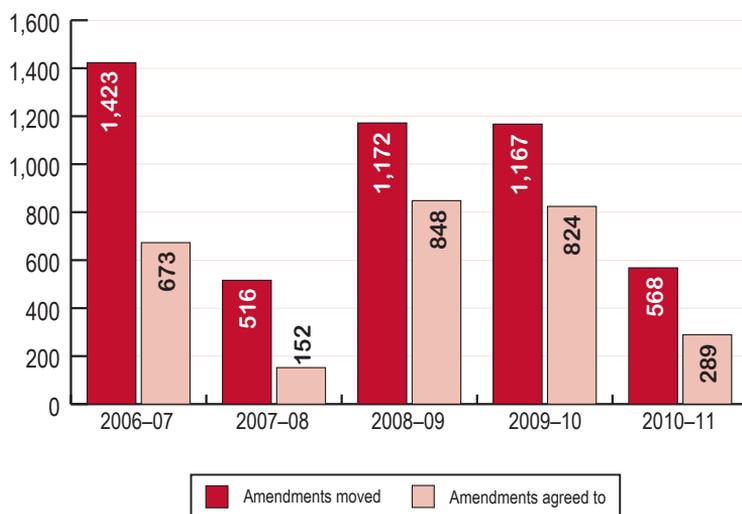
- processing all bills considered in the chamber
- preparing legislative documents, including procedural scripts, running sheets, schedules of amendments, third reading prints and messages
- recording the progress of legislation
- preparing assent and Act prints, and processing assent messages and proclamations.

The charts in figures 6 to 8 reflect the levels of legislative activity in the years 2006–07 to 2010–11.

**Figure 6** Senate legislative activity, 2006–07 to 2010–11



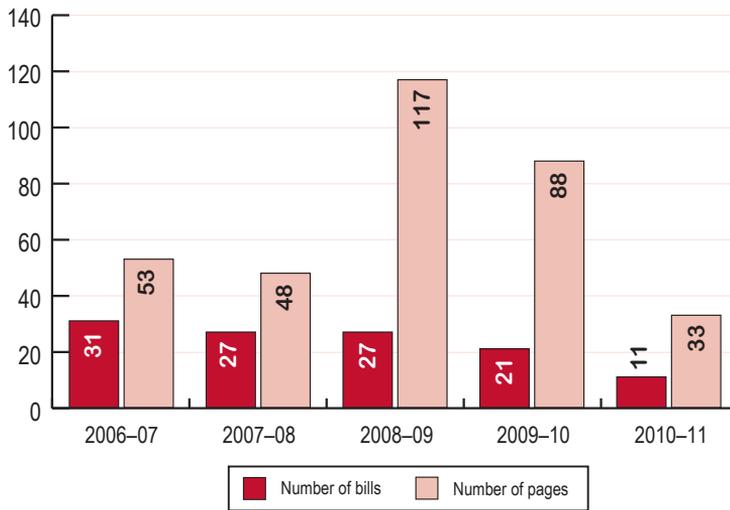
**Figure 7 Amendments moved in and agreed to by the Senate, 2006–07 to 2010–11**



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

The number of amendments moved was almost half the number moved in the previous period. The number of amendments agreed to also decreased by almost two-thirds. The significant decrease in both these figures is attributable to the decrease in the number of sitting days due to the 2010 election. Both figures are comparable to the figures during 2007–08 (covering the 2007 election). The percentage of amendments agreed to compared with amendments moved also decreased, from 71 per cent in 2009–10, to 50 per cent in this period.

Of the total number of amendments agreed to, 58 per cent (167) were amendments moved by ministers, a decrease of 31 per cent from 2009–10 (89 per cent). Amendments moved by minority party and independent senators accounted for 37 per cent (106) of the amendments agreed to by the Senate.

**Figure 8** Running sheets, 2006–07 to 2010–11

Printed 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 is 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 also published electronically through hyperlinks in the *Dynamic Red*.

The number of bills for which running sheets were prepared in 2010–11 decreased, reflecting the decrease in the number of amendments moved. This was in turn reflected in the reduced number of pages of running sheets prepared – 33 pages compared with 88 in 2009–10.

The office is responsible for preparing the formal messages by which the two Houses communicate on legislative and other activity. In 2010–11, 163 messages were prepared (205 in 2009–10). Of those messages, 120 related to the passage of bills, and 43 were administrative in nature (for example, relating to the establishment of joint committees and appointment of their members at the beginning of the parliament).

## Bills system

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

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's main focus is to ensure the ongoing maintenance of the system and to implement changes as required.

The department took over the administration and support of the group from the commencement of the 43rd Parliament in September 2010. The group has met formally twice and has also met informally on a number of occasions, to discuss IT developments which may have an impact on the system. The proposed redevelopment of the Commonwealth Parliament website and the transfer of the bills system to the Parliament's new standard operating system were the major issues which the group addressed during the period.

The Table Office delayed moving its systems to the new standard operating system because testing the bills system on that system revealed that it did not support the use of web folders. These folders are a significant feature of the bills system and losing the functionality which they provide was unacceptable. BSAG agreed to request the bills system developers to identify a solution to enable web folders to work on the new standard operating system. The developers have indicated that a solution is possible. It is expected that, following successful testing of a solution for the bills system, all Table Office systems will move to the new standard operating system in the next reporting period.

Legislation subsection staff continue to backcapture data for the system. This involves entering the data for events and identifying the documents to be published. The backcapture has become problematic because not all Word files of older documents are available and PDF files created of the missing documents cannot be loaded to the system as it requires Word format source files. To resolve this problem, BSAG has requested the system developer to provide a solution to enable PDF-only versions of documents to be loaded to the system if a Word file is not available.

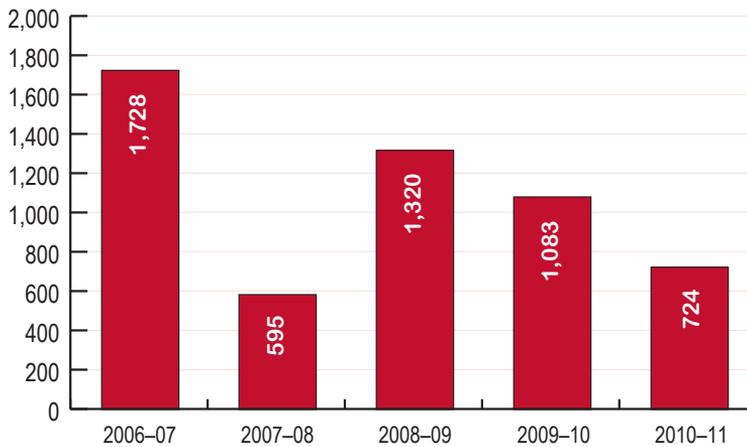
The legislation subsection has continued to endeavour to meet the high expectations of users of the bills homepages. In the reporting period, 13,869,390 queries were made of the bills and legislation collection through ParlInfo Search, representing 25 per cent of the total queries made through ParlInfo 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.

The *Questions on Notice Summary* records statistics and other information relating to these questions, including response times. Figure 9 shows the number of questions on notice in recent years which clearly follows the electoral cycle.

**Figure 9** Questions on notice, 2006–07 to 2010–11



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 2010–11, Table Office staff drafted or edited and processed 432 notices of motion, which were then included in the *Notice Paper* and the *Journals of the Senate*. This is a slight decrease compared with 486 in 2009–10, again reflecting the electoral cycle.

During 2010–11, senators presented 32 petitions (43 in 2009–10), collectively representing 43,466 signatories. The office continued to provide advice to senators and members of the public on whether proposed petitions, including electronic petitions, conformed with the requirements of the Senate Standing Orders. All conforming petitions were processed promptly and presented in the Senate, including those received by the office directly from the public without a senator’s

signature to certify the number of petitioners. In such cases, the office seeks a senator's signature so that the petition can be presented.

## 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* and *Estimates at a glance*
- 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 Senate 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 (the same as in 2009–10), 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. During 2010–11, the *Notice Paper* was restructured to identify clearly the time for which questions on notice asked during estimates had remained unanswered, which assisted senators using the procedures under standing order 74(5) to seek an explanation from the relevant minister for the failure to answer.

The *Journals of the Senate* are the official record of decisions made by the Senate. During 2010–11, 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 37 proof *Journals*, each averaging 30 pages (52 proof *Journals* in 2009–10, also averaging 30 pages).

## Informal records and statistics

The *Dynamic Red*, available on the Senate 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* for estimates hearings was replaced by *Estimates at a glance*: a convenient summary of estimates hearings, including contact details for estimates committees and weblinks to view proceedings. *Estimates at a glance* is available electronically on the Senate homepage during estimates, and the Senate estimates homepage after the end of estimates.

Statistical summaries of business conducted by the Senate were produced after each sitting week. The online statistics were completely reorganised during 2010–11, providing easier access to more comprehensive commonly sought statistics on the work of the Senate as well as individual links to relevant source documents, such as *Odgers' Australian Senate Practice* and *Brief Guides to Senate Procedure*. 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 number of statistical inquiries is decreasing as awareness of the online statistical collection increases. However, in 2010–11, information not available on the Senate 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
- rearrangement of government business initiated by non-government senators.

## 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 5,401 inquiries were responded to during 2010–11. Most of the inquiries (95 per cent) were responded to within five minutes. The remainder of the inquiries were responded to by staff in timeframes agreed 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 (23 per cent of all inquiries) and 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. Although there were some significant outages of the system in 2010–11, only two affected the work of the inquiries subsection on sitting days.

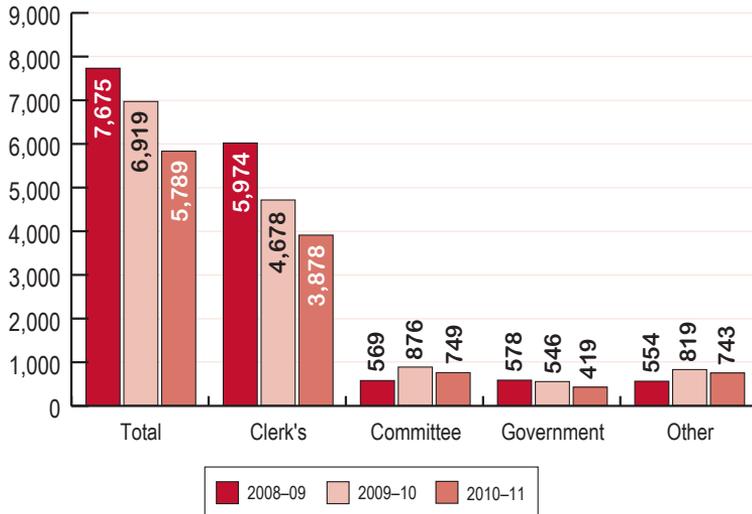
## Documents

The Table Office processed the 5,789 documents presented to the Senate during 2010–11, 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 to 2010–11.

Although the number of committee reports, miscellaneous documents and government documents presented to the Senate decreased during

2010–11, the figures are comparable with previous years, taking into account the reduced number of sitting days. Clerk's documents are an exception to this pattern with numbers tabled continuing to decline.

**Figure 10 Documents tabled in the Senate, 2008–09 to 2010–11**



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 reports enables the production of the *Index to the Papers Presented to Parliament*. The index is published through the Senate website, printed at the end of each parliament and available through ParlInfo Search as the Tabled Papers Register. It is expected that the register will also be used to make the full text of documents included in the PPS available online through the e-PPS (developed in response to recommendations made by the Joint Committee on Publications 2010 report on the PPS).

## 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 Senate website.

In 2010–11, the digital imaging team continued to work on resolving technical issues which were delaying the loading of images to the web repository. Some of these issues have been resolved. Consequently, the

digitisation of the microfilm of the first 100 years of documents has almost been completed: 33 of the 39 parliaments until 2001 are now available online. Documents from 2001 until the current parliament are also available online. Of the 5,821,306 images loaded to the repository, 524,203 were loaded in 2010–11.

All the original documents presented to the Senate since its first meeting in 1901 are stored in Parliament House under archival conditions. The Table Office catalogues and maintains stock copies of some of these documents. In November 2010 a leaking air-conditioning unit on the second floor caused substantial water seepage in the Main Document Store area where these copies are kept. Leaking water from a bathroom area on the ground floor also resulted in water making its way into a document storage annexe in March 2011.

The Department of Parliamentary Services' (DPS) maintenance section has conducted a risk assessment of the Main Document Store and will undertake work to ensure that any similar leaks from areas above the Main Document Store will be diverted away from the area. DPS have undertaken to provide options for preventative measures to mitigate any potential damage to documents in that area. DPS also examined the two stores which contain the Senate's original documents and indicated that those stores were considered to be negligible risk areas for any potential hazards which could compromise the longevity of the documents in them.

Although the number of documents tabled in 2010–11 in the Senate decreased, the volume of documents remained constant. Tabled papers occupied 12 metres of shelf space in 2009–10, and 11 metres in 2010–11. This consistent annual volume maintains pressure on the office's limited storage areas which are almost at capacity.

## **Secretariat support for various committees**

During the year, the Table Office provided secretariat support for all meetings and prepared draft reports of the Standing Committee on Appropriations and Staffing, the Selection of Bills Committee and the Senate Publications Committee. The office also provided some secretariat support to the Joint Committee on Publications until September 2010 when secretariat support for the Joint Committee became the responsibility of the House of Representatives Table Office, as it is in alternate parliaments.

The staff in the legislation subsection and the programming section also assisted committees by determining 'time critical bills'. On 12 May 2011,

the Senate passed a motion referring time critical bills (those with commencement provisions of 1 July 2011 or earlier) 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 provided the option for a committee considering such a bill to decide that no substantive inquiry was necessary and report accordingly to the Senate. The bills were also considered by the Selection of Bills Committee in accordance with the provisions of the Standing Orders.

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

## **Learning and development 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.

With the introduction of the department's training calendar, more staff resources have been employed in training. The office has expanded the range of sessions it offers to include training on more detailed elements of Table Office work.

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

## **Factors, events and trends influencing performance**

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.

## **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. This year's survey, conducted early 2011, 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.

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 survey's evaluation of the office.

## **Performance outlook**

In 2011–12, the Table Office will continue its core work relating to the sittings of the Senate.

Work on the TOPS project will continue in cooperation with staff from the Department of the House of Representatives, with the aim of progressing to the tender stage in the next 12 months.

In cooperation with the other parliamentary departments, work will also continue on finalising arrangements for an electronic Parliamentary Papers Series.

Staff from the departments of the House of Representatives and the Senate will continue to backcapture bills and associated documents and to further refine the bills system. This will ensure that the bills system meets the needs of senators and their staff, parliamentary staff and persons outside the Parliament.

The office will continue to focus on possible improvements to its services, including the role it may have in the services developed by SPIO.

Finally, on 1 July 2011, 12 senators-elect will commence their Senate terms. Staff in the office will be involved in the preparations for swearing in the new senators on 4 July and in the proposed orientation program.

