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 work of the Senate.
Processing of tabled documents and maintenance 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
Order of Business finalised and distributed prior to sittings and advice prepared proactively or as required to ensure senators can meet their duties.	The *Order of Business* was distributed in advance of all sittings. Advice was given proactively or as required.
Accurate running sheets available as soon as practicable; proposed government amendments distributed in accordance with requirements; accurate schedules of amendments and prints of bills available in accordance with predetermined requirements.	Legislative documents were accurate and produced within required timeframes.
Notice Paper for the current day and *Journals of the Senate* for the previous day available prior to sittings; accurate statistical and other documentation produced to meet the required timeframes.	All documents and information resources were accurate and provided according to required timeframes, other than where short delays were caused by technical difficulties.
The Senate record is accurately and safely stored; and all inquiries answered and documents distributed on a timely basis.	All documents were recorded and safely stored and 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.

Figure 5 Elements and responsibilities of the Table Office

Executive	
Maureen Weeks, Clerk Assistant	
Procedural advice Business programming Production of the Senate *Order of Business* Secretariat support to the Selection of Bills Committee	

Legislation and Documents	Journals and Notice Paper
Sue Blunden, Director	**James Warmenhoven, Director**
Processing of legislation and preparation of supporting documentation	Production of the *Notice Paper*, the *Journals of the Senate*, the *Dynamic Red* and the *Senate Daily Summary*
Processing and custody of Senate records	
Inquiries and document distribution services	Collection and dissemination of statistical information
Secretariat support to the Publications Committee	Processing of questions on notice and petitions
	Secretariat support to the Appropriations and Staffing Committee

During 2012–13, the Table Office provided effective support for the Senate chamber and met its performance goals, as noted in the above table. The office supported the Senate on 56 sitting days and also provided an inquiries service and ongoing advice and support in relation to the legislative process, the presentation of documents and other aspects of the Senate's work.

The office also provided secretariat support to three domestic committees and supported Senate committees in their interactions with the Senate. As well as undertaking these core roles the office progressed a number of information management and publishing projects.

Requirements for advice, statistics and documentary support for the Senate are determined largely by the sittings of the Senate, including the number

of days and hours of sitting. Other factors influencing performance include the work generated by the Senate such as the number of documents tabled and the legislative workload.

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, and, overall, that feedback continues to be positive.

Staff numbers were reduced by one, resulting in an average full–time equivalent (FTE) staffing level for 2012–13 of 16. The cost of the office was $2.5 million ($2.7 million in 2011–12).

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, particularly to ministers, party whips and committee chairs
- preparing procedural scripts for use in the chamber (1,432 in 2012–13, a slight increase on previous years)
- providing a broadcast captioning service for Senate proceedings.

The *Order of Business* (the program for each day's sitting) was prepared in draft to assist whips and published as a final edition to assist all senators. Commencing with the Spring sittings in 2012 the *Order of Business* sported a new format aimed at making the document more easily understood. The roster of temporary chairs of committees was prepared and monitored each sitting day to ensure that the Chair was always occupied.

Advice and documentation were consistently accurate and provided in time to facilitate the Senate's work.

Legislation

The office facilitated the legislative work of the Houses by:

- processing all bills considered in the Senate and recording the progress of legislation, allowing it to be tracked
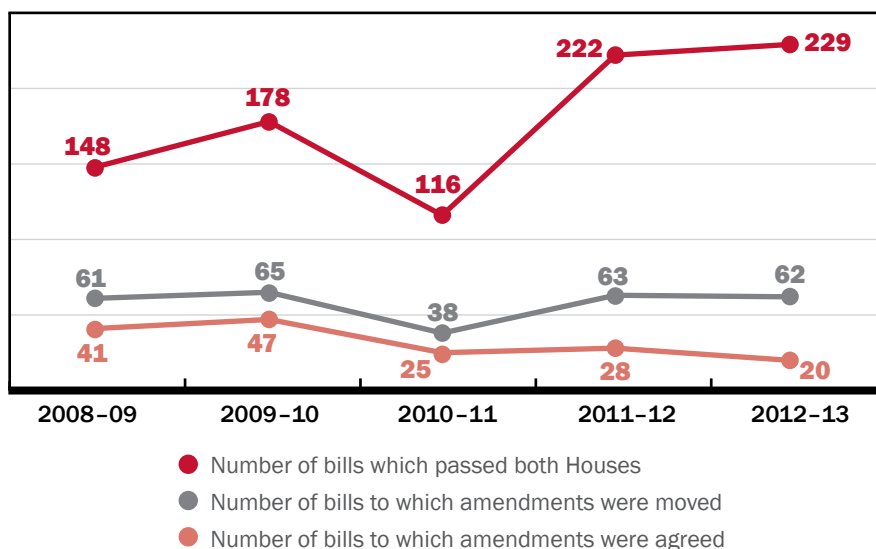
- preparing legislative documents, including procedural scripts, running sheets, schedules of amendments, third reading prints and messages

- preparing assent and Act prints and processing assent messages.

Motions to limit the time for debate on bills were used on four occasions. The Senate passed 63 bills while subject to these motions. The office provided the additional procedural scripts required to manage this process.

The office prepares the formal messages by which the two Houses communicate on legislative and other activity. In 2012–13, 261 messages were prepared (258 in 2011–12), of which 233 related to the passage of bills.

The chart in figure 6 reflects the level of legislative activity in recent years. All performance goals in facilitating this activity were met.

Figure 6 Senate legislative activity, 2008—09 to 2012—13

Number of bills which passed both Houses
Number of bills to which amendments were moved
Number of bills to which amendments were agreed

Formal and informal records of business

For each sitting day, the Table Office produced the official records of Senate business, the *Notice Paper* and the *Journals of the Senate*. These

were supplemented by a range of less formal information resources, also produced and published by the office in multiple formats. Performance goals were consistently met in the production of these documents.

Formal records

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* are published before each sitting day: an abridged printed version, now averaging 44 pages (89 pages in 2011–12), and the full, online version. The reduced printed version saved approximately $52,100, or half the cost of printing that publication.

The *Journals of the Senate* are the official record of decisions made by the Senate. During 2012–13, 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 28 pages (62 proof Journals in 2011–12, averaging 26 pages).

Informal records and statistics

The office also supported the needs of senators and others for accurate and timely information by publishing:

- the *Dynamic Red*, which provides real–time information on the progress and outcomes of business on each sitting day
- the *Senate Daily Summary*, a more considered review of the previous day's proceedings
- *Estimates at a Glance*, a convenient summary of the estimates program conducted by Senate committees
- the *Senate Bills List*, providing information on the purpose and status of all bills introduced
- statistical summaries of Senate business in biannual volumes of *Business of the Senate*, which has recorded statistics on the work of the Senate for more than 30 years.

These resources are primarily published online. Further guidance on their use and purpose is available on the Senate website.

The office also produced *ad hoc* statistics on Senate business, on request.

These documents and statistics were consistently produced in accordance with agreed timeframes.

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 the year, senators asked 1,067 questions on notice (1,227 in 2011–12) which were edited by staff for conformity with the standing orders and published.

Questions on notice are published in the *Notice Paper*, while answers have traditionally been published in *Hansard*. During the year the Table Office and SPIO created a web–based, searchable database of both questions and answers to streamline and provide a single source for this information. The office also produced the *Questions on Notice Summary*, which records statistics and other information relating to these questions, including response times.

Notices of motion (used by senators to indicate their intention to move particular motions on specified days) are usually drafted by senators, the Table Office or the Procedure Office, before being published in the *Notice Paper* and the *Journals of the Senate*. In 2012–13, the office processed and published 633 notices of motion – the same number as in 2011–12.

During 2012–13, senators presented 27 petitions (53 in 2011–12) from 50,849 signatories. The office continued to provide advice to senators and members of the public on whether proposed petitions, including electronic petitions, conformed to Senate requirements. All conforming petitions were processed promptly and presented in the Senate. The office also undertook research on behalf of the Procedure Committee for its report on the use of electronic petitions.

Performance goals in relation to questions, notices and petitions were met.

Inquiries

Copies of all documents presented to the Senate are made available through the inquiries and distribution services provided by the office, which also responds to general inquiries relating to the work of the Senate.

5,782 inquiries were responded to during 2012–13, most (96 per cent) within five minutes of receipt and the remainder within timeframes agreed with clients.

While about half of all inquiries originated from senators, their staff and departmental officers (51 per cent), the inquiries service was also used extensively by other government departments and agencies (30 per cent) and by media representatives and legal organisations (19 per cent) seeking copies of documents and advice on processes and outcomes from the Senate chamber.

These figures are comparable with recent years.

Documents

The office received and processed 7,080 documents for presentation to the Senate during 2012–13, recorded their details in the *Journals of the Senate* and the *Index to the Papers Presented to Parliament* and archived them. Figure 7 shows the number of documents tabled in the Senate in recent years.

The office arranged for some documents from ministers, the Auditor–General and committees to be presented when the Senate was not sitting. This procedure is a useful avenue for the timely publication of material of interest to or required by the Parliament. In 2012–13, 302 documents were presented using this procedure — a 30 per cent decrease on the 2011–12 total of 427.

Figure 7 Documents tabled in the Senate, 2010–11 to 2012–13
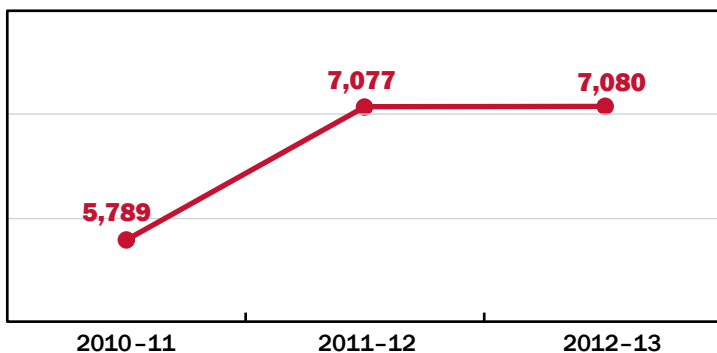
Digitisation and preservation of tabled papers

The digitisation of the microfilm of the first 100 years of documents presented to the Senate is almost complete, with 33 of the 39 parliaments until 2001 now available online. Staff commenced quality assurance work to ensure the digitised images match the necessary data. Documents from 2001 to the current parliament are also available online. A total of 6,357,410 images have now been loaded to the repository, including 238,158 loaded in 2012–13.

All the original documents presented to the Senate since its first meeting in 1901 are stored in Parliament House under archival conditions. Tabled papers from 2012–13 occupied 32.5 metres of shelf space, compared with 25.5 metres for 2011–12 papers.

Support for committees

During the year, the Table Office provided secretariat support and prepared draft reports of the Standing Committee on Appropriations and Staffing, the Selection of Bills Committee and the Senate Publications Committee. All committee meetings were convened, and documents were provided, within agreed timeframes.

Staff assisted in categorising bills under a mechanism now routinely adopted by the Senate during the budget sittings to enable 'time critical' bills to be referred to committees when the Senate is not sitting. Thirty bills were considered under the terms of the motion and seven were referred for inquiry.

Information management and publishing projects

Projects being undertaken in conjunction with the other parliamentary departments progressed as planned during the year.

The Project Board for the Table Office Production System (TOPS) (which will produce all of the principal Senate business documents, replacing the current Document Production System) met eight times and project assurance and test teams met as required. A staged release of elements of the system into a test environment has enabled staff to undertake testing and provide feedback, and that work has influenced subsequent

development. The office also began a review of its work practices to align with the new system.

The Parliamentary Papers Series (PPS) is a collection of the majority of substantial parliamentary and policy documents tabled in either House. Production of a digitised PPS (known as the ePPS) commenced with the 2013 parliamentary sittings.

Performance outlook

In 2013–14, the Table Office will continue its core work relating to the sittings of the Senate. The office will contribute to the planning of the opening of the 44th Parliament and provide other advice and support as required.

Following the substantial amount of the foundation work completed during this reporting period, the TOPS project is expected to be completed in late 2013, after which Senate business documents will be prepared using the new system. Work practices and work flows will be reviewed so that the opportunities afforded by the new system can be realised. The review will also identify new possibilities for improving the efficiency and cost effectiveness of the provision of information to senators and others interested in the work of the Senate. Work on creating an online collection of *Journals of the Senate* from federation will also be finalised.

In cooperation with the other parliamentary departments and government agencies, work will continue on arrangements for the ePPS, to increase the timeliness of departments and agencies providing documents for publication online and to enable the full text of documents to be made available through the register.

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