



Parliament of Australia
Parliamentary Budget Office

Report to the Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee on PBO activity

12 October 2016

Overview

The Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) 2015–16 Annual Report will be tabled on 12 October 2016.

In 2015–16, the demand from parliamentarians and parliamentary parties for policy costings and budget analyses increased significantly in the lead up to the 2016 general election. During 2015–16 the PBO responded to 3,251 requests, more than double the number of responses it prepared in 2013–14, the previous election year, and almost four times the number completed in 2014–15 (refer to Table 1).

The remainder of this activity report provides an update on PBO activities since the commencement of 2016–17.

Requests from parliamentarians and parliamentary parties

In the first quarter of 2016–17, the PBO responded to 576 requests from parliamentarians at an average turnaround time of 5.8 business days and a median time to completion of 6 business days (refer to Table 1). The bulk of these requests related to costings prepared for the post-election report of election commitments. The turnaround time in quarter 1, 2016-17 reflects that many of these requests had previously been completed by the PBO on a confidential basis.

In the same period, the PBO received 30 responses from Commonwealth agencies to information requests at an average turnaround time of 13.7 business days and with an average punctuality of 2.5 business days early (refer to Table 2). Table 3 contains details of the responsiveness of Commonwealth agencies to information requests during the first quarter of 2016–17.

Post-election report of election commitments

The Parliamentary Budget Officer is required, within 30 days after the end of the caretaker period for a general election, to prepare a post-election report of the budget impacts of the election commitments of each parliamentary party with five or more members in the Parliament immediately before the commencement of the caretaker period.

For each designated parliamentary party, the post-election report includes costings of all the election commitments of that party that the Parliamentary Budget Officer, in his best professional judgement, reasonably believes would have a material impact on the Commonwealth budget estimates for the current financial year and the following three financial years, along with the total combined impact of those commitments on the budget.

This report for the 2016 election was published on 5 August 2016.

Self-initiated research program

Details of the PBO's published research program for 2016–17 are set out in our 2016–17 work plan that was published on 9 August 2016.

A report on the national fiscal outlook over the forward estimates period is expected to be published in November 2016.

The remaining reports flagged in the work plan are expected to be published progressively over the course of the financial year.

Capacity building and information management

The PBO continues to acquire detailed datasets and develop models covering major demand driven expenditure programs and elements of the tax and transfer system to further improve the PBO's responsiveness and the quality and reliability of our costings and budget analyses.

The PBO implemented a new workflow management system on 4 May 2016 that has already yielded significant efficiency improvements in our work practices.

External engagement

The PBO continues to engage on a regular basis with government agencies, peer organisations and international institutions and bodies.

At the request of the Parliamentary Budget Office of the Republic of South Africa, the Parliamentary Budget Officer participated in the 2016 African Parliamentary Budget Office Conference in August 2016, held in Cape Town, South Africa.

PBO staffing

The PBO has a staffing establishment of approximately 40 positions and receives additional funding every third year in the lead up to a general election to boost its staffing. At 30 September 2016, the PBO had 45 staff (refer to Table 4), which reflects the increase in staff associated with the lead up to the general election. In addition, the PBO currently has two secondees under the 2016 Parliament of Australia graduate program.

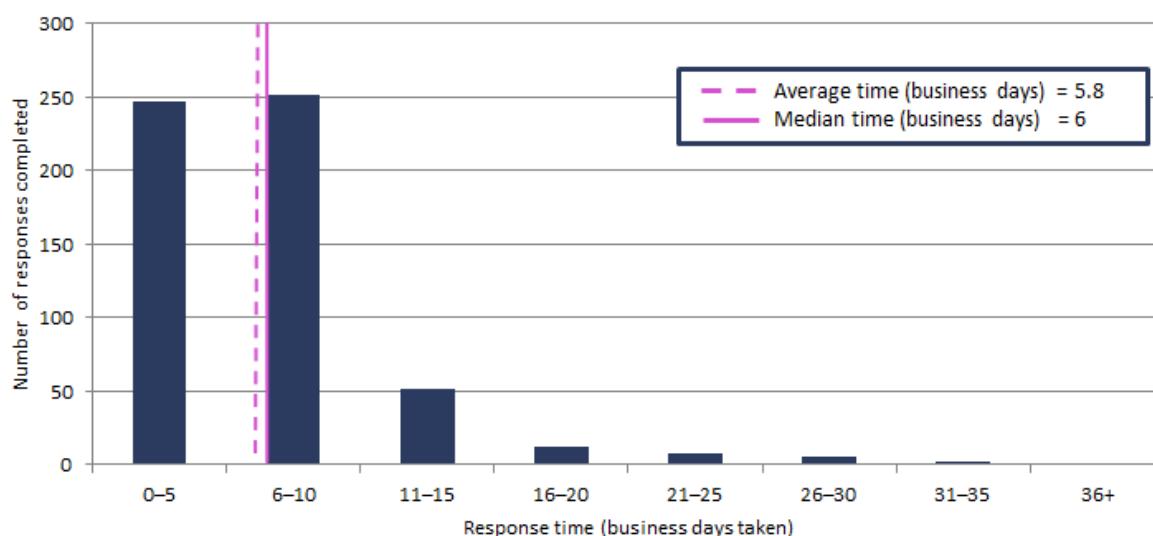
Requests from parliamentarians and parliamentary parties for costings and budget analyses

Table 1: Costing and budget analysis requests from parliamentarians and parliamentary parties to 30 September 2016

	2012–13	2013–14	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17
	Total	Total	Total	Total	Q1
Requests outstanding at start of period	–	463	76	138	20
Requests received in period	1,146	1,297	973	4,146	787
Requests withdrawn in period	19	162	42	1,013	28
Requests completed in period	664	1,522	869	3,251	576
Average time to completion (business days)	33.9	13.8	19.7	18.6	5.8
Median time to completion (business days)	n/a	6	12	16	6
Requests outstanding at end of period	463	76	138	20	203

Note: The table identifies the number of ‘options’ received by the PBO, noting that a single request can contain multiple options.

Figure 1: PBO response times for completed requests in 2016–17 to 30 September 2016



Requests by the PBO for information from agencies

Table 2: Information requests to agencies to 30 September 2016

	2012–13	2013–14	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17
	Total	Total	Total	Total	Q1
Requests outstanding at start of period	–	28	16	3	1
Requests sent in period	360	388	203	743	36
Requests received in period	332	400	216	745	30
<i>Requests received by due date</i>	149	209	147	695	29
<i>Requests received after due date</i>	183	191	69	50	1
Percentage late	55.1	47.8	31.9	6.7	3.3
Average time taken to respond (business days)	13.1	12.6	13.5	6.5	13.7
Average punctuality (business days late)	3.0	5.3	2.9	-1.3	-2.5
Average lateness of late requests (business days)	6.5	11.9	11.2	3.5	1.0
Requests outstanding at end of period	28	16	3	1	7

As at 30 September 2016, no requests were overdue.

Figure 2: Agencies’ response times for completed information requests in 2016–17 to 30 September 2016

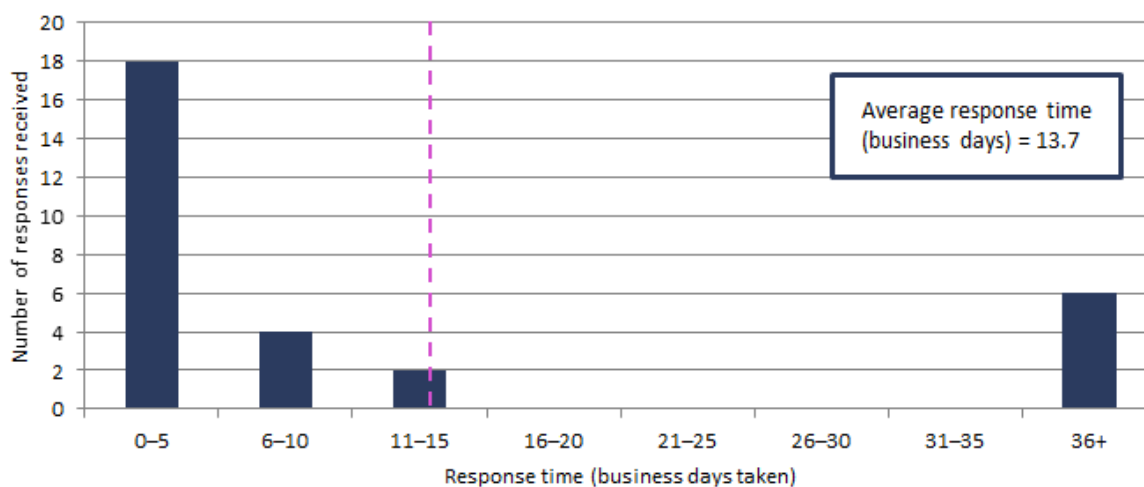
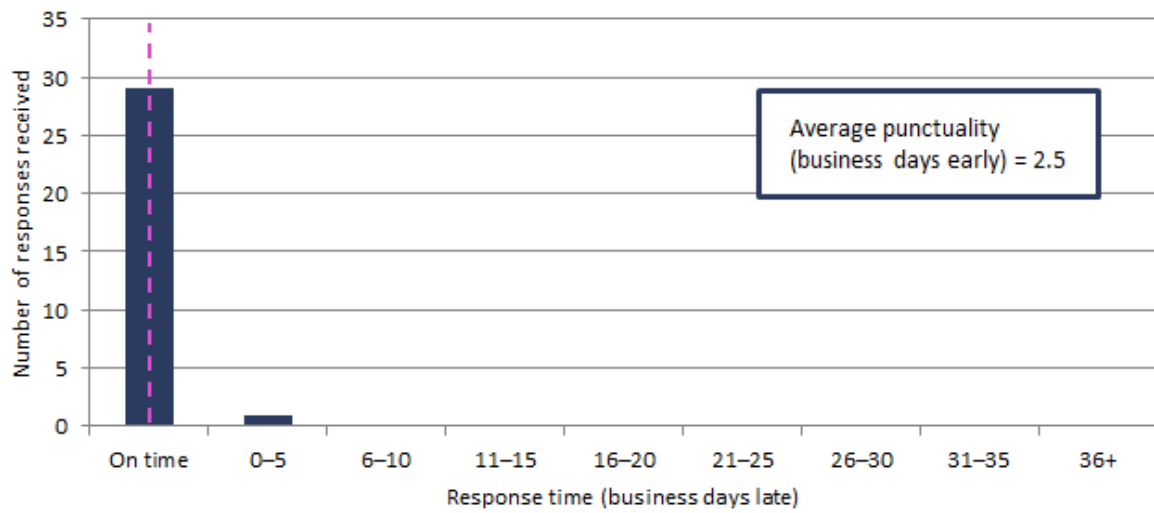


Figure 3: Timeliness of response by agencies to information requests in 2016–17 to 30 September 2016



'On time' responses include responses provided before the due date.

Table 3: Information request responsiveness by agencies in 2016–17 to 30 September 2016

Department/Agency	Requests sent in period ¹	Responses received in period	Average time taken to respond (business days)	Responses received after due date	% Late	Responses outstanding at end of period	Responses overdue
Australian Bureau of Statistics	1	0	0.0	0	0%	1	0
Australian Competition and Consumer Commission	1	1	11.0	0	0%	0	0
Australian Taxation Office	13	9	1.3	0	0%	4	0
Department of Agriculture and Water Resources	2	2	3.5	0	0%	0	0
Department of Education and Training ²	1	1	118.0	0	0%	0	0
Department of Employment	1	1	2.0	0	0%	0	0
Department of Finance	1	1	3.0	0	0%	0	0
Department of Human Services	1	1	6.0	1	100%	0	0
Department of Immigration and Border Protection	0	0	0.0	0	0%	0	0
Department of Industry and Science	1	1	5.0	0	0%	0	0
Department of Social Services ²	7	7	29.9	0	0%	0	0
Department of the Environment	2	2	5.5	0	0%	0	0
Department of the Treasury	6	4	6.5	0	0%	2	0
TOTAL	37	30	13.7	1	3%	7	0

¹ Includes one outstanding request as at 30 June 2016 carried over to 2016–17.

² The timeframes for these agencies are affected by the provision of highly detailed microdata sets that require the agency providing the data to undertake data extraction, checking and cleansing work prior to provision of the requested information.

PBO staff by function and employment level

Table 4: PBO staff by function and employment level as at 30 September 2016

Classification	PBO Executive	Budget Analysis Division	Fiscal Policy Analysis Division	Corporate Strategy Branch	Total
Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO)	1	–	–	–	1
Senior Executive Service Band 2 (SES B2)	–	1	1	–	2
Senior Executive Service Band 1 (SES B1) ¹	–	2	1	1	4
Parliamentary Executive Level 2 (PEL2)	–	4	2	2	8
Parliamentary Executive Level 1 (PEL1) ¹	–	13	4	1	18
Parliamentary Service Level 6 (PSL6)	1	7	1	–	9
Parliamentary Service Level 5 (PSL5)	–	–	–	2	2
Parliamentary Service Level 4 (PSL4)	–	–	–	1	1
Total staff²	2	27	9	7	45

¹ One ongoing SES B1 and two ongoing PEL1 employees are on long term leave without pay and are not included in these totals. In addition, one PEL1 employee is on secondment to the Australian Taxation Office and is not included in the above totals.

Figure 4: PBO staff by function and employment level as at 30 September 2016

