

The Senate

Committee of Senators' Interests

Enhancement of the online Register of
Senators' Interests

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Chapter 1

1.1 Since 2011, the Register of Senators' Interests has been published online on the committee's [webpage](#). The Register comprises an alphabetical list of senators, with each senator's statement of registrable interests and any alterations ('statements') attached individually in pdf format. The webpage includes the current Register for the 46th Parliament and the registers from the previous two parliaments (as well as all tabled volumes of the Register of Senators' Interests since the scheme began in 1994).

1.2 From the commencement of the current parliament, a new facility was introduced to enable senators to fill out and lodge their statements through an online forms system (rather than filling out forms and providing them in original hard copy to the Registrar). The system generates a digital statement which is published in pdf format to the online Register. The new system has improved the transparency of the Register as the statements generated are more accessible, both searchable and readable for people using assisted technologies, than the previous forms, many of which contained hand written entries.

1.3 In an effort to further improve the transparency of the Register, the committee has discussed the desirability of enabling the Register *as a whole* to be searched and results reviewed and compiled.

1.4 The committee requested advice from the Department of Parliamentary services (DPS) regarding the development of a searchable database of information contained in the Register, accessible from the website. The approach recommended by DPS involves the creation of a database that draws from the new online forms system, and a user interface to enable members of the public to search the contents of the online Register via the database. The search function would enable users to search by senators' names, by state and party and other keywords, and filter and sort the content. The solution would build on the existing parliamentary web content management system and will meet cybersecurity requirements. The search function would be made available on the committee's website, located with the Register of Senators' Interests.

1.5 Following the receipt of advice from DPS, the committee agreed that this enhancement project should be undertaken, pending endorsement by the Senate which it seeks through recommendation 1 of this report.

1.6 This enhancement relates only to the ability to more effectively search the publically available content of the Register; it does not involve any change to the disclosure requirements themselves. The current timeframes and process for lodging forms, and the way in which they are published in the online Register will also remain the same.

1.7 Noting that the database will draw its information from the online forms system, the data that will be available to search will be dependent on the use of the online forms. The online form system was introduced at the start of the current Senate

and senators are still transitioning to the new system. The current Register therefore contains a mix of statements lodged using the online forms and statements lodged using the old process.

1.8 The beginning of the next Senate marks the point at which all senators must provide fresh statements, presenting an opportunity to move to the compulsory use of the online forms system and the availability of a complete data set. The committee will be in a position to give further consideration to the implementation timeframe and issues relating to the available dataset after the project has commenced. Any administrative outcomes will be reflected in the committee's rules relating to the administration of the Register.

1.9 The committee will oversee all aspects of the project, including having input into development and implementation. The committee will approve the final product prior to implementation and provide advice to senators in advance.

Recommendation 1

1.10 That the Senate endorse the enhancement of the online Register of Senators' Interests to create a search function, as outlined in this report.

Catryna Bilyk
Chair

November 2019