



Auditor-General for Australia



3 March 2017

Mr George Christensen MP  
Chair  
Joint Committee on Publications  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Christensen

### **Inquiry into the printing standards for documents presented to Parliament**

The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) is committed to the principles of digital first publishing and tabling.

Having extensively consulted external stakeholders, in December 2015 the ANAO ceased publishing and distributing additional hard-copies of audit reports and transitioned to printing the minimum number of hard copies required to meet the *Guidelines for the Presentation of Documents to the Parliament*.

To support our digital first approach the ANAO has invested strongly in our website in order to enhance digital publishing technology. The response to the ANAO shifting to an online-only format has been very positive, including at the early consultation phase.

To meet the Parliamentary printing standards, the ANAO estimates that it takes a minimum of six days to prepare and deliver audit reports for tabling in Parliament. Of the six days, four is dedicated to print processes. The Parliamentary printing standards in respect to format, covers and bindings requires us to engage a printing firm, as there is no internal capability to prepare audit reports to these standards. It would be cost prohibitive and inefficient to source the equipment and capability required to meet these standards.

Reducing the number of published audit reports has resulted in significant cost savings. Between the 2014-15 and 2015-16 periods, the ANAO printing costs were reduced by around \$300 000. Having recently approached the market for printing services, our experience has been that a reduced print run does not necessarily translate to a lower cost per unit. In addition, there are a limited number of local print providers with capability to meet our

requirements. Engaging an interstate provider would lengthen the print processes, requiring additional time for delivery to Parliament House.

The independent Review of Whole-of-Government Internal Regulation (Belcher Red Tape Review) recommended in August 2015 that the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Department of Finance work with relevant entities and Parliament to develop a system for the electronic tabling of government documents. The ANAO supports a review of the Parliamentary printing standards, and more broadly the *Guidelines for the Presentation of Documents to the Parliament*, as it is quite possible that by utilising technology a much richer and more up-to-date set of information can be made available to the Parliament in a more real-time basis.

As an interim measure to full electronic tabling, the ANAO would be supportive of approaches to streamline the presentation of hard-copy documents to the Parliament. This could include a change in the physical size of tabled documents to A4, and an adaption to the presentation standards to allow, for example, self-production of tabled documents to eliminate our reliance on an external print provider and realise further cost and time savings.

The ANAO also encourages and supports a continuation of the trend toward a reduced number of copies required for Parliamentary tabling. Based on our observations, substantial quantities of delivered tabled reports, and particularly those that go to the press gallery, are surplus to requirements.

Considering the ANAO's positive experiences in shifting to an online-only format, we would welcome any opportunity to contribute to the development of a system for electronic tabling, including as a pilot entity.

Yours sincerely



Grant Hehir

Auditor-General for Australia