

**RESPONSE OF THE PRESIDING OFFICERS TO THE
REPORT OF THE
JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLICATIONS:**

**“DISTRIBUTION OF THE
PARLIAMENTARY PAPERS SERIES”**

September 2006

“Distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series”

Response of the Presiding Officers to the report of the Joint Committee on Publications

Changes to the eligibility guidelines

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the eligibility guidelines for the Parliamentary Papers Series be amended to include Commonwealth government departmental libraries.

The Presiding Officers support the principle of meeting the needs of Commonwealth government departments and consider this can be achieved under the current guidelines.

The Presiding Officers amended the eligibility guidelines with effect from January 2006 generally to exclude Commonwealth government departmental libraries.

Many departmental libraries have no need to receive the complete series, which includes documents covering a wide range of government and parliamentary activity. With improved electronic access to documents and the option of seeking individual copies directly from author agencies it is feasible for those departments with occasional need for particular documents to access or acquire them individually.

Only four government departments have objected to the change in the guidelines.

The current guidelines provide for appropriate addressees as determined by the Presiding Officers. The Presiding Officers have determined that departmental libraries with a clear need to receive the series will be accommodated under this discretion. Examples include the libraries of departments with whole of government responsibilities, such as the Department of Finance and Administration, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and the Department of the Treasury. The same approach is taken in respect of other whole of government agencies, such as the National Archives of Australia and the Australian National Audit Office.

It is therefore unnecessary to amend the guidelines as key agencies with a role in monitoring activity across departments will receive the series under current arrangements.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that recipients of the series be regularly surveyed to ascertain whether they wish to continue receiving Parliamentary Papers.

Agreed.

Periodic surveying of recipients will ensure that lists are current and ascertain whether recipients still wish to receive hard-copies of the PPS. The Chamber departments will survey recipients at least once each Parliament.

Methods of distributing hard copies of parliamentary papers

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Chamber departments:

- *continue to monitor agency compliance with the requirements of the Parliamentary Papers Series; and*
- *report to the Committee, by 30 June the following year, any defaulting agencies.*

Agreed.

In 2006 the committee wrote to Ministers in relation to agencies which had not yet complied with the requirements for the 2003 and 2004 series. The Chamber departments will continue to monitor compliance and advise the Committee accordingly.

Recommendations 4 and 5

The Committee recommends that, due to the costs passed on to recipient libraries being in excess of the savings realised by the Chamber departments, blister packs of parliamentary papers continue to be available to eligible recipients.

The Committee recommends that recipients of the Parliamentary Papers series be surveyed to ascertain whether they wish to receive the series as loose pamphlet copies or as a blister pack.

Rather than accepting these recommendations in relation to blister packs, the Presiding Officers propose to meet the requirements of agencies seeking to produce bound volumes by distributing untrimmed copies of Parliamentary Papers.

The May 2005 decision of the Presiding Officers to discontinue distribution of blister packs was made primarily because of the delays in receipt of stock from a small number of author agencies which meant that the series was often significantly out of date when received.

Under the changes to the guidelines for the provision of the Parliamentary Papers Series effective from 2006, all recipients would receive, free of charge, a pamphlet copy only.

The Presiding Officers have now determined that previous recipients of blister packs will be given the option of receiving either a pamphlet copy or an untrimmed copy at the time of initial distribution. This will enable libraries and other organisations to continue to produce bound volumes of the Parliamentary Papers series, while at the same time preventing the distribution of documents from becoming significantly out of date. The Department of the House of Representatives will continue to provide

indexes for bound volumes and the Chamber departments will continue to allocate Parliamentary Papers Numbers.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the guidelines for the provision of the Parliamentary Papers Series be amended to read as follows:

- *that libraries of States, State Parliaments, tertiary education institutions, Commonwealth Departments, the main national or parliamentary library of a country which has an exchange with the National Library of Australia, and appropriate addressees as determined by the Presiding Officers, be entitled to be supplied, on request, with either:*
 - ⇒ *one free copy of each Parliamentary Paper; or*
 - ⇒ *one free collated set of the Parliamentary Papers Series.*
- *that trade, business, employer, employee, professional, commercial and similar organisations including members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery and newspapers, be not entitled to receive free distribution of the above;*

that the Presiding Officers advise current recipients on the free distribution list when the revised distribution scheme becomes operative, and instigate checks, from time to time as they consider necessary, to ascertain whether recipients desire to continue to receive their entitlement.

The Presiding Officers' response to this recommendation is subsumed in the action proposed in response to previous recommendations, particularly recommendations 1, 4 and 5.

Recommendations 7 and 8

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government Information Management Office monitor agency compliance with the Library Deposit and Free Issue Schemes and provide a report, detailing defaulting agencies, to Parliament by no later than 30 June the following year.

The Committee recommends that the Tabling Officer of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet write to each recipient of the internal Parliament House document distribution to determine their stock requirements.

Supported. No action required by the Chamber departments.

Recommendations 9 and 10

The Committee recommends that, where possible, any duplication between the Library Deposit and Free Issue Schemes and the Parliamentary Papers Series be eliminated.

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government Information Management Office, together with the Department of the House of Representatives and the Department of the Senate, investigate methods to reduce the duplication between the Library Deposit and Free Issue Schemes and the Parliamentary Papers Series. A report of their findings is to be supplied to the Committee within six months

of the tabling of this report, and any changes implemented within a further six months.

Supported in principle, subject to investigation of relevant issues and statutory requirements. The investigation should be undertaken with a view to eliminating duplication if it appears to be significant and inappropriate.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that the printing standards for documents presented to Parliament be strictly adhered to. The Committee will monitor compliance with this recommendation and will regularly report to the Parliament those agencies not adhering to the standards.

Supported.

Electronic distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series

Recommendations 12, 13 and 14

The Committee recommends that the Australian National Audit Office regularly monitor the online availability of government documents, especially those presented to Parliament.

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government Information Management Office continue to work with agencies to ensure that all government documents are made available online.

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government Information Management Office take steps to ensure that documents presented to Parliament are permanently available online, including encouraging the use of persistent identifiers to online information.

Supported. No action required by the Chamber departments.

Recommendation 15

The Committee recommends that any digital versions of the Parliamentary Papers Series augment the hard copy series.

Supported.

The hard copy series will continue.

Recommendation 16

The Committee recommends that agencies provide a website link, for all documents to be presented to Parliament, to the Tabling Officer of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. This link is to be included in the daily list of documents scheduled for presentation to Parliament, which is circulated to Members and Senators.

Supported. No action required by the Chamber departments.

Recommendation 17

The Committee recommends that the Chamber departments investigate providing an online list of Parliamentary Papers with hyperlinks to those documents on agency websites.

Agreed, subject to implementation of recommendation 16. The Chamber departments already provide an online list of Parliamentary Papers.

Recommendation 18

The Committee recommends that the legal deposit provisions of the Copyright Act 1968 be extended to include electronic copies of documents.

Supported.

Recommendation 19

The Committee recommends that the Department of the House of Representatives and the Department of the Senate, in consultation with the Australian Government Information Management Office and other stakeholders, investigate and implement the development of an online digital repository for the Parliamentary Papers Series.

The documents constituting the Parliamentary Papers Series should be available online in order to provide community access. Author agencies and the Australian Government Information Management Office have a role in maintaining the online availability of documents. Unnecessary duplication of effort and expense should be avoided.

A virtual repository is desirable, but the scale of such a repository and the resources needed to maintain it would be very considerable. A significant investigation is necessary before any commitment can be made beyond the recognition of the desirability of such a compilation. Appropriate action in response to recommendations 13, 14, 16 and 17 will be an important step towards ensuring long-term electronic access to documents.

The Chamber departments will consult with key stakeholders and expert organisations including the National Library of Australia. The project to replace the ParInfo application may provide a vehicle for considering the nature of the necessary document repository. The Department of the Senate tabled papers digital imaging project will progressively provide online access to all documents in the PPS except House of Representatives committee and departmental documents.

Recommendation 20

The Committee recommends that, to complement the Department of the Senate's digital imaging project, the Department of the House of Representatives investigate the digital imaging of House committee reports presented from 1901 to 1996 and making these available online.

Supported in principle.

The Department of the House of Representatives will investigate the feasibility of such a project.

Cost recovery and subscriptions to the Parliamentary Papers Series

Recommendation 21

The Committee recommends that any cost recovery measures are only applied to partially recover the administrative costs of the Chamber departments.

Agreed.

The Chamber departments do not currently recover costs from recipients. Author agencies bear printing costs.

Recommendation 22

The Committee recommends that all recipients of the series be offered additional copies of the series by subscription, in either pamphlet or blister pack. Organisations that previously received the series should be offered an opportunity to subscribe to the series.

Supported in principle.

The Chamber departments will investigate the demand for additional copies by subscription.

Recommendation 23

The Committee recommends that the Chamber departments set the price for a subscription to the Parliamentary Papers Series, and annually report to the Committee:

- *the cost of a subscription to the series; and*
- *the organisations subscribing to the series.*

Supported in principle, subject to the results of investigations under Recommendation 22.