

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

**INQUIRY INTO THE
DEVELOPMENT OF A DIGITAL
REPOSITORY AND ELECTRONIC
DISTRIBUTION OF THE
PARLIAMENTARY PAPERS SERIES**

November 2010

Inquiry into the development of a digital repository and electronic distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series

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

Introduction

On 24 June 2010 the Joint Committee on Publications tabled its report on its *Inquiry into the development of a digital repository and electronic distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series*.

The committee examined the feasibility of developing an electronic Parliamentary Papers Series.

The Parliamentary Papers Series (PPS) is 'a comprehensive collection of information that documents public policy formulation and administration of government since Federation'.¹ It includes all the documents of a substantial nature that have been tabled in either or both the Senate and the House of Representatives, such as parliamentary committee reports but also documents provided by the executive. Although the PPS includes papers prepared by and for the executive, it is administered by the Departments of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

The committee made seven recommendations. All relate to the responsibilities of the Parliament. The Presiding Officers are pleased to respond to those recommendations, noting that the response to recommendation 5 relates only to those documents that originate within the Parliament. It is also a matter for Government to respond to, in relation to the documents prepared on their behalf.

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that an electronic PPS be developed and implemented.

Agreed in principle. The Presiding Officers agree that emergent technology and wide spread acceptance of these developments now are such that there is an expectation that the documents provided to Parliament to inform its deliberations be available on line. Other Parliaments are already making similar papers available on line to foster an open and transparent democratic process. While the majority of government documents presented to the Parliament are available online, they are not accessible from a central repository and long-term access is not assured.

The response to this recommendation will be further informed by the business case (recommendations 2 and 4).

¹ Parliamentary Joint Committee on Publications (2010), *Inquiry into the development of a digital repository and electronic distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series*, p. 3. PP No.160/2010

Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that the parliamentary departments undertake a business case to examine issues relating to the maintenance of electronic records and long-term archival requirements that would be required in developing an electronic PPS.

Agreed. The Presiding Officers have asked for a business case to be prepared. The business case is to address this recommendation as well as the issues outlined in recommendation 4. The business case is to be provided to the Presiding Officers by early 2011, to facilitate a timely commencement of the digital repository (see recommendation 6).

Recommendation 3

The committee recommends that the parliamentary departments develop a digital repository for the PPS based in the Parliament.

Agreed in Principle. The Presiding Officers note the Government's response to the Joint Committee on Publications' report on the *Distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series* (PP No. 114/2006) indicating that the '[R]esponsibility for ensuring that documents presented to Parliament are permanently available online rests with ...² the parliamentary Chamber departments. The Presiding Officers are prepared to accept that this is a responsibility of the Parliament. However, author agencies are responsible for providing the documents for tabling and, to allow the development of a cost effective digital repository, author agencies will need to provide electronic copies on a timely basis and in the required formats as recommended by the business case (see recommendation 5).

Recommendation 4

The committee recommends that a business case, referred to in recommendation 2, also include:

- *The scope for other tabled documents not in the PPS to be made available through the repository; and*
- *The costs placed on the parliamentary departments to provide the repository.*

Agreed. See comments under recommendation 2.

Recommendation 5

The committee recommends that author departments and agencies be required to provide electronic copies of documents at the same time print copies are provided for tabling in the Parliament.

Agreed. The Presiding Officers support this recommendation. Electronic copies of documents which have been ordered to be printed or made a parliamentary paper and which have originated with either chamber department or the Department of Parliamentary Services will be provided for inclusion in the digital PPS.

² Departments of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and Finance and Administration, 2006 Government response to Parliamentary Joint Committee on Publications (2006), *Distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series* (PP No. 114/2006), p. 3.

It is our view that the provision of the electronic documents at the same time the print copies are provided for tabling will assist in ensuring the documents included in the series are identical to those that are tabled. We have no reservations about the misuse of embargoed documents as access will be dependent on tabling. Such issues are routinely managed by the Table Offices of the Chamber departments.

This is also a matter for the Executive as many of the documents currently included in the PPS originate with executive departments. The Presiding Officers note the current requirements by AGIMO for departments and agencies to verify that the on-line versions of documents tabled in Parliament that are posted on websites, are identical to the documents that have been tabled. The use of this process in the provision of electronic copies of documents for inclusion in the PPS will vouch for the integrity of the electronic and tabled versions. Ultimately, the responsibility for ensuring that both versions are identical can only lie with the author agency.

Recommendation 6

The committee recommends that a digital repository for the PPS be in production and accessible to users by early 2011, to coincide with the start of the 2011 PPS.

Agreed in principle. The Presiding Officers note that the scope of the digital project will be subject to the findings of the business case. The executive's preparedness to provide the electronic format for inclusion in the PPS will be a very important consideration.

Recommendation 7

The committee recommends that the chamber departments administer a digital repository for the PPS.

Agreed in Principle. The Presiding Officers note that the administration of the printed Parliamentary Papers Series resides with the Department of the Senate and the Department of the House of Representatives and agrees that their responsibilities should be extended to include responsibility for a digital repository.

The Presiding Officers note that the Parliamentary departments may have some additional capital outlays in establishing the digital PPS. The business case will examine the costs associated with it and these will be considered in the budgetary context of the Parliamentary departments.