

The use of colour and illustrations

Background

2.1 The Committee has been aware for some time that an increasing number of agencies are using colours and illustrations in their annual reports. In 1989 the then Chair of the Committee commented to the House of Representatives that:

... it would appear that the primary purpose of preparing a report for the scrutiny of the parliament is being overshadowed by a perceived need to produce an elaborate and expensive self-promotional document.¹

2.2 Prior to the commencement of this inquiry, the Committee analysed all government documents (not including delegated legislation, petitions or those presented *ad hoc* during debate) presented between 8 August and 7 November 2006 and found that 51 per cent were printed using a single colour for text and up to half included a photograph or other illustration.

¹ *House Hansard*, 30 November 1989, p. 3281.

The Standards as at 30 March 2006

2.3 The Standards, as at 30 March 2006, state that:

Report covers may be printed in full colour.

Black ink is to be used for text and illustrations; however an additional colour may be used if essential for the proper understanding of information such as complex maps or diagrams ...

Line drawings, graphs, charts, photographs and other illustrations may be included, provided they are essential to a better understanding of subjects discussed in the text.²

2.4 Witnesses were very positive about retaining the provision of the Standards allowing full colour covers. The Committee will continue to permit full colour covers but encourages agencies to exercise restraint in this respect.

2.5 In relation to the use of colour printing within the body of a document, the Committee maintains that, for the majority of documents presented to Parliament, black text on white paper is more than adequate. Examples of such documents include delegated legislation, presented in the House of Representatives as 'Deemed documents' and in the Senate as 'Clerk's Documents', and Portfolio budget statements.³

2.6 Throughout its inquiry, the Committee received evidence that suggested there was scope to adjust the Standards to allow for more flexible use of colour and illustrations. This chapter outlines the evidence received in relation to the use of colour and illustrations in documents presented to the Parliament. The chapter concludes with the Committee's comments on, and assessment of, the evidence detailed here.

2 See http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/publ/printing_standards.htm and Appendix C.

3 Ms Robyn McClelland, Department of the House of Representatives, *Transcript of evidence*, 18 June 2007, p. 10; Mr Sandi Logan, Department of Immigration and Citizenship, *Transcript of evidence*, 18 June 2007, p. 4.

The use of colour

2.7 As noted above, the Committee is of the view that black text on white paper is sufficient for most documents presented to the Parliament. In relation to more substantial reports and documents included in the PPS, several agencies reported that the provisions of the current Standards (black plus one colour for text, with a full colour cover) met their needs for annual reports and other documents.⁴

Arguments for changing the Standards

2.8 The Committee also received extensive evidence arguing that the Standards be revised to allow for more flexible use of colour, particularly in annual reports. A number of issues were identified in support of the argument for greater flexibility, including:

- an audience beyond the Parliament;
- graphs and diagrams;
- graphic design;
- online publishing;
- enhancing readability; and
- annual report awards.

An audience beyond the Parliament

2.9 Although the Parliament remains the primary consideration when designing and publishing a document, additional effort may be expended in making a report more attractive to an external audience.⁵

2.10 The National Capital Authority (NCA) acknowledged that annual reports have indeed developed a secondary function of providing information to stakeholders other than the Parliament, such as the general public. A report produced in strict compliance with the Standards might not appeal to other stakeholders, and it is not

4 Department of Veterans' Affairs, *Submission 8*, p. 2; Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, *Submission 9*, p. 3; Mr Jansson Antmann, Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources, *Transcript of evidence*, 18 June 2007, p. 5.

5 Mr Russell Wilson, Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources, *Transcript of evidence*, 18 June 2007, p. 6; Mr Sandi Logan, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

necessarily cost effective to produce separate reports.⁶ The current Standards may therefore limit the extent to which annual reports are able to carry out this secondary, extra-parliamentary function.

- 2.11 The increased use of colour may be beneficial for documents intended for distribution to a wider audience for communications or marketing reasons.⁷ The NCA stated that a high quality document helps their position among potential sponsors and corporate organisations.⁸ The Committee notes that this was also the rationale behind allowing higher production standards for Class 3 documents (as detailed in Chapter 1) prior to the current Standards being introduced.

Graphs and diagrams

- 2.12 Colour is most commonly used in graphs and diagrams. This is already provided for in the current Standards, albeit limited to one additional colour, "if essential for the proper understanding of information".⁹
- 2.13 The APSC submitted that colour "is an essential tool in the presentation of complex charts, tables, diagrams etc".¹⁰ Their *State of the Service* report, which is used widely across the Commonwealth public service and contains "a lot of data, tables, graphs, et cetera would benefit from being able to make far greater use of colour".¹¹
- 2.14 Similarly, NCA reports deal with planning documents and maps where the inclusion of colour is very useful.¹²

Graphic design

- 2.15 The Committee heard that the requirement to use only two colours is not restrictive in terms of the design process. Being restricted to the

6 National Capital Authority, *Submission 4*, p. 1.

7 Mr David Finlayson, Attorney-General's Department, *Transcript of evidence*, 18 June 2007, p. 32.

8 Mrs Tanya Boulter, National Capital Authority, *Transcript of evidence*, 18 June 2007, p. 15.

9 See http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/publ/printing_standards.htm and Appendix C.

10 Australian Public Service Commission, *Submission 5*, p. 1.

11 Ms Karin Fisher, Australian Public Service Commission, *Transcript of evidence*, 18 June 2007, p. 5.

12 Mrs Tanya Boulter, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

use of only two colours may, however, involve more work to convert graphs and/or illustrations that have been submitted in full colour.¹³

- 2.16 This supports the claim made by the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) that added design complexity, as a result of colour restrictions, can increase the cost of producing a document:

Where agencies are seeking to produce reports in restricted colours but at the same time to present subtle differences in illustrations ... the graphic design task becomes markedly more complex. Graphic designers have to invest more time ... and employ more time-consuming shading techniques ...¹⁴

Online publishing

- 2.17 The Government Online strategy stipulates that once documents are presented to Parliament they are required to be published online.¹⁵ These documents are published in a variety of formats, including Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) and Portable Document Format (PDF).
- 2.18 The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) reported that the online versions of reports are more attractive if in colour, and that black and white graphs and images do not translate well to the Internet. It considers creating one document for both hard copy and online distribution to be more cost-effective than creating separate documents for these two purposes.¹⁶
- 2.19 The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) noted that the use of colour can provide a design linkage between the online and hard copy versions of a report, as well as with other key documents such as corporate and strategic plans.¹⁷

Enhancing readability

- 2.20 The presentation of a document is important in ensuring that it is read and understood.¹⁸ The Department of Health and Ageing (DHA)

13 Mr Jansson Antmann, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

14 Australian Public Service Commission, *op.cit.*, p. 2.

15 See <http://www.agimo.gov.au/information/oiso>.

16 Mr Sandi Logan, *op.cit.*, pp 4 and 16.

17 Department of Veterans' Affairs, *op.cit.*, p. 1.

18 Australian Public Service Commission, *op.cit.*, p. 2.

submitted that an aesthetically appealing document encourages people to pick it up and read it.¹⁹

- 2.21 Adding colour to a document can be useful for breaking up blocks of text, making the document more manageable, and encouraging the reader to continue reading it.²⁰ However, it was pointed out that it is not necessarily colour that enhances the readability of a document, but that the layout and design may be more significant factors.²¹

Annual report awards

- 2.22 The Committee was concerned to receive evidence that full compliance with the Standards may disadvantage agencies when competing for annual report awards.²² The Committee is concerned that this may result in the encouragement of practices that are not in line with the principle of achieving value for money. It may also produce an environment not conducive to innovation and creativity.

Cost implications of colour printing

- 2.23 In light of the numerous arguments offered in support of the Standards providing more flexible use of colour, the Committee also considered detailed evidence regarding the differential costs between using single colour and full colour printing. The main aspects covered related to technological advances in the printing industry, and the technique of colour 'bleeding'. These are discussed in more detail below.

Advances in printing technology

- 2.24 The Committee's main objection to the extensive use of colour has been the additional cost involved. Previous investigations by the Committee found an increase in costs of approximately 70 per cent for four colour printing when compared to two colours.
- 2.25 Representatives of the Printing Industries Association of Australia (PIAA) stated that, in recent years, there have been significant

19 Department of Health and Ageing, *Submission 6*, p. 1.

20 *ibid.*; Mr Russell Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 15; Ms Robyn McClelland, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

21 Ms Tanya Boulter, *op.cit.*, p. 15; Mr Kieran May, Printing Industries Association of Australia, *Transcript of evidence*, 18 June 2007, p. 17.

22 Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, *op.cit.*, p. 4; Ms Sarah Tink, Department of Defence, *Transcript of evidence*, 18 June 2007, p. 33.

advances in printing technology, delivering both high quality print outcomes and cost savings.²³ These new technologies are not as labour-intensive, preparation time has been substantially reduced and the new multicoloured presses require a sheet of paper to pass through only once, instead of up to three times as was previously the case.²⁴

- 2.26 As a result of technological advances in the printing industry, full colour is now nearly as cost-effective as black and white or two colour printing.²⁵ The Committee heard that the cost differential between single colour and full colour printing may now be as low as 10 to 20 per cent.²⁶
- 2.27 It should be noted, however, that even a small percentage increase in the cost of printing a large document can still represent a considerable overall cost increase.²⁷

Bleeding

- 2.28 The Committee notes with concern the increase in the use of colour 'bleeding' in reports, particularly annual reports, presented to the Parliament. This technique involves colour being printed to the edges of a page, so that there is no white margin.²⁸ This has been applied by some agencies in the form of coloured tabs at the edge of pages, aiding in navigating through different sections of a report.²⁹
- 2.29 Colour bleeding dramatically increases printing costs. It makes trimming each page more difficult and therefore requires larger sheets of paper to be put through printing presses or, alternatively, fewer pages to be printed on each sheet.³⁰ This increases the costs of labour and materials and, therefore, the overall printing cost of the document.

23 Printing Industries Association of Australia, *Submission 7*, p. 3.

24 Mr David Daniel, Canprint Communications Pty Ltd, *Transcript of evidence*, 18 June 2007, p. 4.

25 Mr Barry Neame, Printing Industries Association of Australia, *Transcript of evidence*, 18 June 2007, p. 3.

26 Printing Industries Association of Australia, *op.cit.*, p. 3; Mr Sandi Logan, *op.cit.*, p. 4.

27 Mr Russell Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

28 Mr David Daniel, *op.cit.*, p. 8.

29 Department of Veterans' Affairs, *op.cit.*, p. 2.

30 Mr David Daniel, *op.cit.*, pp 7-8; Mr Kieran May, *op.cit.*, p. 8.

- 2.30 Evidence varies as to the magnitude of cost increase as a result of colour bleeding. The DIAC suggests an increase in the order of 10 to 15 per cent, and the DVA submits that there is little additional cost involved.³¹ CanPrint Communications, however, advises that colour bleeding increases printing costs by 60 per cent.³² The PIAA notes that this discrepancy is likely a result of variation between different printing companies, and reflects differences between their printing presses and practices.³³

The inclusion of illustrations

- 2.31 Throughout the inquiry process there was almost universal support for the Standards to provide for more flexible use of illustrations, especially photographs. The Committee heard that illustrations:
- add to the understanding of issues;³⁴
 - demonstrate the diversity of programs and client groups;³⁵
 - highlight achievements;³⁶ and
 - improve readability and clarify information.³⁷
- 2.32 Illustrations are currently permitted under the Standards, albeit restricted to circumstances where such illustrations are “*essential* to a better understanding of subjects discussed in the text” (emphasis added).³⁸ The term ‘essential’ may be an overly strict test, particularly as the Committee did not receive any evidence suggesting that the inclusion of illustrations represents a significant cost burden.³⁹

31 Mr Dario Postai, Department of Immigration and Citizenship, *Transcript of Evidence*, 18 June 2007, p. 7; Department of Veterans’ Affairs, *op.cit.*, p. 2.

32 Mr David Daniel, *op.cit.*

33 Mr Kieran May, *Pri op.cit.*, p. 8.

34 Australian Public Service Commission, *op.cit.*; Department of Health and Ageing, *op.cit.*

35 Australian Sports Commission, *Submission 1*, p. 1.

36 National Capital Authority, *op.cit.*, p. 1.

37 Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

38 See http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/publ/printing_standards.htm and Appendix C.

39 Mr Richard Pye, Department of the Senate, *Transcript of evidence*, 18 June 2007, p. 33.

Committee comments

Colour

- 2.33 The Committee accepts that incorporating more colour into documents can be attractive and add interest. Interest can, however, be generated just as successfully through the use of other tools, such as clever design and layout. The Committee is therefore not convinced that aesthetic appeal, in and of itself, is an adequate argument for the relaxation of colour restrictions in the Standards.
- 2.34 Neither does the Committee consider it appropriate to amend the Standards in order to give government bodies a better chance of winning annual report awards. Rather, the Committee would welcome moves by organisations administering such awards to ensure that compliance with the Standards is taken into account by assessors when identifying meritorious reports. Any perceptions that complying with the Standards disadvantages entrants in annual report awards, could also be overcome by all government bodies entering such competitions ensuring that their entries comply with the Standards.

Recommendation 1

- 2.35 **The Committee recommends that government agencies, authorities and companies ensure that any documents they submit for consideration for annual report awards, comply fully with the *Printing standards for documents presented to Parliament* issued by the Committee.**
- 2.36 The Committee notes that various estimates were offered for the cost impact of colour ‘bleeding’, and that the actual price increase would depend on a number of variables. Notwithstanding, the Committee is of the view that colour bleeding is an unnecessary technique in government reports and does not represent value for money. The Committee therefore discourages the use of colour ‘bleeding’ and will reflect its concern with this practice by amending the Standards to specifically not permit techniques that ‘bleed’ the colour to the edge of the page.

Recommendation 2

- 2.37 **The Committee recommends that all government agencies, authorities and companies ensure that documents presented to Parliament do not involve any design elements that would result in colour ‘bleeding’ to the edge of the page.**
- 2.38 The Committee does note, however, the evolving purposes of documents published by government bodies and is sympathetic to the wish to include more colour in documents that have an audience beyond the Parliament. Similarly, the Committee acknowledges the difficulty that can be involved with producing complex graphs and diagrams with a limited range of colours. Finally, the Committee acknowledges that the production of two separate documents (full colour for online publishing, and restricted colour for hard copy printing) may not necessarily be cost effective, particularly where large documents are involved.
- 2.39 With the exception of colour ‘bleeding’, in light of the evidence provided throughout the course of this inquiry, the Committee sees some merit in full colour printing being used in some documents presented to Parliament. The Committee also notes that the evidence suggests that it is not the use of full colour printing, *per se*, that increases printing costs. Rather, the way in which colour is used determines the quantum of cost increase.
- 2.40 Nevertheless, the Committee agrees with the sentiments expressed at the conclusion of the roundtable discussion that “just because you have the ability to add many colours...[it] does not mean you should”.⁴⁰ The Committee expects government agencies, authorities and companies to continue to exercise restraint in the production standards of their documents. The use of additional colours should be necessary for the purpose of the report, and the additional costs should be weighed carefully against the expected benefits.

40 *ibid.*

Illustrations

- 2.41 The Committee has considered the many benefits offered by the inclusion of illustrations, particularly in detailed and annual reports. It also noted the absence of evidence suggesting illustrations represent a significant cost burden. The Committee is therefore supportive of illustrations being included in reports, where their inclusion has a purpose and adds to the text.

Amendments to the Standards

- 2.42 The Committee will issue revised Standards (see Appendix D), taking into account the following:
- Report covers may continue to be printed in full colour.
 - For most annual reports, black plus one colour is sufficient for text.
 - Full colour printing may be used in some circumstances, particularly where a government agency, authority or company also uses the document for the purposes of marketing or communicating with an audience beyond the Parliament. The descriptions of the former document classes (as detailed in paragraph 1.10) will be included to provide some guidance for agencies.
 - Where full colour printing is used in a report, the author body should be able to demonstrate to the Committee, if required, the necessity of using full colour in a report.
 - In determining whether to use additional colours, author bodies should have particular regard to the purpose and audience of the document and also to ensuring that value for money is being obtained.
 - Techniques that ‘bleed’ colour to the edge of the page are not to be used under any circumstances.
 - Illustrations may be included in a report, as long as the illustration ‘adds value’ to the understanding of the text.

