

Our reference: 2005/3585

Mr Jason Sherd
Secretary
Joint Committee on Publications
Parliament of Australia
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Sherd

The National Archives would like to provide the attached submission to the Committee for consideration in the current inquiry into the distribution of the Parliamentary Paper Series.

The Archives appreciates the opportunity to provide comments. For any questions in regard to the submission please contact Ms Colleen McEwen, Director, Information Management. She can be contacted by telephone on (02) 6212 3732, or by email at colleen.mcewen@naa.gov.au

Yours sincerely,

James Barr
Deputy Director-General
National Archives of Australia

20 October 2005

Submission by the National Archives of Australia to the Inquiry into the Distribution of the Parliamentary Paper Series

Introduction

The National Archives of Australia (NAA) appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to the Joint Committee on Publications Inquiry into the Distribution of the Parliamentary Paper Series.

Currently the Archives receives one blister pack of Parliamentary Papers, which it binds. For a number of years we also received loose pamphlet copies, which we found a most useful resource. The bound copies are located in the National Archives' central library located in Canberra, where they are made available to both staff and researchers using the archival collection. Staff in State Offices are provided with copies of papers from the central library to support their work if required.

The NAA library, which manages the PPS, would be classified as a small government library comprising of 9,000 titles.

Before providing comments on the Terms of Reference we would like to describe the role and functions of the Archives to assist the Committee's understanding of our requirements.

The role of the National Archives

The NAA promotes best practice in the management of government records from the point of creation for as long as they are required to support the needs of government and the people. The Archives selects, preserves and makes available for research to present and future generations the most valuable records.

The Archives:

- is a budget funded Executive agency within the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts;
- under the *Archives Act 1983* has responsibility to identify, preserve and make available Commonwealth records of enduring value, and to provide advice on managing records;
- has holdings of records totalling about 50 million items and provides appropriate storage arrangements and an archival management framework where the records and their administrative context are described;
- appraises government records to determine retention periods and disposal action and legally authorise these decisions;

- advises government on good recordkeeping practices through the development and promulgation of standards and policies;
- responds to reference inquiries from members of the public in reading rooms and through a remote reference service and assist members of the public conduct research using the records;
- carries out activities to promote access to archival records including mounting exhibitions, producing publications, providing websites and running education and events programs.

Terms of Reference

From the perspective of the National Archives the following comments are made against the Terms of Reference.

The potential impact of changes to the distribution of the PPS made by the Presiding Officers, namely the tightening of eligibility guidelines and the cessation of blister packs to commence on 1 January 2006.

In order to fulfil functions detailed in the *Archives Act 1983*, the National Archives needs to receive the annual blister packs. Specifically:

- In its role as the Commonwealth's archival organisation, carrying out the functions noted above, NAA officers responsible for the arrangement and description and illuminating government records of enduring value transferred into archival custody, refer to the PPS to assist in providing essential details on the administrative context which created the records. The PPS, therefore, supplements and adds value to the archival holdings. The Parliamentary Paper series is an efficient collation of reports documenting core government and Parliamentary business and while most reports are available from individual agency websites, it is time consuming to locate them and expensive to print them out.
- Reference staff and researchers who visit the Canberra Reading Room (the most frequented National Archives Reading Room with 12,660 visits from both public and official researchers recorded for 2003-04) have an ongoing requirement to refer to the Parliamentary Papers, again to place the records in their administrative context and to provide details of the government decision making process to assist their research.
- Discontinuing the blister packs and replacing them with the loose pamphlet set, would require libraries to manage a large number of single items to ensure a complete set is available for binding. Such a requirement would place an extra administrative burden on the National Archives' library and other small libraries.

The provision of the PPS in a digital format, either as an alternative or an adjunct to the hard copy series.

- The provision of the PPS in a digital format as an adjunct to the hard copy could be useful, particularly for a distributed library such as the National Archives library. However, to make this service effective all papers would have to be accessible on one site, rather than scattered on the various sites of agencies responsible for preparing the tabled papers.
- We do not support the provision of the PPS in a digital format as an alternative to the hard copy series. The way both NAA staff and Reading Room researchers use Parliamentary Papers, ie as research tool, would require them to print a paper copy which would be an expensive option.
- If there was a decision to provide the PPS in a digital format, as an alternative to the hard copy series, there would also need to be a commitment to keep the digital copies on the web for the long-term to serve ongoing historical needs i.e. well over 30 years, the date of official release of records under the Archives Act.

The feasibility of a subscription service, either in digital or hard copy form; and the possibility of partial or full cost recovery for the series.

- From the Archives' perspective a subscription service for the acquisition of the PPS would be preferable to not receiving the papers in hard copy at all. However, it should be noted that a full cost subscription service would have a significant impact on the budget of small libraries.