

## **Department of Education, Science and Training**

### **Submission to Joint Committee on Publications Re: Inquiry into the distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series**

The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) would like to thank you for the invitation to make a submission to the 'Inquiry into the distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series (PPS)'.

The Parliamentary Papers Series is an important record of documents of a substantial nature that are presented to the Parliament and represents a valuable resource to Australian Government departments. Staff at DEST use the series on a regular basis as a source of information in support of DEST operations, so continued access is very important.

The Department notes that Parliamentary business is of interest to many sectors of the community and considers wide access to parliamentary papers is an important issue not only for this Department, but for the broader community.

DEST notes that many Australian Government agencies now charge for access to information, but where this model is adopted, the approach used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) provides a sound approach to reconciling the need for wide access compared with cost recovery. The ABS provides basic information free of charge, but charges for more detailed information.

The scale of charges is also an important issue in terms of providing community access to Parliamentary papers.

The following responses are provided in respect of each of the Terms of Reference.

#### **Tightening of eligibility guidelines**

As a Government Department, DEST requires access to Parliamentary Papers as soon as possible after they have been tabled in Parliament in order to conduct its daily business. A DEST staff member may need to refer to the Papers in order to answer Questions on Notice, develop Ministerial submissions and advice, answer questions for Senate Estimates, answer public enquiries and create reports in a timely and effective manner. If DEST no longer received the Parliamentary Papers, important papers may have to be accessed via Inter-library loan. This may affect DEST's ability to answer questions and produce reports in a timely manner.

#### **Provision of the PPS in a digital format**

DEST would prefer hard copy of parliamentary papers. DEST accesses Parliamentary Papers electronically on a regular basis but would be concerned if this was the only format available. The Department has experienced times when the electronic format has not been available due to broken links or electronic pages being unavailable and has had to rely on the print version. Another issue with electronic formats is currency and continued access.

For example, will the electronic copies continue to be loaded onto the Parliamentary website in a timely and efficient manner and remain available? A print copy remains on the shelf for staff members to access indefinitely, whereas an electronic version is only available as long as the electronic link, media or application(s) are maintained. Long term access to Parliamentary Papers has been an issue in the past and is even more of an issue in the present constantly

changing electronic environment. There are many issues involved in maintaining electronic archives due to technology refresh and the fact that many applications are not backwards compatible.

### **Subscription service**

DEST requires a standing order for all PPS publications and does not favour the introduction of a subscription service. If a subscription service were to be introduced, DEST would prefer the subscription to be annual, rather than on an administratively burdensome case by case basis.

### **Partial or full cost recovery**

A number of Australian Government Departments charge for their services, but DEST notes that the PPS contains core Australian Government information which needs to be freely available to enable government business to be undertaken in a timely and efficient manner

DEST's attitude to the introduction of charges would depend on their scale, but DEST is of the view is that the PPS should have a wide distribution, broader than to just Australian Government Departments. Consequently any charges should not be of such a scale as to limit wide community availability.

### **Conclusion**

Australian Government organisations such as DEST require uninterrupted access to the Parliamentary Papers Series, in both paper and electronic format, as a source of information to perform their business operations and brief their Ministers effectively and efficiently. DEST requests that the existing system be continued and enhanced.