

Introduction

The Joint Committee on Publications

- 1.1 The Joint Committee on Publications (the Committee) is atypical in that it is comprised of two separate committees: the Publications Committees of the House of Representatives and the Senate. The major role of each Publications Committee is to make recommendations, to its respective House, on presented documents that should be included in the Parliamentary Papers Series (PPS).
- 1.2 The committees may meet separately, but may also meet together as a Joint Committee, in which case they have the additional power to “inquire into and report on the publication and distribution of parliamentary and government publications and on matters referred to it by a Minister”.¹
- 1.3 The power to conduct inquiries has been utilised only 13 times since the Committee’s establishment in 1970.

1 House of Representatives Standing Order 219 and Senate Standing Order 22.

Printing standards for documents presented to Parliament

Purpose

- 1.4 The *Printing standards for documents presented to the Parliament* (the Standards) are prepared by the Committee. The Standards ensure that documents selected for inclusion in the PPS conform to the series' requirements.
- 1.5 The Standards provide guidance for agencies in the following areas:
- production quality and value for money;
 - use of colour and illustrations;
 - paper size and type;
 - covers and binding;
 - number of copies required for the PPS; and
 - corrections.
- 1.6 The current printing standards, as at 30 March 2006, are at Appendix C.

Application

- 1.7 Even though the Standards are designed to ensure conformity among the documents that comprise the PPS, the Committee considers that they apply to all documents that are presented to Parliament. Documents not considered for inclusion in the PPS, such as treaties, delegated legislation and the reports of parliamentary delegations are not specifically mentioned in the Standards but comply with most, if not all of the requirements.²
- 1.8 The Standards are supported by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPM&C). The DPM&C's *Guidelines for the presentation of Government documents to the Parliament*³ defers to the

2 Ms Robyn McClelland, Department of the House of Representatives, *Transcript of evidence*, 18 June 2007, p. 10.

3 Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Guidelines for the Presentation of Government Documents to the Parliament (including Government Responses to Committee Reports, Ministerial Statements, Annual Reports and Other Instruments)*, June 2006, see http://www.dpmc.gov.au/guidelines/docs/guidelines_govt_docs.pdf.

Standards, as does the *Requirements for Annual Reports for Departments, Executive Agencies and FMA Bodies*.⁴

- 1.9 The Standards do not apply to documents that are not presented to Parliament.

Previous practice

- 1.10 Prior to the commencement of the 40th Parliament in 2002, documents were divided into three Classes:

Class 1 – reports which include information (text) only, eg returns under bounty Acts or the annual report under the Bankruptcy Act. The production standards are limited to black ink only, no illustrations etc.

Class 2 – reports with a wider readership than Class 1, eg reports of most departments and authorities. Higher production standards are acceptable in terms of paper quality – black and white illustrations and limited use of colour in text are among the main features.

Class 3 – reports of authorities in active competition in the private sector or where considerations of national prestige are paramount. Production standards are appropriately higher – more expensive paper may be used, colour illustrations are permitted etc.⁵

- 1.11 To exceed these standards, a department or agency would have needed to seek, and be granted, an exemption from the Committee. These exemptions usually related to the inclusion of colour and were almost always granted. Committee records from the 38th and 39th Parliaments show that these exemptions became an increasingly large proportion of the Committee's workload.
- 1.12 The current Standards were then issued at the beginning of the 40th Parliament and the onus for complying with the Standards was placed on agencies themselves.

4 Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Requirements for Departmental Annual Reports - Document as approved by the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit*, June 2007, see http://www.dpmc.gov.au/guidelines/docs/annual_report_requirements.pdf.

5 Australian Government Printing Service, *Circular 23*, as cited in Joint Committee on Publications, *Annual reports of Commonwealth Departments and Statutory Authorities*, Canberra, 1979, p. 14.

Action taken by the Committee in the current Parliament

- 1.13 In 2005 the Committee wrote to several agencies whose 2004-05 annual reports did not fully comply with the Standards in terms of colour and illustrations. Responses from these agencies provided assurances that value for money was being achieved.
- 1.14 At this time the Committee also sought information from a large Canberra-based printer on the comparative costs of two- and four-colour printing, which indicated that a four colour process would be approximately 70 per cent more expensive than two colours.
- 1.15 On 30 March 2006, the Committee amended the Standards to permit a full colour cover, but limited text to only two colours.
- 1.16 In May that year, the Standards were referred to in the Committee's report on the distribution of the PPS. The Committee at that time suggested that service-wide savings could be made if the Standards were adhered to and indicated that it would continue to monitor the issue.⁶

The inquiry

- 1.17 On 1 March 2007, the Committee resolved to undertake a formal inquiry into the Standards and adopted the terms of reference at page vii of this report.
- 1.18 In April 2007, the Committee issued a discussion paper, which was posted on the Committee's website and sent to all government departments and a large selection of government agencies, authorities and companies that regularly present documents to the Parliament. These organisations were invited to comment on the discussion paper or to make other comments on the Standards.
- 1.19 The inquiry was publicised in the House Committees advertisement in *The Australian* newspaper on 11 April 2007 and *The Bulletin* magazine on 17 April 2007.
- 1.20 The Committee received nine submissions, which are listed at Appendix A.

6 Joint Committee on Publications, *Distribution of the Parliamentary Papers Series*, Canberra, 2006, pp 24-25.

- 1.21 A roundtable discussion with stakeholders was held in Canberra on 18 June 2007. Details of the participants of this discussion are at Appendix B.

