

## **Part 1—Secretary’s review**



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An effective parliament requires excellent support services and administration. For the Australian Parliament, these functions are provided by the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS), and the two chamber departments.

There is considerable detail in the body of this report about the wide range of services which DPS provided to support the Parliament in 2007-08. However, before delving into detailed issues, I would like to reflect on the big picture events in the life of the Parliament, against which the performance of DPS should be judged for financial year 2007-08. I will also briefly outline some of the challenges and work programs for DPS for 2008-09 and beyond.

The early focus of 2007-08 for DPS was to assist the 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament to complete its business, prior to the November 2007 federal election. This included the conclusion of Committee work as well as business in both Chambers.

As a result of the change of government, in November and December 2007 DPS worked with the Department of the House of Representatives and the Department of Finance and Deregulation to facilitate induction of 42 new members of the House of Representatives, as well as the considerable logistics of "moving out/moving in" for offices within the House of Representatives, and the Ministerial Wing. Staff from many parts of DPS were involved in these changeover processes, which assisted the commencement of operations of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament.

A post-election changeover process, such as that in November–December 2007, involves many obvious tasks, but also some other less obvious tasks, such as the need for all of our Parliamentary Security Service staff to quickly memorise the identity of the 42 new Members of the House of Representatives; the logistical challenge of disposing or recycling large volumes of unwanted paperwork from the offices of departing Members and Ministers; providing briefings to new Members and their staff about important services such as that provided by the Library Research staff; and setting up computer access in Parliament House and each electorate office.

As we moved into 2008, it became clear that the new Government wished to hold two major events in Parliament House, namely the Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples and the Australia 2020

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Summit. For both of these events, many DPS groups and individual staff were actively involved in preparations and the actual events. Numerous staff have commented to me about how they were personally moved by the Apology ceremony.

In addition, in May 2008, DPS played a major role in celebrating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the new Parliament House.

Finally, as we approached the end of the financial year, DPS staff worked with the Department of the Senate to facilitate the departure of 14 retiring senators and the induction of 14 new senators, including a similar but smaller "moving out-moving in" process to that which had occurred in November-December 2007.

I also note that in terms of parliamentary activity, the last six months of 2007 were quieter than usual as a result of the election, while the first half of 2008 was back to business as usual in both chambers, together with a robust program of Committee work.

Although I joined DPS late in 2007-08, it is clear to me that the staff and management of DPS were strong contributors to a busy year in the overall life of the Australian Parliament. I thank all staff for their contribution.

In parallel with the parliamentary and Government activities outlined above, it is important to reflect that other DPS staff provided services less directly linked to the parliamentary cycle. For example, during 2007-08 there were some 867,220 visitors to Parliament House, including school groups. The visitor experience of these people was greatly enhanced by our guides, Parliament Shop staff, and our parliamentary security staff. In addition to the National Apology and the 2020 Summit events, Parliament House was the venue for some 114 events in the Great Hall and 96 in the Mural Hall. The success of these events was largely a result of the contribution of DPS staff and our events/catering contractors.

Finally, the overall program of building and landscape maintenance and upgrade continued, and we were able to achieve a further 27% decrease in water consumption compared with 2006-07. Once again, our building maintenance and landscape staff can take pride in all of their achievements.

Along with the program of service delivery outlined above, it is also important to recognise the major improvement programs that were completed or initiated across DPS in 2007-08. These include four

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separate strategic plans for Information Technology, Water, Energy and People. At a more tangible level, improved waste recycling systems were established for Parliament House, the new ParlInfo IT system approached completion, new catering contractors were appointed, and the arrangements for a Childcare Centre were advanced to the point that both Houses were able to approve the new facility in June 2008. Some important trials of different lawn grasses were also initiated, so as to minimise future water consumption.

Overall, 2007-08 was a year of considerable accomplishment for the staff of DPS. Some of the key DPS contributors were recognised through Australia Day Achievement Medallions (see page 29).

As we look ahead into 2008-09 it is important to identify the key challenges for the next few years. Some of the challenges are about how the Department operates, notably the need to improve our project delivery performance; excellent new project management systems were implemented in 2007-08 and these should result in timely and cost-effective delivery of future projects. Another issue for the Department is to fully understand our customer/client base; while we have a very strong focus on the needs of Senators and Members, and the business of the two Chambers and related Committees, there are many other events occurring in and around Parliament House where our focus has been less effective.

In 2008-09 we also need to proactively tackle the issue of climate change and water shortages in the Murray-Darling Basin. We have already taken difficult interim decisions to "turn off" numerous water features around the building, and to initiate grass trials and energy audits. An overall climate change plan is now required.

A further challenge is that our budget outlook is very constrained. A stark reality is that the operating budget (around \$116 million) for DPS in 2008-09 is very similar to the combined budgets of the three predecessor agencies in 2000-01 (around \$115 million), even though the Consumer Price Index (CPI) increased by over 30% in that same period. Moreover, it is becoming clearer that the amount of Committee work and Chamber time is now moving to levels well above those experienced for the three years of the 41<sup>st</sup> Parliament (when the Government held majorities in both Chambers). This increased activity is already affecting the work of DPS.

The staff of DPS can take pride in the various productivity initiatives that have facilitated continued delivery of high quality services, but

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further emerging cost pressures (including those relating to a heightened level of parliamentary and committee activity) point to a need to operate very frugally in 2008-09 and the years beyond.

On a more positive note, in my brief time as Secretary I have identified a significant strength for the Department, and this relates to the pool of talented individuals within DPS. The table on Page 8 provides a sample of these capabilities. By harnessing this diversity of talent we should make a huge contribution to the challenges I have identified.

Against this background, the work program for DPS for 2008-09 will include five key priorities.

- We plan to deliver a wide range of "improvement" projects for Parliament, including the new ParlInfo IT system and the new Childcare Centre.
- We will strengthen our client focus across the full range of customers/clients of Parliament House.
- A climate change action plan will be developed.
- We will ensure we maintain a program of infrastructure maintenance and prudent modernisation.
- We expect to continue with "normal" service delivery, albeit operating very frugally.

To deliver this program we will harness the diverse skills of DPS staff, and build on existing initiatives such as recognising staff through the Australia Day Achievement Medallions Program.

Before I conclude, it is appropriate to recognise some significant changes in key office holders.

On 11 January 2008, the first Secretary for DPS, Hilary Penfold QC, left to take up her appointment as Justice of the ACT Supreme Court. Ms Penfold was Secretary of DPS for four years. She successfully brought together the three predecessor agencies, established a sense of unity across DPS, and implemented highly effective administrative systems. Her intellectual rigour is well respected by DPS staff and many other building occupants.

On 12 February 2008, the Hon. David Hawker MP completed a four-year term as the Speaker, and Mr Harry Jenkins MP was elected as the new Speaker.

I wish to thank the former President of the Senate, Senator the Hon. Alan Ferguson, and Speakers, the Hon. David Hawker MP and Mr

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Harry Jenkins MP, for their support of DPS through 2007-08. On behalf of all DPS staff, I also thank Hilary Penfold for her leadership since 2004, and extend my thanks to David Kenny who acted as Secretary from January 2008 through to May 2008.

I commend the rest of this report to the reader as a useful record of the achievements of DPS for 2007-08. I look forward to working with the Presiding Officers, DPS staff and the chamber departments to deliver ever-better services while tackling some major challenges.

Alan Thompson

**Maintaining the flagpole**

Our cover photo depicts DPS staff and contractors engaged in safety equipment checks. The image captures the moment they enter the cage, just before the approximate 100m ascent up the south-east leg of the flagpole above the roof of Parliament House.

The insert shows the workers about to emerge from the carriage onto the platform to travel further up the flagpole.

These photos were taken by Brett Goodhew of Content Management Branch from the Opposition Leader’s courtyard. Other photos throughout the report were taken by Patrick Gallagher and Pat Gallagher also of Content Management Branch.



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### ***Skilled people***

DPS employs some 900 people with a wide range of diverse skills. The following list, whilst not exhaustive, captures some of the capabilities of our talented people:

- Library management
- Publishing
- Arts collection and management
- Document and file management
- Policy and legislation research in, for example, social policy, politics, foreign affairs, economics, defence, science and statistics
- Broadcast services—development, operation and maintenance
- Hansard recording
- Security services
- Visitor guides
- Retailing
- Heritage preservation and environmental science
- Landscape services / horticulture / gardens
- Building and facilities maintenance, including carpentry, plumbing, electrical, cabinet-making, mechanical trades
- Project management
- IT hardware and software development operations and maintenance
- Telecommunications
- Finance
- HR services and Occupational Health and Safety
- Facilities and events management
- Nursing services
- Administrative skills