



Outcome 1— Effective provision of services

The Department of the Senate has a single overarching outcome.

Outcome 1—Effective provision of services to support the functioning of the Senate as a House of the Commonwealth Parliament.

To achieve this, the department ensures that the Senate, Senate committees, the President of the Senate, other senators, and members of the public are provided with a broad range of advisory and support services. The department is responsible to the Senate and all senators, and maintains complete impartiality in serving them.

The department's four main areas of service provision are reflected in the following intermediate outcomes:

- effective support for the Senate and all senators
- public awareness of the Senate and its work
- effective support for the Senate committees and certain joint committees
- effective office and information technology support services for senators in their Parliament House offices.

Overall performance

The department's performance in achieving Outcome 1 is assessed using indicators that cover all the department's activities, as well as indicators that are specific to particular output groups. The department-wide assessment indicators covering quality, timeliness, quantity and price are outlined in the table below. The report on performance for each output group begins with a similar table.

REPORT ON PERFORMANCE – OUTCOME 1

Outcome 1		
Effective provision of services to support the functioning of the Senate as a House of the Commonwealth Parliament		
	Performance indicators	Performance results
Quality	The degree of satisfaction of the President, Deputy President and senators, as expressed through formal and informal feedback mechanisms, with the accuracy, quality and timeliness of advice and support and the achievement of key tasks.	Feedback from the President, Deputy President, committee members and senators about the quality and timeliness of advice and the achievement of key tasks indicated ongoing high levels of satisfaction, consistent with the results of the 2007 senators' survey. All advices, documents, publications and draft reports remained of a high standard and none was shown to be inaccurate.
Timeliness	Advice or material given on request of senator in time to be used for the purpose for which it was required. Key business documents for the Senate and its committees, including minutes, agendas, messages and schedules of amendments and reports, produced in accordance with predetermined requirements and the requirements of the Senate and its committees.	All business documents were produced, and advice was given, in accordance with predetermined requirements and agreed timeframes, in time to serve the purposes for which they were prepared.
Quantity	On the basis of recent experience, in 2007–08 the department would expect to support the Senate on approximately 60 sitting days and committees in accordance with their requirements.	The department supported the Senate on 36 sitting days, the low figure a result of an extended election period. The department supported estimates committees on 13 days and other committees in accordance with their requirements.
Price	The total price of the department's outputs in 2007–08 is estimated to be \$40.0 million (\$25.6 million departmental).	The actual cost of the department's outputs in 2007–08 was \$35.2 million (\$22.0 million departmental).

Factors influencing performance

A constant theme of the department's annual reports is that the activities of the department are determined by the requirements of senators, the Senate and its committees—requirements that are sometimes unpredictable and essentially external.

In assessing those activities, the year can be considered in three distinct phases: the end of the Forty-first Parliament, the election period, and the beginning of the Forty-second Parliament. The electoral cycle gives a general rhythm to the activities of the Senate and the department, so that a lull in some work is expected approximately every three years. As a counterpoint,

however, the election of a new government brings with it an increase in demand for the department's services.

The last weeks of the Forty-first Parliament were characterised by short, urgent committee inquiries; the government's desire to introduce and pass legislation quickly was matched by the numbers to achieve that end. In the four weeks of sitting in August and September 2007, Senate committees reported on their inquiries into 41 bills, and 61 bills passed the Senate, at an average of four bills per sitting day.

Legislative activity in the chamber was concentrated, but uncomplicated; while Senate committee recommendations on legislation which found favour with the government still found their way into bills, both in the House of Representatives and in the Senate. There were few controversial matters before committees—a mere five references other than bills were agreed to by the Senate—although a few longer term references also progressed.

This year an extended 'election break' ran from September 2007 to early February 2008. Each office reports in this annual report on the mix of ongoing tasks and project work undertaken during this period. By contrast, the change in government brought with it a range of additional tasks, including, for instance, increased demand for training and support for senators and staff in new roles and a large number of accommodation moves. Again, specific tasks are outlined in the report on performance for each office.

With the changed party numbers in the Senate, the Forty-second Parliament began with a new dynamic. Chamber and committee work continued to involve a high level of legislative activity. The number of bills passed by the Senate remained high, at 84 bills in 21 sitting days: again, an average of four per sitting day. At the same time, however, the complexity of legislative work increased, with the resumption of negotiations between the chambers on legislative disagreements. Forty-six bills were referred to committees, consistent with the high numbers seen in recent years, while the increase in general, longer term committee references and the establishment of a number of select committees also added to the workload of senators and staff during the latter part of the financial year.

Operational performance

The department provided comprehensive, timely, high-quality and cost-effective support for the operations of the Senate and its committees during 2007–08.

Many of the performance indicators for quantity are based on the expected number of sitting days. Previous reports have commented on the reduction in the number of sitting days to 60 or fewer in recent years. This year, an election year, the Senate sat on only 36 sitting days—a low figure not seen in the past 50 years and four days fewer than in 2004–05, the previous election year. The reduction was largely due to the election period, but a relatively light sitting program in the first part of 2008 also contributed.

The number of days set aside for estimates hearings and the requirements of individual committees relating to their other inquiries determine much of the demand for departmental services. Procedural and advisory support services provided by the department are highly concentrated on estimates hearing days. The number of estimates days was 13, with four committees meeting each day. The department maintained its high levels of efficiency in delivering a range of services throughout the year, including on the many days when committees met.

Many areas of the department share in common tasks, such as providing advice to senators and their staff, and publishing information on the work and role of the Senate and its committees.

REPORT ON PERFORMANCE – OUTCOME 1

The number of advices provided by the Clerk's office was lower than in previous years, because of the election period, but the range of topics covered and the level of complexity was broad and varied. A new edition of the *Senators' Guide to Procedures* was published. Further details are provided in the report on Output Group 1.

The Table Office maintained a high workload, even with the reduction in the number of sitting days, because of an increased level of legislative activity during sitting periods and ongoing major projects. The report on Output Group 2 provides further details.

The Procedure Office experienced a major change during the year in relation to the drafting and procedural advisory service, with members of the new opposition, as well as the minor parties, requesting this service from December 2007. The promotion of public awareness programs offered by the Parliamentary Education Office, the Research Section and other areas continued, as demand for such programs increased and positive feedback levels remained high. Further details can be found in the report on Output Group 3.

The support provided by the Committee Office to the Senate and certain joint committees was unevenly distributed throughout the year, because of the federal election and the light sitting pattern. The reporting timeframes for bills inquiries were tighter than ever before the election, but lengthened in the new parliament. The Senate established six new select committees during the year, a very significant increase when compared to the previous year, when no new select committees were established. These committees were staffed from resources within existing secretariats, supplemented by some external resources. The report on Output Group 4 provides further details.

The Black Rod's Office continued to provide the administrative support services required to enable senators to perform their representative and legislative duties, and departmental staff to perform their duties. These services ranged from assisting senators to move their office accommodation and delivering support services to the Chamber and committee rooms, to providing new information technology and other communication equipment to achieve a more efficient use of resources. Further details are provided in the report on Output Group 5.

The department has responded to the unpredictable nature of demands in recent years in a number of positive ways:

- by developing a more agile staffing profile—particularly in its committee secretariats, whose workloads can vary markedly in a short period of time
- by improving its reporting and planning processes to better monitor and highlight implementation of productivity measures, workforce planning requirements, risk management and compliance with financial management
- by streamlining its recruitment processes to reduce the time taken to engage new staff
- by providing in-house training and coaching to new supervisors to enable them to provide leadership, manage performance and motivate staff. Further details are provided in the Management and Accountability chapter.

Financial performance

The income statement discloses total income of \$23.6 million and a net operating surplus of \$1.6 million. This compares to a surplus of \$1.9 million reported in the previous year. In last year's report the department predicted a much tighter financial outcome for 2007–08, but because of the election year the department was still able to manage a sizeable surplus. With the resumption of the normal parliamentary cycle, including a busy sitting pattern scheduled for the second half of 2008 and several select committees in operation, the financial outcome should be much tighter in 2008–09.

EFFECTIVE PROVISION OF SERVICES

Table 1 summarises the financial resources used by the department in 2007–08, in the context of the amounts budgeted for that financial year and for 2008–09.

Table 1 Total resources for Outcome 1, 2007–08

	(1) Budget 2007–08 ^a \$'000	(2) Actual expenses 2007–08 \$'000	Variation (column 2 minus column 1) \$'000	Budget 2008–09 ^b \$'000
Administered expenses				
<i>Parliamentary Entitlements Act 1990</i>	736	200	(536)	736
<i>Parliamentary Superannuation Act 2004</i>	520	450	(70)	640
<i>Remuneration and Allowances Act 1990</i>	12,591	12,529	(62)	13,083
Total administered expenses	13,847	13,179	(668)	14,459
Price of departmental outputs				
Output Group 1—Clerk's Office	1,391	1,196	(195)	1,117
Output Group 2—Table Office	3,335	2,868	(467)	2,681
Output Group 3—Procedure Office	7,301	6,279	(1,022)	5,868
Output Group 4—Committee Office	9,255	7,961	(1,294)	7,439
Output Group 5—Black Rod's Office	4,268	3,722	(546)	3,430
Total price of outputs	25,550	22,026	(3,524)	20,535
TOTAL FOR OUTCOME 1 (Total price of outputs and administered expenses)	39,397	35,205	(4,192)	34,994
			2007–08	2008–09
Average staffing level			152	157

a Full-year budget, including additional estimates.

b Budget before additional estimates.

Satisfaction with services

The principal medium for formal evaluation of the services provided by the department is the survey of senators' satisfaction, last conducted in 2007 and due to be conducted again in early 2009.

Given the small size of the department and the close contact we have with them, many senators take the opportunity to provide formal and informal feedback to the Clerk and Deputy Clerk, program managers, committee secretariats and departmental staff at all levels. Feedback continued to indicate high levels of satisfaction.

The reports on performance for each office provide further detail of formal and informal evaluation of their services.

The performance of individual staff members was evaluated through the performance communication scheme, in accordance with the employee collective agreement. All departmental staff were assessed overall as 'effective or better'.

Scrutiny of activities

The department's annual appropriations and proposals for changes to the structure and responsibilities of the parliamentary departments continued to be scrutinised by the Senate Standing Committee on Appropriations and Staffing.

Another important mechanism for evaluation of the services provided by the department is the appearance of senior departmental officers at estimates hearings. Officers were questioned on the department's activities by members of the Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration at the additional estimates 2007–08 hearings on 18 February 2008 and the budget estimates 2008–09 hearings on 26 May 2008. Major issues considered included resourcing of Senate select committees, appropriations allocated to the department, answers provided by ministers to questions on notice, the registration of members' and senators' interests, and parliamentary privilege.

The department's activities also continued to be scrutinised by our internal auditors and the Australian National Audit Office. For further details, see 'Audit and Evaluation Committee' and 'External scrutiny' in the 'Management and Accountability' section.