

Table Office

Outputs

Programming and procedural support to the Senate and the legislative process
 Publication of formal and informal records of Senate business
 Dissemination and storage of documents
 Secretariat support to the Appropriations, Staffing and Security*; Selection of Bills; and
 Publications committees.

Performance information

Performance results

Order of Business finalised prior to sitting and progressively updated.

The *Order of Business* (the 'Red') was distributed in advance of all sittings, and continuously updated online in the *Dynamic Red*.

Procedural advice and legislative documents are timely and accurate and meet the requirements of the Senate and senators.

Advice was given proactively or as required. Legislative documents were accurate and produced within required timeframes.

Notice Paper for the current day and *Journals of the Senate* are accurately published and meet required timeframes.

All information resources were accurate and provided according to required timeframes, other than where short delays were caused by technical difficulties.

Other publications and statistics are accurate and produced to meet the required timeframes.

Tabled documents are accurately processed and stored, and available online wherever possible. Inquiries assistance is effective and supported by online information service.

Senate records were safely stored and documents were distributed in a timely manner. Inquiries were attended to within agreed timeframes.

Advice, documentation, publications and draft reports are accurate, of a high standard and produced to meet the required timeframes.

Committee meetings were held, documents provided and reports prepared within agreed timeframes.

* The Appropriations and Staffing Committee was renamed during the year.

Overview

The Table Office is led by the Clerk Assistant (Table) and has three functional areas, as shown in figure 5.

Figure 5 Elements and responsibilities of the Table Office

Executive	
Chris Reid, Clerk Assistant	
Procedural advice Business programming Production of the Senate <i>Order of Business</i> Secretariat support to the Selection of Bills Committee	
Legislation and Documents	Journals and Notice Paper
Sue Blunden, Director	James Warmenhoven, Director
Processing of legislation and preparation of supporting documentation Processing and custody of Senate records Inquiries and document distribution services Secretariat support to the Publications Committee	Production of the <i>Notice Paper</i> , the <i>Journals of the Senate</i> , the <i>Dynamic Red</i> and the <i>Senate Daily Summary</i> Collection and dissemination of statistical information Processing of questions on notice and petitions Secretariat support to the Appropriations, Staffing and Security Committee

The Table Office provided support for the Senate on each of its 65 sitting days and achieved performance results as outlined in the above table. During the year, a number of information management and publishing projects progressed or were completed, and new staff members joined the team.

Much of the work of the Table Office involves direct contact with senators and their staff, as well as other clients. This presents an ongoing opportunity to receive and respond to feedback about the services provided by the office, and that feedback continues to be positive, although problems with new technology remained, causing concern at times.

Staff numbers remained the same at an average full-time equivalent (FTE) level of 16 for 2014–15. The cost of the office was \$2.7 million (\$2.5 million in 2013–14).

Programming and procedural support

The Table Office supported the operation of the Senate by providing procedural and programming advice to senators, preparing procedural scripts for use in the chamber (1760 in 2014–15) and providing a broadcast captioning service of Senate proceedings.

The *Order of Business* (the program for each day's sitting) was prepared in draft to assist senators (and whips, especially) and published as a final edition prior to each sitting.

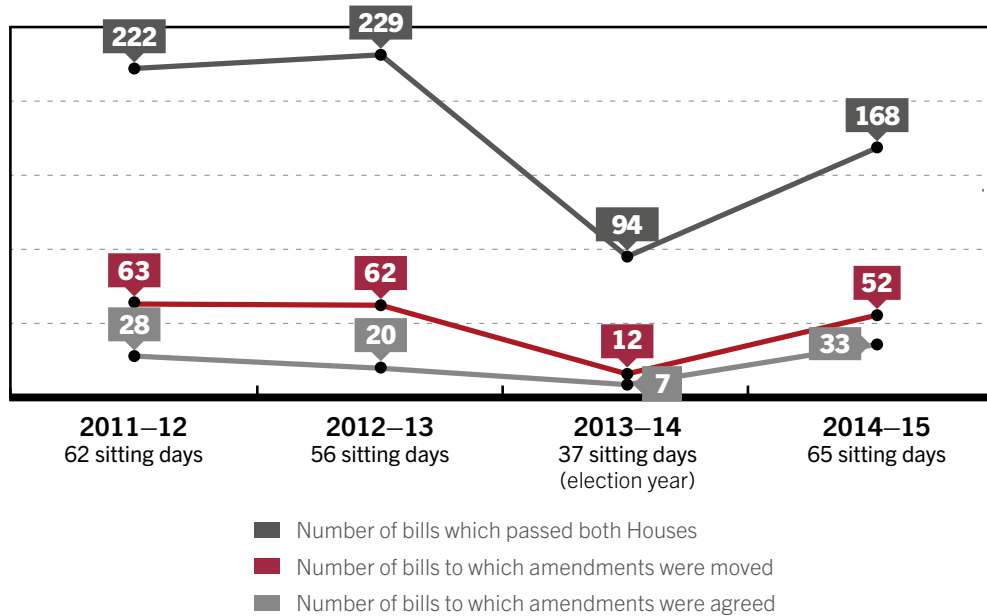
Legislation

The office facilitated the legislative work of the parliament by processing all bills considered in the Senate, preparing legislative documents, preparing third reading and assent prints of bills passed, and processing assent messages.

The office also prepared the formal messages by which the two Houses communicate on legislative and other activity. In 2014–15, 161 messages were prepared, of which 135 related to the passage of bills.

The chart in figure 6 reflects the level of legislative activity in recent years.

Figure 6 Senate legislative activity



Formal and informal records

The *Notice Paper* is the formal agenda of Senate proceedings. Two versions were published, before each sitting day: an abridged printed version, and the full, online version. The *Journals of the Senate* are the official record of decisions made by the Senate. Proof *Journals* were published online shortly after the end of each sitting day, and printed versions distributed the next morning. Official final *Journals* were produced following thorough checking of source material. In 2014–15, 65 editions of each document were produced.

The office also supported the needs of senators and others for accurate and timely information by publishing the *Dynamic Red*, which provides real-time information on the progress and outcomes of business on each sitting day. The office also publishes the *Senate Daily Summary*, *Estimates at a Glance*, the *Senate Bills List* and statistical summaries of Senate business online and in biannual editions of *Business of the Senate*. In addition, the office produced *ad hoc* statistics about Senate business, on request.

These documents and statistics were consistently produced in accordance with agreed timeframes, although technical difficulties at times caused intermittent delays in publishing real-time information on the *Dynamic Red*.

Questions on notice, notices of motion and petitions

Senators continued to use questions on notice—written questions to ministers on the administration of public policy—as an important accountability mechanism. During the year, senators asked 1747 questions on notice. These were published to an online database, and statistical information was published in the *Questions on Notice Summary*, which also includes response times.

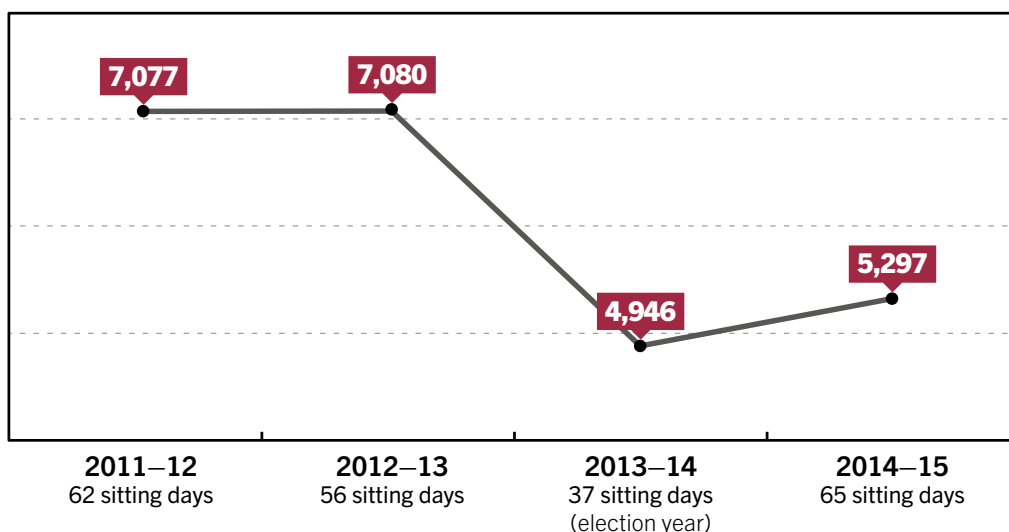
In 2014–15, the office processed and published 669 notices of motion. These signal senators' intention to move particular motions on specified days. The office also processed 31 petitions, from 134,230 signatories, which senators had lodged for presentation to the Senate.

Documents

The office received and processed 5,297 documents for presentation to the Senate during 2014–15, recorded their details in the *Journals of the Senate* and the *Index to the Papers Presented to Parliament* and archived them. Figure 7 shows the number of documents tabled in the Senate in recent years.

Documents from ministers, the Auditor-General and committees may be presented when the Senate is not sitting. The office administers this procedure, which is a useful avenue for the timely publication of material of interest to, or required by, the Parliament. In 2014–15, 552 documents (or 10 per cent of all documents tabled in the Senate) were presented using this procedure.

Figure 7 Documents tabled in the Senate



Inquiries

Copies of all documents presented to the Senate are made available through the inquiries and distribution services provided by the office. In 2014–15, 2,709 inquiries were responded to, most within five minutes of receipt and the remainder within timeframes agreed with clients.

Approximately two-thirds of all inquiries originated with senators, their staff and departmental officers, while others were received from government departments and agencies, and from media representatives and legal organisations seeking copies of documents and advice on processes and outcomes of the Senate.

Digitisation and preservation of tabled papers

Documents presented to the Senate from 1901 to 2012 are now available online through the Senate Tabled Papers database, with quality assurance processes continuing for documents that were converted from microfilm to digital format. The documents presented to the Senate during the 43rd Parliament will be the last documents loaded to the database, bringing the project to an end by June 2016. A total of 6,768,839 images have now been added to the database, including 200,753 in 2014–15.

Consistent with the department's commitment to providing more information in digital form, new systems are being developed in collaboration with DPS to facilitate the receipt and storage of tabled papers electronically, and their publication online immediately after they are tabled.

All the original documents presented to the Senate since its first meeting in 1901 are stored in Parliament House under archival conditions. Documents presented to the Senate in 2014–15 added a further 28.2 metres of shelf space to this archive.

Support for committees

During the year, the office provided secretariat support for, and prepared draft reports of, the Standing Committee on Appropriations, Staffing and Security (previously 'Appropriations and Staffing'), the Selection of Bills Committee and the Senate Publications Committee. All committee meetings were convened, and documents provided, within agreed timeframes.

Information management and publishing projects

The Table Office Production System (TOPS), used to generate essential documents such as the *Notice Paper* and the *Journals*, was first used in May 2014. Further development was undertaken, and identified defects rectified, in a second release in June 2015. The TOPS project has been one of mixed results. The new system was required to replace old, unsupported technology. It now produces the Senate's formal records and has replaced numerous databases, but has not met expectations for improved productivity nor the promise of easier compilation and better sharing of parliamentary information. Nevertheless, its future integration into parliamentary business systems under the parliament-wide ICT strategic plan is expected to advance these goals.

As foreshadowed last year, the historical *Journals of the Senate* have been converted into digital form. They were published on the Senate website in March 2015 and are now accessible and searchable as an online resource.

Performance outlook

In 2015–16, the Table Office will continue its core work of supporting the Senate before, during and after its meetings.

Technology-based projects will again feature in the year ahead. This will be a period of consolidation for TOPS and will see the arrival of a new Questions on Notice database. The office will also be involved in parliament-wide ICT projects such as ParlWork. Using data sourced from TOPS and other business systems, ParlWork will enable users to easily access parliamentary information (such as motions, bills and documents) on a range of mobile devices and computers.

Professional development will continue to be encouraged and supported, including by providing opportunities for staff to rotate into other positions within or beyond the Table Office during the year.