Table Office

Outputs

Programming and procedural support to the Senate and the legislative process.

Publication of formal and informal records of Senate business.

Receipt, dissemination and storage of documents.

Inquiries service.

Secretariat support to the Appropriations, Staffing and Security, Selection of Bills, and Publications committees.

Performance information	Performance results
Order of Business ('the Red') produced for each sitting day.	The draft and final *Order of Business* was published in advance of each sitting day.
Procedural advice and legislative documents are accurate and timely.	Advice was given proactively or as required. Legislative documents were accurate and produced within required timeframes.
Notice Paper and *Journals of the Senate* are accurate and published within required timeframes. Other publications are accurate and timely.	All information resources were accurate and published according to required timeframes, including the *Notice Paper* published in advance of each sitting day and proof *Journals of the Senate* published at the end of each sitting day (followed by final journals).
Tabled documents are processed and stored, and available online wherever possible.	Senate records were accurately recorded and safely stored and documents were distributed in a timely manner.
Inquiries assistance is effective and supported by online information services.	Inquiries were responded to immediately, or within reasonable or agreed timeframes for more complex queries.
Committees are supported; advice, documentation, publications and draft reports are accurate and timely.	Committee meetings were held, documents provided and reports prepared within agreed timeframes.

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

Rachel Callinan, Clerk Assistant

Procedural advice, programming support and production of the *Order of Business.*
Secretariat to the Selection of Bills Committee.

Legislation and Documents	Journals and Notice Paper
Ivan Powell, Director	**James Warmenhoven, Director**
Processing legislation	Production of the *Notice Paper*, and the *Journals of the Senate*
Processing and custody of documents	
Inquiries services	Processing questions on notice, orders for the production of documents and petitions
Secretariat to the Publications Committee	Secretariat to the Appropriations, Staffing and Security Committee

The Table Office provided support for the Senate on each of its 57 sitting days in this reporting period. All performance results, as outlined in the above table, were achieved within relevant timeframes. Project work was completed or has continued as forecast.

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 ad hoc feedback about the services provided by the office. In addition, a formal survey of senators' satisfaction with services was conducted in this reporting period. The results indicated a high level of satisfaction (similar to the results of the March 2017 survey), with 96 per cent of responses indicating that services provided were either 'excellent' or 'good' (the other options being 'poor' or N/A') with the clear majority being 'excellent'. The survey assisted the office to identify areas for improvement and a number of changes to processes were implemented as a result.

Staff numbers remained steady during the reporting period, with an average full-time equivalent (FTE) level of 13.3. The cost of the office was $2.3m ($2.5m in 2016–17).
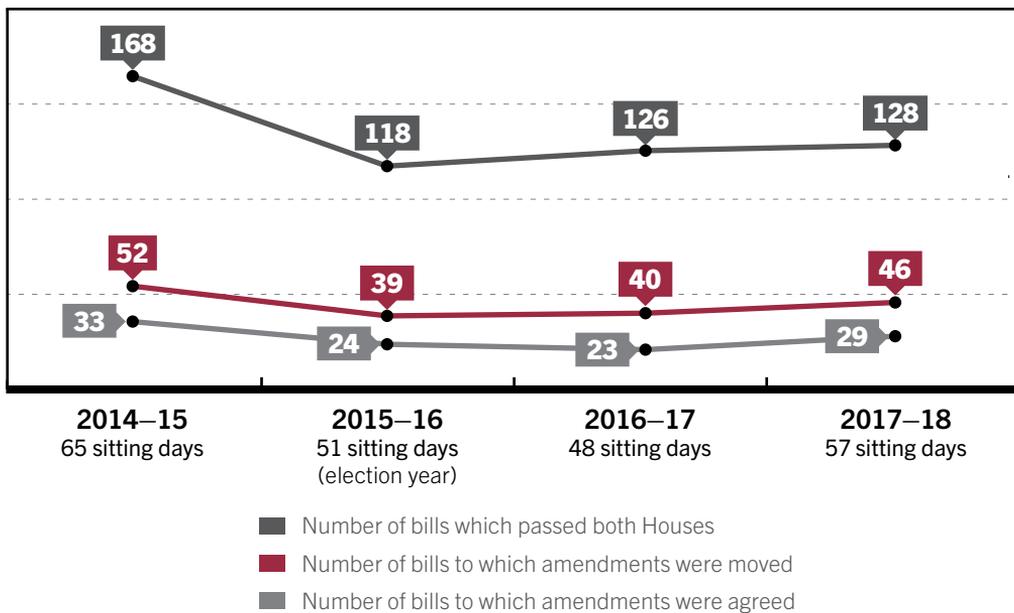
Programming and procedural support

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 (1,557 in 2017–18, 27 per sitting day) and providing a broadcast captioning service of Senate proceedings. The *Order of Business* (the program for each day's sitting) was prepared in draft form to assist senators (especially the Whips) 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 including 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 2017–18, 180 messages were prepared, of which 138 related to the passage of bills (the remaining related to matters such as committee memberships). These figures compare to 190 messages, of which 136 related to the passage of bills, in 2016–17. Figure 6 reflects the level of legislative activity in recent years.

Figure 6 – Senate legislative activity, 2014–15 to 2017–18

	2014–15 65 sitting days	2015–16 51 sitting days (election year)	2016–17 48 sitting days	2017–18 57 sitting days
Number of bills which passed both Houses	168	118	126	128
Number of bills to which amendments were moved	52	39	40	46
Number of bills to which amendments were agreed	33	24	23	29

- Number of bills which passed both Houses
- Number of bills to which amendments were moved
- Number of bills to which amendments were agreed

Formal and informal records

The *Notice Paper* is the formal agenda of Senate proceedings. The *Notice Paper* was produced and published by the Table Office in advance of each sitting day. 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. Final Journals were produced following thorough checking of source material. In 2017–18, 57 Journals and Notice Papers were produced.

Questions on notice, notices of motion and petitions

Senators continued to use the questions on notice process — written questions to ministers on the administration of public policy — as an important accountability mechanism. Throughout the year, 366 questions were asked on notice. These were processed and published to a searchable online database.

In 2017–18, the office processed and published all notices of motions received — 630 for this reporting period compared to 586 in the previous period. These notices of motion signal senators' intentions to move particular motions on specified days. The office also processed 15 petitions (with 112,233 signatories) which senators had lodged for presentation to the Senate (compared to 13 petitions with 24,071 signatures in 2016–17).
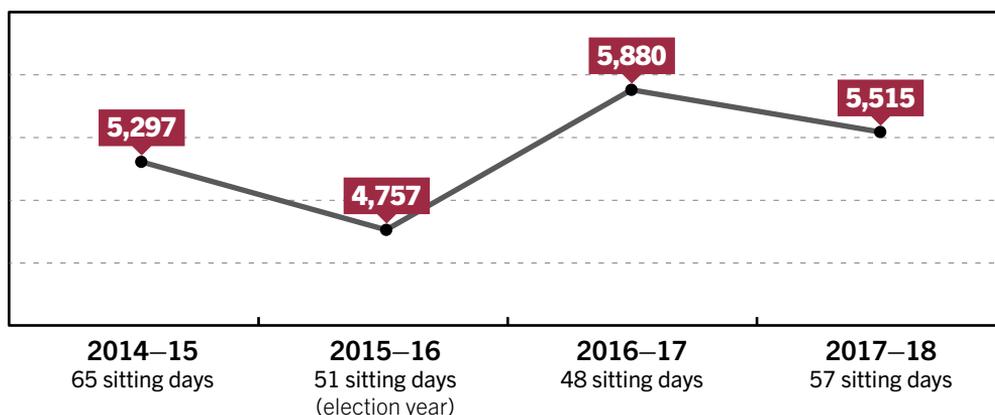
Documents

The office received and processed all of the 5,515 documents provided for tabling in the Senate during 2017–18, recorded their details in the *Journals of the Senate* and the *Index to the Papers Presented to Parliament*, and archived them. This figure is comparable to the number of documents tabled in the previous year (5,880). Documents presented to the Senate in 2017–18 added approximately 27 metres of boxed documents to the archive. 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 facilitates the timely publication of material of interest to, or required by, the Parliament. In 2017–18, a total of 627 documents (or approximately 11 per cent of all documents tabled in the Senate) were presented using this procedure. The lower number of documents presented using this procedure in the previous reporting period (398) was because there were no out-of-sitting presentations during the double dissolution period in July and August 2016.

All documents presented to the Senate in the reporting period were digitised and made publicly available in the ParlInfo database on or as soon as possible after receipt, or otherwise published on the Parliament's website (in the case of certain committee documents) or the Federal Register of Legislation (in the case of legislative instruments).

Significant work was also undertaken in the reporting period to organise and rationalise the office's holdings of hardcopy materials. This work will continue in the next reporting period to ensure the preservation of historically important material and the efficient use of the office's document storage areas.

Figure 7 – Documents tabled in the Senate, 2014–15 to 2017–18

2014–15	**2015–16**	**2016–17**	**2017–18**
65 sitting days	51 sitting days	48 sitting days	57 sitting days
	(election year)		

Values plotted: 5,297 (2014–15); 4,757 (2015–16); 5,880 (2016–17); 5,515 (2017–18)

Inquiries

Copies of all documents presented to the Senate are made available through the inquiries and distribution services provided by the office. The inquiries service also fields a range of queries about Senate proceedings from senators and their staff, government agencies and others. In 2017–18, 3,063 inquiries were received (approximately 39 per cent coming from senators or their staff). This compares to 3,416 inquiries in the previous reporting year. The majority of inquiries – which are communicated by telephone or email – were responded to immediately, with the remainder responded to within timeframes agreed with the requestor.

Support for committees

During the year, the office provided secretariat support, including the preparation of draft reports, for the Standing Committee on Appropriations, Staffing and Security, the Selection of Bills Committee and the Senate Publications Committee. All committee meetings were convened, and documents provided, within the timeframes required by the committees.

Performance outlook

In 2018–19 the Table Office will continue to serve as the secretariat to the Senate, and to certain committees.

The existing timeframes set for the provision of various services continue to remain appropriate with a few minor adjustments, as will be reflected in the 2018–19 office work plan, and reporting of non-compliance on an exception basis will be undertaken to monitor performance (and various statistics will continue to be collected).

The office will also continue to support various ICT related activities, including contributing to the ongoing maintenance, enhancements and testing of existing systems, as well involvement in projects such as the development of a new system to facilitate the electronic receipt and publication of tabled documents which will commence in August 2018.

The key staffing focus for the next reporting period will continue to be the sharing of skills and knowledge among staff in the office, as well as bringing in staff from other areas of the department from time-to-time, to ensure that expertise in relation to specific tasks is not unduly concentrated.