



DEPARTMENT *of the* HOUSE *of* REPRESENTATIVES

2012-13

ANNUAL REPORT

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Front cover image: Department of the House of Representatives entrance viewed from the Chinese gardens.

The department welcomes your comments on this report.

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HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES

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31 October 2013

Ms Anna Burke MP
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Burke

I have pleasure in submitting to you, for presentation to the House, the annual report of the Department of the House of Representatives for the year ended 30 June 2013, pursuant to section 65 of the *Parliamentary Service Act 1999*.

I am satisfied that the department has prepared fraud risk assessments and fraud control plans, and has in place appropriate fraud prevention, detection, investigation, reporting and data collection procedures and processes, that meet the specific needs of the department and comply with the Commonwealth Fraud Control Guidelines.

Yours sincerely

B C WRIGHT
Clerk of the House

About this report

The Department of the House of Representatives provides services that allow the House to fulfil its role as a representative and legislative body of the Australian Parliament.

This annual report details our activities during the 2012–13 financial year.

The **overviews** section includes a report by the Clerk of the House of Representatives, Bernard Wright, who is also the chief executive of our department. The departmental overview describes our purpose, role, organisational structure, and outcome and program structure.

The **performance** section describes the main activities of our five program components, and measures our performance against our targets during the year.

The **management and accountability** section spells out our approach to corporate governance, the management of our people and assets, and our obligations under various laws. This section also provides an outlook on the next financial year.

The **appendixes** give detailed information about our work for the House, its committees and visitors, and about our publications and staffing.

The **financial statements** show how we spent the money allocated to us by the parliament.

Finally, to aid in navigating and interpreting the report, there is a list of abbreviations and acronyms and an index.

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Clerk's review

The 2012–13 reporting period was the final full year of the Forty-third Parliament, which had seen the formation of the first minority national government in 70 years. Traditionally, at this stage of the parliamentary cycle levels of activity drop across the department as committees finalise their inquiries and other areas of the department experience a lowering of demand. However, consistent with the high levels of activity that had marked the Forty-third Parliament, the legislative, scrutiny and representational work of the House continued and the requirement for departmental staff support remained at very high levels. Importantly, throughout the reporting period we continued to make significant progress on some key longer-term institutional and corporate activities.

In addition to its significance as Canberra's centenary year, 2013 marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the opening of the new Parliament House. The occasion was marked with several special events to celebrate the work of the artists, designers and craftspeople who produced the commissioned art and craft work and the internal fit-out and fabric of the building. In June, the parliament hosted a large morning tea to thank the many employees and other workers who had contributed during the past 25 years. The celebrations were to culminate in an open day on 24 August.

SERVICE

Throughout the year, we continued to place a high priority on service provision to our clients: the House, its members and committees, our other parliamentary clients and the wider community. It was pleasing that, in spite of the increased demands on staff, respondents to the annual members' survey reaffirmed high satisfaction rates with the level of service provided by the department. Further details about the survey and responses are in Appendix 12.

The reporting period saw the election of a new Speaker and Deputy Speaker. On 9 October Ms Anna Burke MP was elected Speaker, and the Hon Bruce Scott MP was elected Deputy Speaker. As is customary, the department was pleased to provide briefings and ongoing support to these office-holders as they assumed their roles.

Our principal function is to support the proceedings of the House and Federation Chamber and of House and joint committees, and to provide advice and assistance to members. The chambers continued to meet for more hours each week than in previous parliaments, necessitating higher levels of support. The number of bills introduced remained well above the long-term average, and more bills were passed by both Houses and assented to than in either of the two previous years.

Legislative drafting services provided by the department also continued at high levels. Last year I reported that more private members' bills had been introduced in 2011–12 than in any year since Federation in 1901. In 2012–13 the number of private members' bills introduced surpassed that record figure. In addition, there was a marked increase in requests to draft amendments to government bills. The department was grateful that it could continue an arrangement entered into in 2010–11 with the Office of Parliamentary Counsel whereby a legislative drafter was seconded to work in the department on these tasks.

The unprecedented numbers of bills referred to committees by the Selection Committee continued, with a further 51 bills referred during the reporting period. Despite their increased workload due to bills inquiries, committees continued to conduct substantial inquiries into public policy issues, as well as scrutinising aspects of government

administration. Committees supported by the department presented 116 reports (including 12 which were presented by way of an oral statement), a 9 per cent increase on the previous year.

House committees continued to adopt innovative practices in engaging with the community. This was evident when, for the first time, a House committee invited the community to use social media to engage directly with members and participants in a roundtable hearing via the department's official Twitter account.

New rules for media-related activity in Parliament House and its precincts were introduced during the reporting period. The rules arose from a year-long consultation process by the Joint Committee on the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings, necessitating a significant amount of work by the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office which provides secretariat support for the committee.

PEOPLE

The department's strong performance over the year, and over the life of the parliament, was achieved through the collective efforts and dedication of staff members. Success in supporting the House and its committees and in the substantive flow of corporate and institutional work was only possible because of their continued hard work and commitment.

Throughout what was a demanding period, we continued to invest in the development of staff by supporting and encouraging training and development opportunities. A new leadership training and development program was implemented for the Executive, executive level staff, and others with supervisory responsibilities. This program has reinvigorated our leadership team. The development of knowledge and skills through the sharing of information during our regularly scheduled informal debrief sessions continued.

In May 2013 our annual planning meeting was used to identify and discuss priorities that will form the basis of a new corporate plan for the period 2013–15. It was pleasing to observe again so many staff enthusiastically contributing their views and ideas on a broad range of issues facing the department.

A key event during the year was the negotiation of a new three-year enterprise agreement which was lodged with and approved by Fair Work Australia in December 2012. I was grateful to all involved in the negotiations for their constructive participation.

The department's annual staff survey continued to serve as an important source of information on the perceptions and expectations of staff across a range of matters including job satisfaction, the quality of leadership in the department and satisfaction with pay and conditions of service. It was pleasing that this year's results showed a small increase in the overall average satisfaction index.

CAPABILITY

Several factors in 2012–13 placed further pressure on departmental resources: the House and the Federation Chamber met for additional hours, and secretariat support was needed for two new joint committees. It was important that additional funding was provided for these purposes. The role of the Standing Committee on Appropriations and Administration was critical; it continued its important function of assessing the funding requirements of the department and bringing these requirements to the attention of government.

The additional funding and the implementation by the department of further savings measures during the year resulted in a slight easing of the department's financial position. However, we will need to continue to closely monitor expense levels to remain within budget. We will maintain a careful approach to the use of resources, and continue to deliver services as efficiently as possible. The department will continue to report regularly to the Speaker and to the Appropriations and Administration Committee on these matters.

COLLABORATION

We continued to work closely with colleagues in the three other parliamentary departments. The governance framework surrounding these relationships was strengthened during the year with the commencement of quarterly meetings of the heads of the parliamentary departments. These meetings provide a valuable opportunity to consider important matters affecting the departments. This year one of the key decisions of the departmental heads was to agree to develop an overall strategic plan for parliamentary administration.

The department also took a key role in the development of a joint Reconciliation Action Plan for the parliament and this matter was considered by the heads.

Our relationships with the other parliamentary departments are also expressed through work on a number of formal boards and committees which continued to provide parliament-wide input in a range of key areas.

Following the review of ICT services conducted by Mr Michael Roche, the Presiding Officers agreed to the consolidation of ICT services in the Department of Parliamentary Services. We took a lead role in implementing new ICT arrangements and worked closely with parliamentary colleagues as responsibility for ICT for this department was transferred to the Department of Parliamentary Services effective from 1 July 2013. As part of the transition four staff members from this department were transferred to that department.

Paralleling an existing service level agreement with the Department of Parliamentary Services to provide payroll services for its staff, in July 2012 we started providing payroll services to staff of the Parliamentary Budget Office.

I am pleased that the pressures of supporting a minority parliament did not prevent us from assisting other parliaments in our region. Building on the strong collaboration established with colleagues in the Pacific region, the Pacific Parliamentary Partnerships program continued in 2012-13, and funding

of \$2.8 million over five years was secured from AusAID to fund the Pacific Women's Parliamentary Partnerships project—a project aimed at supporting women parliamentarians in the region.

OUTLOOK

The 2013-14 financial year promises to be another interesting period for the department. The impending election will see us making preparations for the Forty-fourth Parliament. The number of retiring members has ensured that there will be a significant intake of new members. We look forward to assisting them to settle into their parliamentary roles.

The election period will present an opportunity to turn our attention to some important internal projects in preparation for the new parliament. We are also preparing for the rollout of some new ICT systems that will create efficiencies in the way we work. The break in sittings will present an opportune time for staff to undertake training and become acquainted with these new systems in readiness for the new parliament.

The beginning of a new parliament is a stimulating and challenging time for departmental staff. Once it is established, our highest priority will be to continue to support the House and Federation Chamber, committees and members by providing advice and guidance and delivering services that meet members' expectations.

The finalisation of a service level agreement and asset and funding transfers will be important next steps as part of the consolidation of ICT services in the Department of Parliamentary Services. We will continue to work collaboratively with our colleagues in all parliamentary departments and will monitor the impact of these arrangements to ensure that desirable service levels are achieved.

We will continue to develop the strategic direction of the parliament's international program. Parliamentary strengthening programs will continue to be a major focus of our work in this area in the year ahead.

We will also continue to examine the ways in which we present content about the work of the House and its committees to reflect the growth of the digital publishing sector:

The long-term trend of pressure on our funding is likely to continue, but we have responded well to these pressures in the past and I have no doubt about our ability to adapt to future pressures.

Though the challenges ahead are significant, I am encouraged by the feedback from staff that the experience of supporting a hung parliament has left us well positioned to face them. Our skills and knowledge have grown and we have demonstrated our adaptability. It has again been a privilege to work with such a fine group of colleagues, and I have every confidence that the challenges the department will face will continue to be met with the dedication and professionalism that colleagues have shown over the past three years.

Departmental overview

PURPOSE

The department's purpose, as set out in its corporate plan, is:

To support the House of Representatives, and the wider Parliament, in the role of a representative and legislative body by providing advice and services of a high standard.

ROLE AND FUNCTIONS

The *Parliamentary Service Act 1999* provides the legal framework for a nonpartisan Parliamentary Service to serve the Australian Parliament. The Act establishes this department and the other three parliamentary departments—the Department of the Senate, the Department of Parliamentary Services and the Parliamentary Budget Office. The Act provides for the management, leadership and responsibilities of Parliamentary Service employees as well as the functions of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the Parliamentary Service Commissioner and the Parliamentary

Service Merit Protection Commissioner. The other parliamentary departments report separately to the parliament.

During 2012–13, the department continued its role as a service department for the parliament, supporting the work of the House of Representatives, including its members in their parliamentary work, its committees and some joint committees comprising members of both Houses. The department also maintained its focus on assistance to the House and the parliament in their relationships within Australia and internationally.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

The department is managed by its Executive, comprising the Clerk, Deputy Clerk, Clerk Assistant (Committees), Clerk Assistant (Table) and Serjeant-at-Arms. Their work is carried out through eight offices. Figure 1 shows the department's organisational structure at 30 June 2013.

Figure 1 Organisational structure at 30 June 2013

