

Table Office

Outputs

Provision of programming and procedural support to the Senate.

Processing of legislation.

Preparation and publication of the record of proceedings of the Senate; records of current and outstanding business, and statistical and other information on the work of the Senate.

Processing of tabled documents and maintenance of Senate records, and provision of a document distribution and inquiries service.

Provision of secretariat support to the Appropriations and Staffing, Selection of Bills and Publications committees.

Performance information

Performance results

Order of Business finalised and distributed prior to sittings and advice prepared proactively or as required to ensure senators can meet their duties.

The *Order of Business* was distributed in advance of all sittings. Advice was given proactively or as required.

Accurate running sheets available as soon as practicable; proposed government amendments distributed in accordance with requirements; accurate schedules of amendments and prints of bills available in accordance with predetermined requirements.

Legislative documents were accurate and produced within required timeframes.

Notice Paper for the current day and *Journals of the Senate* for the previous day available prior to sittings; accurate statistical and other documentation produced to meet the required timeframes.

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

The Senate record is accurately and safely stored; and all inquiries answered and documents distributed on a timely basis.

All documents were recorded and safely stored and documents were distributed in a timely manner.

Meetings held, documentation provided and reports produced within timeframes set by the Senate or the committee, as relevant.

Committee meetings were held, and documents and reports were provided, 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

Chris Reid, Clerk Assistant

Procedural advice
Business programming
Production of the Senate *Order of Business*
Secretariat support to the Selection of Bills Committee

Legislation and Documents

Sue Blunden, 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

Journals and Notice Paper

James Warmenhoven, Director

Production of the *Notice Paper*, the *Journals of the Senate*, the *Dynamic Red* and the *Senate Daily Summary*
Collection and dissemination of statistical information
Processing of questions on notice and petitions
Secretariat support to the Appropriations and Staffing Committee

An election year

With a general election occurring on 7 September 2013, the Senate did not meet in 2013–14 until mid-November and so sat on fewer days compared with recent non-election years. Nevertheless, the Table Office provided support for the Senate on each of its 37 sitting days and achieved performance results as outlined in the above table. In addition to providing these support services on sitting days, the office also prepared for both the Opening of Parliament on 12 November 2013 and for the new Senate commencing in July 2014. 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 generally positive, although teething problems with new technology led to a level of dissatisfaction with some services.

Staff numbers remained the same at an average full-time equivalent (FTE) level of 16 for 2013–14. The cost of the office was \$2.5 million (\$2.5 million in 2012–13).

Programming and procedural support

The Table Office provided support for the operation of the Senate by providing procedural advice to senators, preparing procedural scripts for use in the chamber (850 in 2013–14) and by providing a broadcast captioning service for 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.

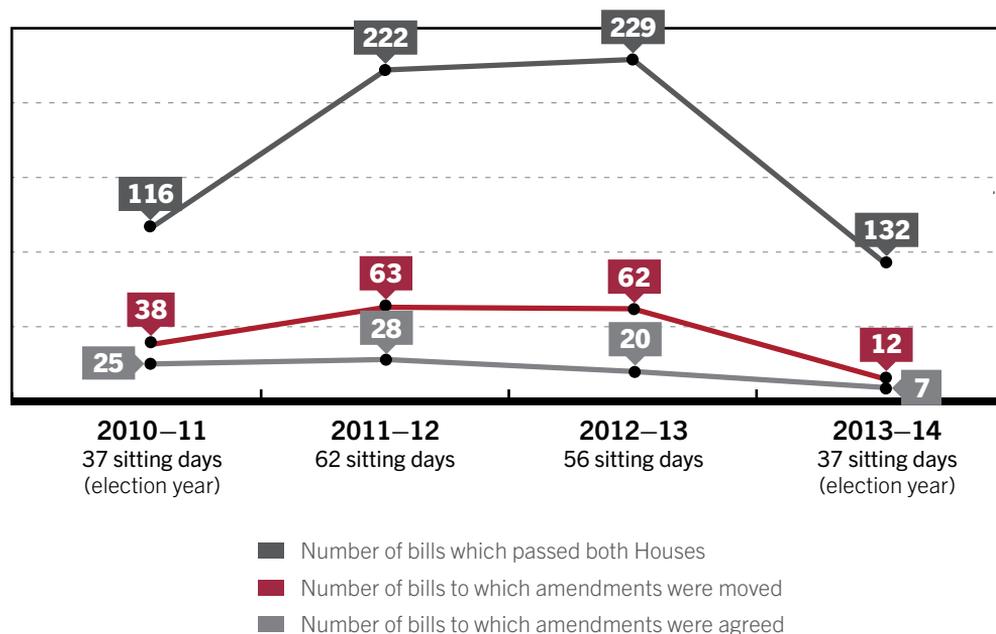
Legislation

The office facilitated the legislative work of the Houses by processing all bills considered in the Senate, preparing legislative documents, and preparing assent prints and Act prints and processing assent messages.

The office prepares the formal messages by which the two Houses communicate on legislative and other activity. In 2013–14, 136 messages were prepared, of which 97 related to the passage of bills.

The chart in figure 6 reflects the level of legislative activity in recent years, including the two most recent election years.

Figure 6 Senate legislative activity



Formal records

The *Notice Paper* is the formal agenda of Senate proceedings. Two versions of the *Notice Paper* are published before each sitting day: an abridged printed version, and the full, online version. In 2013–14, 36 printed Notice Papers were produced.

The *Journals of the Senate* are the official record of decisions made by the Senate. During 2013–14, proof Journals were published online shortly after the end of each sitting day, and printed versions were distributed the next morning. In 2013–14, 37 proof Journals were produced and published.

Informal records and statistics

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 volumes 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, noting, however, that technical difficulties at times during the June sitting periods 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 721 questions on notice. These are published to an online database and statistical information is published in the *Questions on Notice Summary* (which also includes response times).

Notices of motion (used by senators to indicate their intention to move particular motions on specified days) are published in the *Notice Paper* and the *Journals of the Senate*. In 2013–14, the office processed and published 482 notices of motion.

During 2013–14, senators presented 21 petitions from 58,026 signatories.

Inquiries

Copies of all documents presented to the Senate are made available through the inquiries and distribution services provided by the office. 3,314 inquiries were responded to during 2013–14, most within five minutes of receipt and the remainder within timeframes agreed with clients.

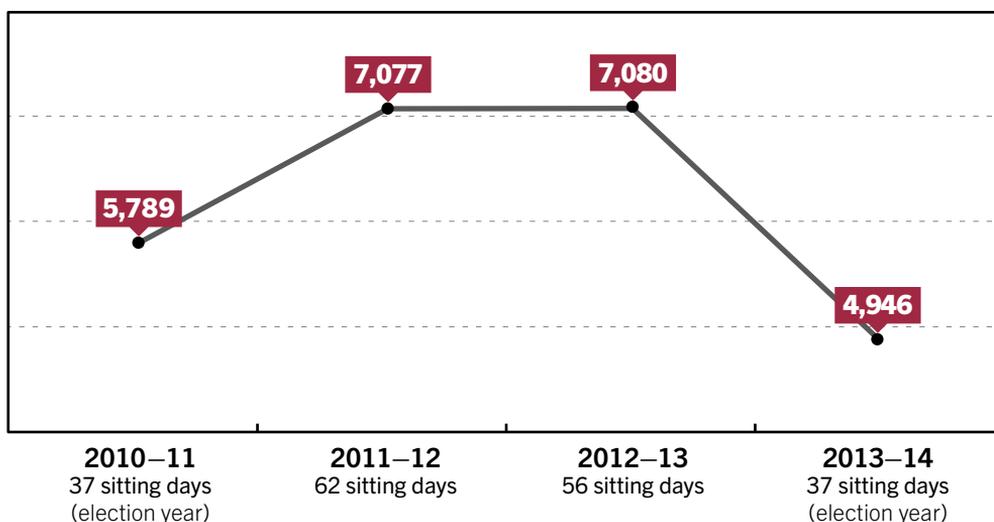
Approximately half of all inquiries originated with senators, their staff and departmental officers, while others were received from other government departments and agencies and from media representatives and legal organisations seeking copies of documents and advice on processes and outcomes from the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

Documents

The office received and processed 4,946 documents for presentation to the Senate during 2013–14, 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, and demonstrates that fewer documents are typically presented in an election year.

The office arranged for some documents from ministers, the Auditor-General and committees to be presented when the Senate was not sitting. This procedure is a useful avenue for the timely publication of material of interest to, or required by, the Parliament. In 2013–14, 499 documents (or 10 per cent of all documents tabled in the Senate) were presented using this procedure.

Figure 7 Documents tabled in the Senate



Digitisation and preservation of tabled papers

Documents presented to the Senate from 1901 to 2010 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 work to digitise documents presented to the Senate since 2010 continues. A total of 6,569,367 images have now been added to the database, including 189,558 in 2013–14.

All the original documents presented to the Senate since its first meeting in 1901 are stored in Parliament House under archival conditions. Tabled papers processed in 2013–14 added a further 24 metres of shelf space to this archive.

Support for committees

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

Information management and publishing projects

Projects being undertaken in conjunction with the other parliamentary departments progressed throughout the year.

The Table Office Production System (TOPS) (designed to produce principal parliamentary business documents, replacing the now unsupported Document Production System) was used for the first time on 13 May 2014. It was then used in some, but not all, parts of the Table Office as further enhancements were being developed and identified defects rectified.

The Parliamentary Papers Series (PPS) is a collection of the majority of substantial parliamentary and policy documents tabled in either House. Production of a digitised PPS (known as the ePPS) commenced in 2013 and is now part of a comprehensive 'online publishing' project being undertaken by the Table Office and SPIO.

The historical *Journals of the Senate* have been converted into digital form and will be loaded to the Senate website in the near future. They will be made accessible and searchable as an online resource in early 2014–15.

Performance outlook

In 2014–15, the Table Office will continue its core work of supporting the Senate before, during and after its meetings, starting in July with the arrival of a new Senate and many new senators.

Technology-based projects will again be a feature of the year ahead. The next 12 months will be a period of further development and adjustment to ensure that TOPS is successfully embedded into Table Office operations. The next reporting period will also see the Table Office and SPIO combine resources to advance the online publishing project.

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.