

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
<i>Order of Business</i> ('the Red') produced for each sitting day.	The draft and final <i>Order of Business</i> 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.
<i>Notice Paper</i> and <i>Journals of the Senate</i> 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 <i>Notice Paper</i> published in advance of each sitting day and proof <i>Journals of the Senate</i> published at the end of each sitting day (followed by final journals).
Tabled documents are accurately processed and stored, and available online wherever possible.	Senate records were 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 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 6.

Figure 6 – Elements and responsibilities of the Table Office

Executive	
Chris Reid, Clerk Assistant	
Procedural advice, programming support and production of the <i>Order of Business</i> 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 <i>Notice Paper</i> , and the <i>Journals of the Senate</i> , processing questions on notice, orders for the production of documents and petitions, Secretariat to the Appropriations, Staffing and Security Committee
Processing and custody of documents	
Inquiries services	
Secretariat to the Publications Committee	

The Table Office provided support for the Senate on each of its 48 sitting days in this reporting period. All performance results as outlined in the above table were achieved within relevant timeframes. Projects 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 the services provided by the office was conducted in this reporting period. While the participation levels were lower than hoped for, the results indicate high levels of satisfaction with services. Across the fourteen services canvassed, the overwhelming majority of respondents indicated they were 'excellent', with a smaller number indicating they were 'good'; no respondents indicated that any services were 'poor'.

Staff numbers remained steady during the reporting period, with an average full-time equivalent (FTE) level of 16. The cost of the office was \$2.5m (\$2.8m in 2015–16).

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 (1,425 in 2016–17 – almost 30 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.

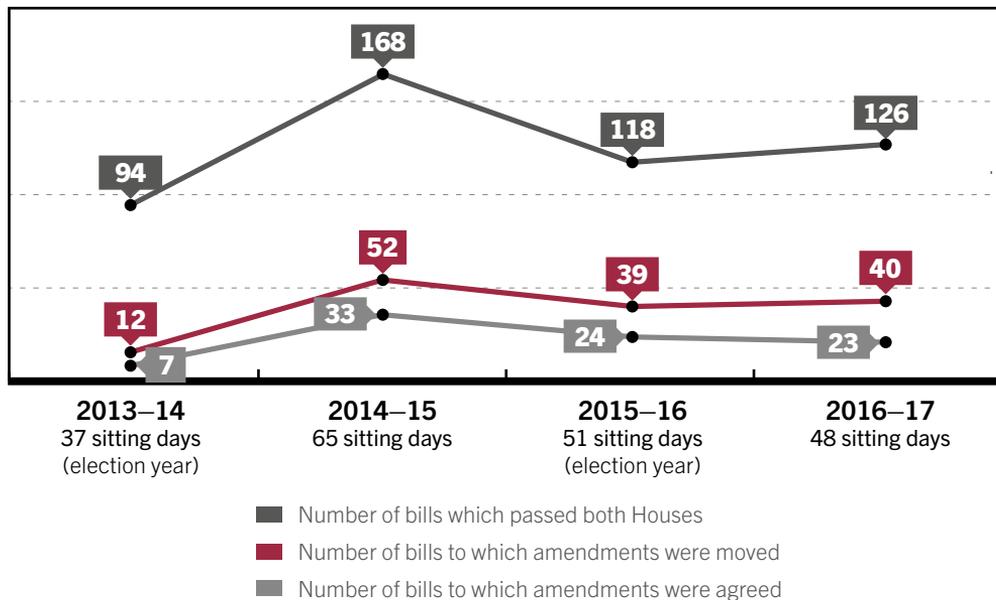
Legislation

The office facilitated the legislative work of the parliament by processing all bills considered in the Senate, preparing legislative documents, 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 2016–17, 190 messages were prepared, of which 136 related to the passage of bills (the remaining messages related to matters such as committee memberships). These figures compare to 164 messages relating to the passage of 141 bills in 2015–16.

The chart in figure 7 reflects the level of legislative activity in recent years.

Figure 7 – Senate legislative activity, 2013–14 to 2016–17



Formal and informal records

The *Notice Paper* is the formal agenda of Senate proceedings. During the reporting period, the *Notice Paper* contents were streamlined, with a large portion of information made available separately online.

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 2016–17, 48 Journals and 47 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, 486 questions were asked on notice. These were published to a searchable online database.

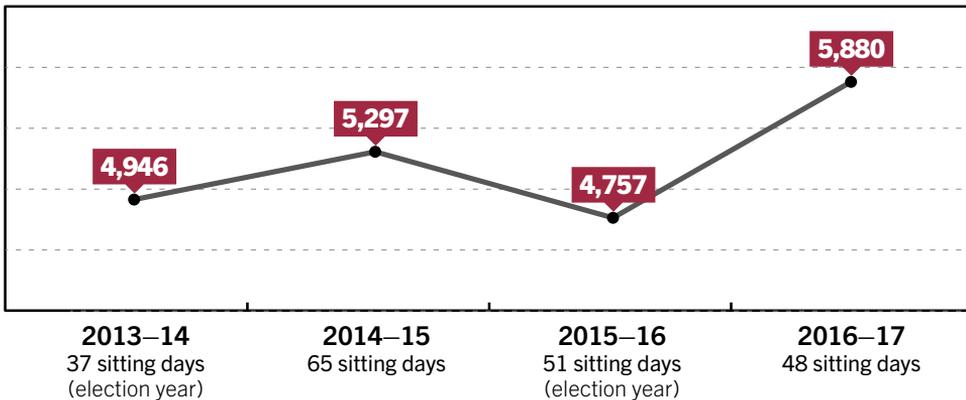
In 2016–17, the office processed and published 586 notices of motion (similar to the previous reporting period of 588). These notices of motion signal senators' intentions to move particular motions on specified days. The office also processed 13 petitions, with 24,071 signatories, which senators had lodged for presentation to the Senate (compared to 30 petitions with 128,950 signatures in 2015–16).

Documents

The office received and processed 5,880 documents for presentation to the Senate during 2016–17, recorded their details in the *Journals of the Senate* and the *Index to the Papers Presented to Parliament*, and archived them. This is an increase of approximately 1,000 documents from the previous year, due largely to the two month period during which the parliament was prorogued after both houses were dissolved in May 2016, after which documents could not be tabled. Figure 8 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, although not after the Senate's dissolution. 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 2016–17, a total of 398 documents (or approximately 7 per cent of all documents tabled in the Senate) were presented using this procedure. This number is lower than the previous reporting period (547) as there were no out-of-sitting presentations during the double dissolution period in July and August 2016.

Figure 8 – Documents tabled in the Senate, 2013–14 to 2016–17



Inquiries

Copies of all documents presented to the Senate are made available through the inquiries and distribution services provided by the office. In 2016–17, 3,416 inquiries were received (approximately 40 per cent coming from senators or their staff). This compares to 2,494 inquiries received 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.

Digitisation and preservation of tabled papers

Documents presented to the Senate from 1901 to 2013 (which includes documents presented up to the end of the 43rd Parliament) are now available online through the Senate Tabled Papers database. Documents presented to the Senate during the 44th Parliament are being progressively scanned or downloaded to ParInfo. This work will be completed in the next reporting period.

All original documents presented to the Senate since its first meeting in 1901 are stored in Parliament House. Documents presented to the Senate in 2016–17 added a further 6 metres of shelf space to this archive.

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 2017–18 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 and reporting of non-compliance on an exception basis will be undertaken to monitor performance.

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 system to facilitate the electronic receipt of tabled documents.

A key staffing focus for the next reporting period will be to share skills and knowledge among staff in the office (and by bringing in staff of other areas of the department from time-to-time) to ensure that expertise in relation to specialised tasks is not unduly concentrated.