

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee —Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearing—October 2014

Answers to Questions on Notice

Parliamentary departments, Department of Parliamentary Services

Topic: Disability Access

Question: 254

Written: Senator Ludwig

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 31 December 2014

1. Please provide a list of all premises owned, leased or otherwise operated by the department / agency which do not yet comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (through The Disability (Access to Premises - Buildings) Standards 2010). For each, please provide:
2. The year in which it was purchased / leased / rented (and if lease / rental agreement, when it expires).
3. What plans are in place to make the premises compliant with the act.
4. When these plans will commence and when they are expected to be complete.
5. Has the minister or the minister's office been informed of these plans? Please provide a copy of any communication (including but not limited to emails, letters, memos, notes etc) between the minister's office and the department regarding this issue.
6. What is the expected cost of making the premises compliant? Please break down the costs.
7. Have any plans to make any premises compliant been cancelled, put on hold or delayed since September 7, 2013? If yes, please detail, including the reasons for which they were cancelled, put on hold or delayed and how the decision was reached.
8. Have any complaints been lodged with regard to the premises not being compliant? If yes, please detail.

Answer

1. The Department of Parliamentary Services manages and maintains Parliament House on behalf of the Commonwealth.

Parliament House was constructed in the 1980s and, due to the timing of its design and the complex nature of the building, it is not fully compliant with the current requirements of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* or the Building Code of Australia. It may never be fully compliant.

2. Not applicable.
3. In the 2012–13 Budget, DPS received disability access funding of \$2.58 million over four years to enable projects—primarily in public areas of the building—to be implemented. This includes such areas as hearing loops, disability access, signage and disabled toilets.

Funding of \$130,000 was spent during 2012–13 on installing hearing loops to 4 committee rooms (1R5 & 6 and 1S5 & 6) for the hearing impaired, the purchase of six wider metal detectors to allow easier access for mobility-impaired persons, and some initial design work to make the Main Front Carpark more accessible.

The remaining NPP funding of approximately \$2.45 million will be used over the 2013–14 to 2015–16 financial years to address a range of issues, including:

- the addition of hearing assistance technology in the Great Hall;
- automation of some of the heavy doors in public areas, including the roof;
- removal of trip hazards; and
- improvements to the Forecourt (Public) carpark.

4. See above.
5. The Presiding Officers signed the original request for funding via a New Policy Proposal to the then Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, around September 2011. The documentation became 'Cabinet in Confidence' upon submission.
6. Not applicable. Parliament House may never be fully compliant, as outlined above.
7. Not applicable.
8. There have been a number of submissions, suggestions and complaints in regard to the premises not being compliant at the time the New Policy Proposal was submitted in 2011. These included the following:
 - Senator the Hon Jan McLucas—then Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers;
 - The Hon Bill Shorten, then Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services;
 - Mr Graeme Innes AM—Disability Discrimination Commissioner and Race Discrimination Commissioner, Australian Human Rights Commission;
 - Professor Gwynnyth Llewellyn—Dean of the University of Sydney;
 - Mr Robert Pask—Coordinator National MS Advocates Program (on behalf of MS Australia); and
 - Ms Christina Ryan—General Manager, Advocacy for Inclusion.

In addition, a complaint was lodged with the Human Rights Commission regarding access to the parliamentary webcast by the hearing impaired. The complaint was made under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and related to the lack of captions on the parliamentary webcast.