

## **Chapter 2**

### **Parliamentary Departments**

2.1 The Committee took evidence from the parliamentary departments on Monday, 22 May 2006.

#### **Department of the Senate**

2.2 Issues raised by members of the Committee and other senators in attendance included:

- Transfer of the citizenship visits program from the parliamentary departments to the education department;
- The government decision to reduce estimates hearings annually by two days;
- Circulation of advice on the rules of the Senate as they relate to the conduct of committee hearings; and
- Foreign parliaments controlling their own budgets.

2.3 Senators inquired into the background to the decision to transfer the citizenship visits program (CVP) from the parliamentary departments to the Department of Education, Science and Training. The Committee heard that the decision was taken despite advice to the contrary from the parliamentary chamber departments, and despite the presiding officers raising concerns with the Prime Minister and other ministers about the proposal.

2.4 The Committee explored the reason for the President circulating to all senators prior the budget estimates hearings a paper titled, 'Conduct of committee hearings: rules of the Senate'. The paper had also been circulated in February after the additional estimates hearings. The Committee heard that the paper was designed to address areas of confusion on the part of some committee chairs during estimates hearings. Those areas related to the relevance of questions and the different roles of chairs and ministers in determining whether questions were 'out of order' when ministers refused to answer them. This led to the discussion on whether the decisions of committee chairs constitute formal practices of the Senate, which was canvassed in chapter one of this report.

#### **Department of Parliamentary Services**

2.5 Issues raised by members of the Committee and other senators in attendance included:

- Savings resulting from the implementation of the Podger review;
- Traffic flow around Parliament House;
- Vehicle and pedestrian safety around Parliament House;

- Staff turnover in the Department of Parliamentary Services;
- Building works and maintenance;
- Security issues; and
- Progress of the proposed child care centre.

2.6 The departmental secretary, Ms Penfold, informed the Committee that savings from amalgamating the parliamentary service departments, as recommended by the Podger review, stood at just under \$2 million. It was noted that this figure was well short of the savings estimated in the Podger review. DPS indicated it had made significant efforts to improve efficiency and reduce costs across the department independently of the review.

2.7 The Committee continued its examination of ongoing concerns about the operation and costs of the security bollards and traffic arrangements around Parliament House resulting from recent security measures. Ms Penfold told the Committee that operational problems with the bollards had decreased. The Committee also heard that a decision had been made to make the parliamentary ring road one way to improve traffic flow and pedestrian safety. The Committee was minded to have the Appropriations and Staffing Committee examine this matter again.

2.8 With respect to a proposed Parliament House child care centre, Ms Penfold informed the Committee that no decisions had been taken and that planning was in its initial stages.