

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee —Budget Estimates Hearing—May 2010

Answers to Questions on Notice

Parliamentary Portfolio, Department of Parliamentary Services

Topic: **Operation of Parliamentary Library provision of pre-election advice to non-government parties.**

Question: **P 2**

Hansard reference: **F&PA 13, 24 May 2010**

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 9 July 2010

Senator RYAN—the library committee on 17 June...Could I ask that you take on notice and table—questions on notice are not due until 9 July—the final agreement and the processes by which these decisions will be taken so that this committee is also made aware of them, as well as, obviously, the library committee to whom you report?

Answer

1 The Joint Standing Committee on the Parliamentary Library considered the delivery of services under the new budget measure and provided guidance to the Library.

2 Taking into consideration the guidance from the Committee, the proposed service is detailed below.

New Budget Measure 2010-11

Introduction

1 The Library has been allocated additional funding of \$500,000 in the 2010–11 Budget, and again in 2013-14, “to enhance the capacity of the Parliamentary Library to assist non-Government parties in developing policies in the lead-up to Federal elections”¹.

2 This paper provides guidance as agreed to by the Joint Standing Committee on the Parliamentary Library at its meeting on 17 June 2010.

Library’s client service responsibilities

3 The *Parliamentary Service Act 1999* requires the Parliamentary Librarian to “...provide high quality information, analysis and advice to Senators and Members of the House of Representatives in support of their parliamentary and representational roles”. The Act further states that the Librarian must perform this function “...on the basis of equality of access for all Senators and Members of the House of Representatives...”. Noting that the service will be provided to the non-government Senators and Members.

4 The Library will establish a pre-election policy unit from 1 July 2010 which will report directly to the Parliamentary Librarian. It will be a small

¹ Australian Government, ‘Part 2: Expense measures’, *Budget measures: budget paper no. 2: 2010-2011*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2010, p.282

group, headed by a Senior Researcher, who will coordinate the operations of the unit and liaise with other areas of the Library's research service. The unit will operate in the lead-up to the election, and wind-up its specific responsibilities in the post-election period.

5 The unit will coordinate confidential responses to individual client requests from non-Government Senators and Members and commissioned policy analysis on selected topics which the Library will publish and make accessible to all Senators and Members.

6 The Parliamentary Librarian will contact non-Government parties and Senators and Members to discuss the scope of the service and seek input. It will be emphasised that the limited timeframe and resources available will of necessity limit the services that can be delivered.

Service principles

7 The service principles are:

(a) The service is focused on providing information, analysis and advice to non-Government clients in the pre-election period. The funding, which is allocated across the whole financial year, will be expended as far as possible before the election, but some final papers and advice may be provided after the election.

(b) A separate new pre-election unit will be established by the Library to coordinate individual requests, produce publications that fall within the scope of the service and commission external specialist advice.

(c) Non-Government Senators and Members will be informed about the new service and asked for their views on how the resources might best be applied to meet their needs.

(d) The service will take election policy enquiries from all non-Government Senators and Members, with requests from Government Senators and Members referred to other research staff.

(e) The Library will seek to ensure that access to the service is shared as equitably as possible between non-Government Senators and Members.

(f) The Library will commission external experts for perspectives on key policy issues of interest in order to produce background material for policy development. Selection of experts will be consistent with library practice. They may also be called on to provide advice to be used in the preparation of responses to individual client requests by library staff.

(g) The Library will discuss possible cooperation with the Departments of Finance and Treasury to access information about their economic models.

(h) The Library notes that costings of election commitments will continue to be able to be requested from the Secretaries of the Treasury and Department of Finance under the Charter of Budget Honesty. The Library's service will therefore not provide costings of election commitments.

(i) The unit will commence on 1 July 2010 with the secondment of at least one existing Library Senior Researcher and will cease operation some time after the election. The Parliamentary Librarian will provide a report to the Library Committee on its operation and outcomes.