

Chapter 2

Parliamentary Departments

2.1 The committee took evidence from the parliamentary departments on Monday, 23 May 2005.

Department of the Senate

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

- Outstanding answers to questions taken on notice by government departments during previous estimates hearings;
- Parliament House Open Day 2005;
- Increased budget allocation to the Citizenship Visits Program and the nature of that program; and
- Reduced budget allocation to support for office holders.

Outstanding answers to questions on notice

2.3 Senator Murray referred the President to statistics compiled by the Clerk on outstanding answers to questions taken on notice by departments during previous estimates hearings. Senator Murray emphasised his concern at the large number of overdue answers, stating:

Mr President, I am raising this with you because I think we are getting to a stage where, unless the President intervenes, the Senate itself is at risk of being treated with contempt.¹

2.4 Senator Murray questioned the President as to what leadership role he could take in dealing with the issue. The President responded that it was a matter for the Senate as a whole and that he would consult with the Clerk and 'see whether we can put something to the Senate for the Senate to make a decision on'.²

Citizenship Visits Program

2.5 Mr Evans, Clerk of the Senate, informed the committee that the increased budget allocation to the Citizenship Visits Program (CVP) would assist in meeting increasing demand for the program. Witnesses for the department went on to explain that the program subsidises visits by school groups to parliament, with the subsidy

1 *Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee Hansard*, [hereafter *Committee Hansard*] 23 May 2005, F&PA 2

2 *Committee Hansard*, 23 May 2005, F&PA 2

level linked to the distance students need to travel to Canberra.³ The committee heard that student visits are currently at a record level and that the extra appropriation will not fully meet the demand.⁴

Support for office holders

2.6 Senator Faulkner questioned witnesses as to why the budget estimate for support to office holders in 2004-05 was zero. Mr d'Angelo, Chief Financial Officer, explained that the item was now funded through the Department of Finance and Administration, so the appropriation had been transferred accordingly. Mr d'Angelo said that the item related to Members of Parliament staff and some travel and related items.⁵

2.7 Mr Evans told the committee that the item had previously been an administered appropriation rather than a departmental appropriation, and that it was 'thought to be more rational that the payment of all members' and senators' personal staff be administered by the same department'.⁶

Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS)

2.8 Issues raised by members of the committee and other senators in attendance included:

- Budgeted revenue from goods and services and sales of assets;
- Parliament House Open Day 2005;
- The proposed DPS restructure;
- DPS certified agreement negotiations;
- Parliamentary Library budget, library services and the position of Parliamentary Librarian;
- Building works and maintenance, including maintenance work at the health and recreation centre, a major water leak from the forecourt water feature, lock replacements in Parliament House, and replacement of the Cabinet Room chairs; and
- Security enhancement works, including bollard replacement, after hours security arrangements for staff at the Senate entrance and alternative sites for the parliament to sit should Parliament House be unavailable.

3 *Committee Hansard*, 23 May 2005, F&PA 4-5

4 *Committee Hansard*, 23 May 2005, F&PA 5

5 *Committee Hansard*, 23 May 2005, F&PA 6

6 *Committee Hansard*, 23 May 2005, F&PA 6

Parliament House Open Day 2005

2.9 Senator Faulkner questioned witnesses regarding the status of Parliament House Open Day 2005 and suggestions that the open day may not go ahead. Ms Penfold, Secretary of the Department of Parliamentary Services, told the committee that the department was reviewing the open day arrangements. Ms Penfold said:

What has emerged is that it has been costing us about the \$28,000 a year, plus staff costs, to run the open day. For that, we get about 3,000 extra visitors. So we are looking at about \$9 per extra visitor for that open day. There are a variety of things we need to look to [in] terms of whether it is sensible for us to go on running the open day in that form.⁷

2.10 Ms Penfold told the committee that DPS would approach the chamber departments, through the Clerks, about sharing the costs of the open day. Ms Penfold advised that if financial problems remained, then DPS would approach the presiding officers to explain the position and seek a decision as to whether the open day would proceed.

2.11 Following further questioning from Senator Faulkner as to when such consultations would occur, the President of the Senate proclaimed that Parliament House Open Day 2005 would proceed:

Senator FAULKNER—So at this stage we do not know whether the open day will go ahead or not.

The PRESIDENT—There will be an open day in 2005.

Senator FAULKNER—There will be an open day?

The PRESIDENT—There will be.

Senator FAULKNER—You have just made that decision now—

The PRESIDENT—Yes, I have.

Senator FAULKNER—regardless of what Mr Speaker thinks?

The PRESIDENT—There will be.⁸

DPS restructure

2.12 Ms Penfold informed the committee that details of the proposed DPS restructure had not yet been finalized. She said that matters to be addressed by the restructure included problems in strategic decision making, priority setting and dealing with clients.⁹

7 *Committee Hansard*, 23 May 2005, F&PA 8

8 *Committee Hansard*, 23 May 2005, F&PA 9-10

9 *Committee Hansard*, 23 May 2005, F&PA 10

2.13 Mr Kenny, Deputy Secretary, outlined the consultation regarding the restructure that had taken place. This included development and dissemination, via the department's intranet site, of a draft set of underlying principles for the restructure and briefings with senior staff. Mr Kenny advised that the department was in the process of establishing a development and implementation team to fully develop the detail of the restructure.¹⁰

2.14 Senator Faulkner questioned witnesses about the process for briefing the President on the proposed restructure. The President told the committee, 'I do not intend, and neither does the Speaker, to get involved in all the detail of the reorganization of the department. That is not our job'.¹¹ Ms Penfold said that once the draft underlying principles had been settled, these would form the basis of a brief to the Presiding Officers.¹²

Library services and Parliamentary Librarian

2.15 The committee examined the removal of Research Brief No. 3, 2004-05 *Critical but stable: Australia's capacity to respond to an infectious disease outbreak* from the Parliamentary Library website. Ms Penfold told the committee that she had received written complaints about the paper from the secretary of the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing and the deputy director general of the New South Wales Department of Health.¹³

2.16 Ms Penfold went on to say that the paper had been removed when 'it emerged that the paper had not gone through the proper quality control processes usually applied by the library'.¹⁴ Witnesses advised that according to the library's guidelines, papers would usually go through a workshop step which had not occurred for this particular paper.

2.17 Members of the committee sought assurance from DPS witnesses that there had been no attempt to censor the Parliamentary Library. Ms Penfold told the committee:

My concern in this matter is not in any sense to keep the government or the health department happy. My concern is to ensure that what the Parliamentary Library puts out as public material is soundly based and defensible, is of good quality and will stand up in any sort of environment.¹⁵

10 *Committee Hansard*, 23 May 2005, F&PA 11

11 *Committee Hansard*, 23 May 2005, F&PA 11

12 *Committee Hansard*, 23 May 2005, F&PA 12

13 *Committee Hansard*, 23 May 2005, F&PA 23 and 59

14 *Committee Hansard*, 23 May 2005, F&PA 23

15 *Committee Hansard*, 23 May 2005, F&PA 63

2.18 In relation to the appointment of the Parliamentary Librarian, witnesses for DPS advised that applications closed at the end of April 2005 and an interview short-list was currently being agreed.¹⁶

Building works and maintenance

2.19 In response to questions from Senator Faulkner, DPS witnesses acknowledged that the Parliament House forecourt water feature had been leaking for some time, although the leak was only identified during recent security enhancement works. The committee heard that the leak has resulted in water wastage of 25,000 litres per day.¹⁷

2.20 Committee members also examined a range of other building and maintenance works and were disturbed that DPS witnesses were unable to promptly confirm whether the lock replacement program at Parliament House had yet commenced.¹⁸

Security enhancement works

2.21 In relation to security, committee members sought an update on the progress of the bollard replacement works. Ms Penfold said that 150 of the 170 original bollards had been installed, with 12 additional bollards to be put into the access slip roads. She advised that this remaining work had been deferred until the end of the winter sittings.¹⁹

2.22 Senator Faulkner questioned DPS about the tender process for the bollard contract, as none of the bollards had been sourced from within Australia. DPS witnesses said that none of the Australian bollards met the relevant specifications set by the ASIO Commonwealth Security Construction and Equipment Committee.²⁰

2.23 Senator Allison questioned witnesses about after hours security arrangements for staff requiring transport at the Senate entrance. The senator raised with witnesses possible options, such as a camera link to the security desk, to avoid staff having to wait unattended on Parliament Drive.²¹

16 *Committee Hansard*, 23 May 2005, F&PA 65

17 *Committee Hansard*, 23 May 2005, F&PA 31

18 *Committee Hansard*, 23 May 2005, F&PA 35

19 *Committee Hansard*, 23 May 2005, F&PA 37-39

20 *Committee Hansard*, 23 May 2005, F&PA 49

21 *Committee Hansard*, 23 May 2005, F&PA 39

