Senate Finance and Public Administration Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Inquiry into the performance of the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS)

I make this submission as a staff member of DPS in its Research Branch (which together with the Information Access Branch and the Parliamentary Library Executive is often known as the Parliamentary Library)

I address the following terms of reference:

(a) matters raised at the Budget estimates hearing of the committee on 23 May 2011 and in answers to questions taken on notice

I do not make comments on this term of reference.

(b) policies and practices followed by DPS for the management of the heritage values of Parliament House and its contents

The over arching heritage value of Parliament House, as envisaged by its design architects, made the building subject to the ownership by the Australian people and set it in a bush environment.

In a post 11 September 2001 environment these values have been downgraded or restricted. We can see this in the barriers around the building's perimeter, bollards on the slip roads, barriers designed to prevent the public from walking over the building, full height metal grills being fitted to the underground ministerial car park under construction at the moment. As I understand it, one of the next proposals in this vein will be construction of a 'security' wall in the public underground car park.

It's not clear whether the threats which were present in a post 9/11 environment are still present, however once the steps are taken it appears that they are impossible to reverse and it would be reasonable to assume that DPS has been driven by the advice of Australia's security agencies. Those agencies could well regard Parliament House's bush setting and environs as a challenge to security; in short, I feel the heritage values of the building have been compromised, but DPS is probably not the main driver of the process.

Further, other changes and improvements are being made to what is now a 30 year design. Heavy doors giving entry from the Marble Foyer to the main building at Points 2 and 3 have recently been disposed of being replaced by self opening timber doors which are significant improvement.

All of these changes challenge the original heritage values of the building to varying degrees. Just as importantly, they also suck up capital works funds which could be otherwise used in other parts of DPS's operations, such as improving office accommodation for Library researchers in open plan areas or the parliamentary IT system and its operation. It is hard to discern any improvement to the standard of the physical infrastructure in the second floor library since the 2004 amalgamation. (The Department of the

Parliamentary Library, the Department of the Parliamentary Reporting Service and the Joint House Department were subsumed into the Department of Parliamentary Services).

(c) asset management and disposal policies and practices;

I do not make any comment on this term of reference.

(d) resource agreements and/or memoranda of understanding for the provision of services within and by DPS;

Resource agreements or service agreements could be used to facilitate the operation of a joint Parliamentary Library/Parliamentary Budget Office in which the two entities would share some corporate resources but purchase most of the other corporate services from DPS (the proposal is discussed below under (g)).

(e) an assessment of the efficiencies achieved following the amalgamation of the three former joint parliamentary service departments and any impact on the level and quality of service delivery;

One touted advantage of the amalgamation from a Library perspective was that Library client request data (via the TARDIS record system)provided to the Department of Finance and Deregulation (hereon Finance) was to terminate.

DPS staff were advised of the new policy of not supplying TARDIS data to Finance by DPS corporate staff in 2004 at general staff meetings of the newly formed DPS with the rationale being: other parliamentary departments do not submit similar members and senator request data to Finance so why should the amalgamated DPS? (I agreed with the view).

A system of recording requests traditionally focused on which Senator, Member or parliamentary staff including committee staff made which request.[1] The demand by Finance for the Library's client request data goes back to 1994, when Library senior executives made a case to Finance for increased resources based on evidence of increasing requests to the Library.

Finance was wary of the rationale for the increase. It made the subsequent increase in resources conditional that additional staff positions not be on-going and later cut them (see table in the Appendix); on the other hand, Finance required client request data be forwarded on an on-going basis.

The 2004 advice to cease forwarding client request data was evidence of success of the amalgamation, but the arrangement endured only for about 12 months. After the appointment of the Parliamentary Librarian in 2005, Finance demanded that the client request data be provided again.

By this time there had been a collapse in the recording of requests due to:

a) the significant effect of the change of policy itself and

b) the 2005 DPS certified agreement which removed executive level (EL) Library staff from flextime, possibly affecting over half of the Library's staff. The flex system dovetailed with client requests and time spent on requests (from 1998).

Thus the combined effect of the two policies was to cause a fall in recorded requests and the time spent on them. Other factors have also played a part. For example, subdividing the one request among staff allocated to respond to large requests. This subdivision didn't exist when the 1994 approach to Finance was

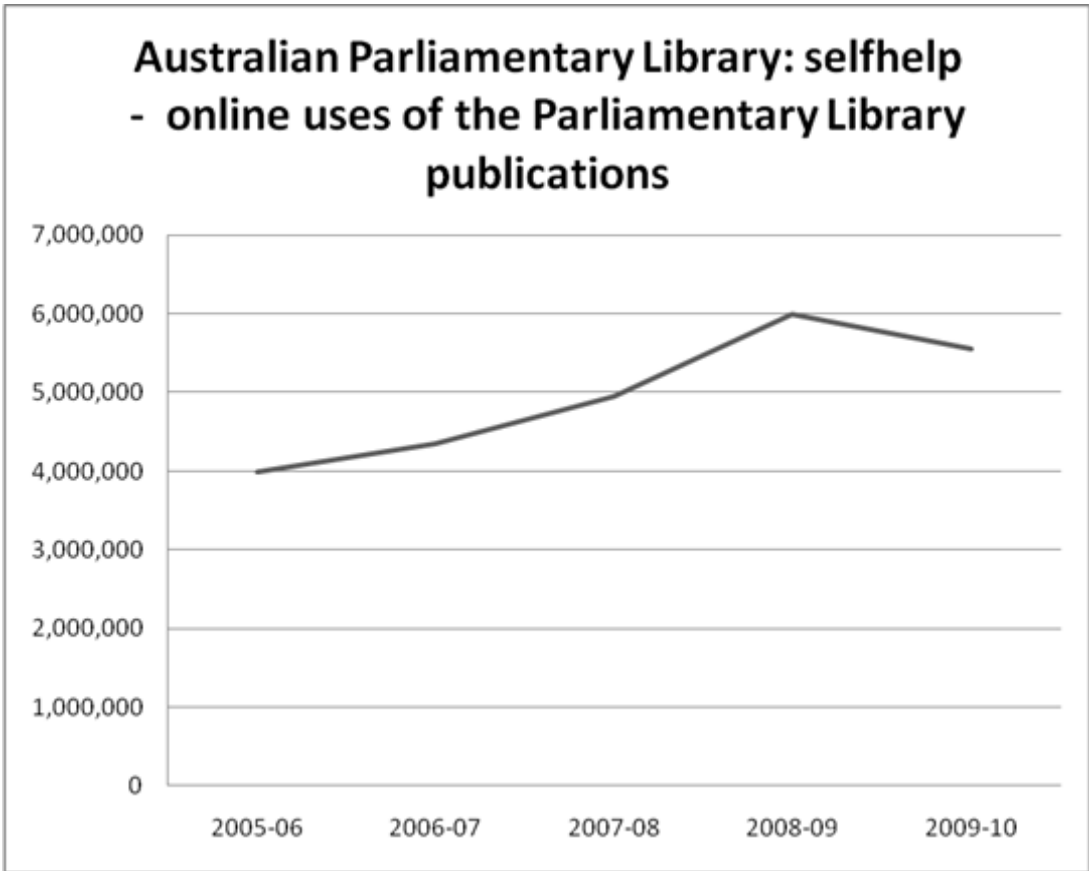
1. Through its reincarnations (CRIS, SPIRIT and most recently TARDIS), it remains a crucial tool to record and manage business.

made. Then, a staff member could make requests via the system to other staff when it was deemed necessary to enlist support, thus 'multiplying' the one request received by the Library. (Alternatively, the Member/Senator could have subdivided his/her request in the first place, also 'multiplying' the request).

The point is that the problem is not with requests but in turning a simple request recording device into a performance indicator instrument.

A parallel driver of declining individual requests has been the provision of self-help facilities. Self-help facilities were the Library's response to the Budget cuts of 1997 and the ongoing efficiency dividend cuts thereafter, with an overall 'self help' policy for clients being developed from about 1998. Many hard copy journals and serials were made accessible on-line.

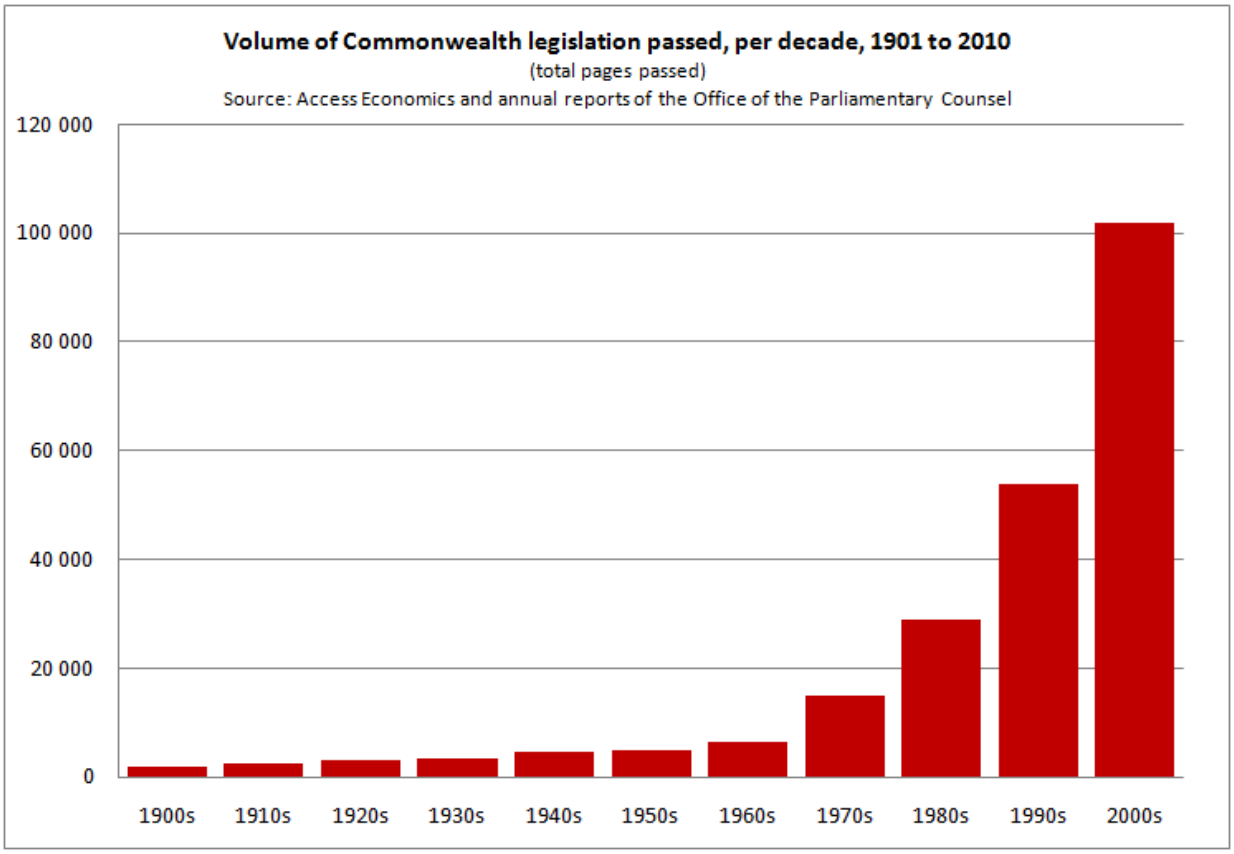
Thus in 1994 Library publications were restricted in access; ie printed in hard copy and made available to Senators and Members. Putting Library publications on the Internet would coincide with the new 'self-help' policy, as well as exploding the numbers from the public and academia who now had access to these works.



(Source: HBA Consulting, *Review of the Staffing Levels of the Parliamentary Library*, June 2011)

If the aim of 'self-help' has been to provide Members, Senators and parliamentary staff with easy or guided access to Library resources, it would seem counterintuitive that the policy could be expected to result simultaneously in an <u>increase</u> in individual client requests to research staff from Senators and Members.

To my knowledge, the chamber departments are not required to provide to Finance this or similar request data from Members/Senators, nor do staff of Members of Parliament. A more useful measure of work coming to the Library would be volume and complexity of Bills. A measure of this change can be seen in the graph below:



What this graph shows is an explosion in the volume and complexity of legislation over the past 20 years. It is reflected in the work the Library performs in its Bills Digest service, as well as adding to knowledge base needed by researchers to give policy advice.

If Finance continues to require performance indicators for parliamentary research staff, then a common set of performance indicators should be developed for parliamentary research staff in all areas of the Parliament and be subject to oversight, say, by a parliamentary committee.

The 2009 Henderson review of Ministerial (and other) staff was required to address Ministerial staffing numbers in light of the 2007 decision to implement a 30% staffing cut. For Shadow Ministerial staff, any increase or decrease in Ministerial staffing would 'flow' as an increase/decrease in staffing levels as a result of a 1980s formula setting Shadow Ministerial staff numbers as a percentage of Ministerial staff numbers.

Henderson observed that there was 'no right number' for Ministerial staff and that it was 'more difficult to assess the resources required to provide media and in particular policy advice for Ministers'.[2] Henderson instead relied on the demands on ministers through the 24 hr news cycle and the major events of that time, such as demands generated by the Global Financial Crisis, floods and so-on to recommend a partial restoration of the 30% cut.

The point here is that these and similar events have obviously impacted also on the workload of the Parliamentary Library but with sustained decreases in staffing levels. Also, if it is argued that the Library can be downsized because of arrival of the internet, then surely the same argument applies to: Ministerial staff, Shadow Ministerial staff, the staffs of the Greens and Independents as well as Committees of the House of Representatives and the Senate. The internet has affected the work of everyone in the parliamentary environment.

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2. A Henderson, *Review of Government Staffing,* 24 February 2009, p.9.

Despite the Henderson Report not being able to quantify workload demands on Ministerial or Shadow Ministerial staff members, the *Agreement for a Better Parliament: Parliamentary Reform (2010)* resulted in Ministerial staff numbers increasing from 368 to 420 (ie per Henderson), Shadow Ministerial staff numbers increasing from 77 to 88 as well as additional staff to the Greens and Independents. (The graph in the Appendix reflects ministerial staff number growth before the decision to partially restore the staff cuts).

The Library staff review which also arose from the *Agreement for a Better Parliament: Parliamentary Reform (2010)* has recommended business as usual relying on decreasing client request trends which means further staffing reductions in line with efficiency dividend cuts.[3]

(f) the efficient use, management and delivery of information technology services and equipment

My concern with information technology services and equipment goes to the use of the TRIM (Total Records and Information Management) record management system introduced in DPS around 2008.

Requests made to the Library research staff are not made into archivable records due to the confidentiality provisions for the performance of such work and the general exemption for the Parliamentary Library's collection under regulations made in 1995 pertaining to parliamentary records and the Archives Act. On the other hand the Department of the House of Representatives reported in 2007-08 that it had recorded documents into the TRIM system, and:

> Nearly 4,000 records were sentenced under the House's records disposal authority, with 300 boxes of committee records transferred to the National Archives of Australia and approximately 2,300 committee files appropriately sorted, boxed and stored on-site.[4]

Over its total history the Parliamentary Library has referred for archiving purposes less than 300 currently accessible documents (including photographs and the like) with the National Archives.

There is a case to say that briefs prepared by the Library provided for Senators and Members remain their property, while the information contained therein will be used for similar requests.

As the Research Branch's predecessor, the Legislative Research Service was inaugurated by the then Parliamentary Librarian in the mid 1960s and not from resolutions of both chambers as with DPS, information contained in briefs and memorandums were and are part of the Library's collection and therefore were not archivable and should not be managed in a way which equates these briefs to Commonwealth records – the TARDIS system does the job of recording who made which request from the Library and which staff member responded.

(g) any related matter.

DPS will have a significant role to play in one form or another. Certain initiatives have been very positive: maintaining the right of those to wear a face scarves into the building; the digitisation of Hansard, putting solar panels on the Parliament House roof as part of addressing the 7,000 kilowatts the building uses on a summer's day, putting a coffee cart on the Senate side, water saving measures, having one taxi cab rank in the underground car park, reorganising space in the public car park , improving its lighting, putting the long distance buses at the entry of the car park which has been of special benefit to cyclists and so-on.

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3. HBA Consulting, *Review of the Staffing Levels of the Parliamentary Library*, June 2011.

4. Department of the House of Representatives, *Annual report 2007-08,* p.38, http://www.aph.gov.au/house/pubs/ar07-08/pdf/DHRannualreport.pdf.

However if decisions are taken to progress the Parliamentary Budget Office, consideration might be given to locating it with the Library in a departmental form separate to DPS. The joint entity envisaged would not be part of DPS. The Parliamentary Services Act could be amended to recognise the independence of each body and their respective statutory officers – in other words there would be no Secretary/CEO of the joint entity but it would have its own enterprise agreement. The PBO, if it is to go ahead as a separate entity would become a fourth parliamentary agency; under DPLPBO model there would still be four parliamentary agencies – just more equal ones. [5]

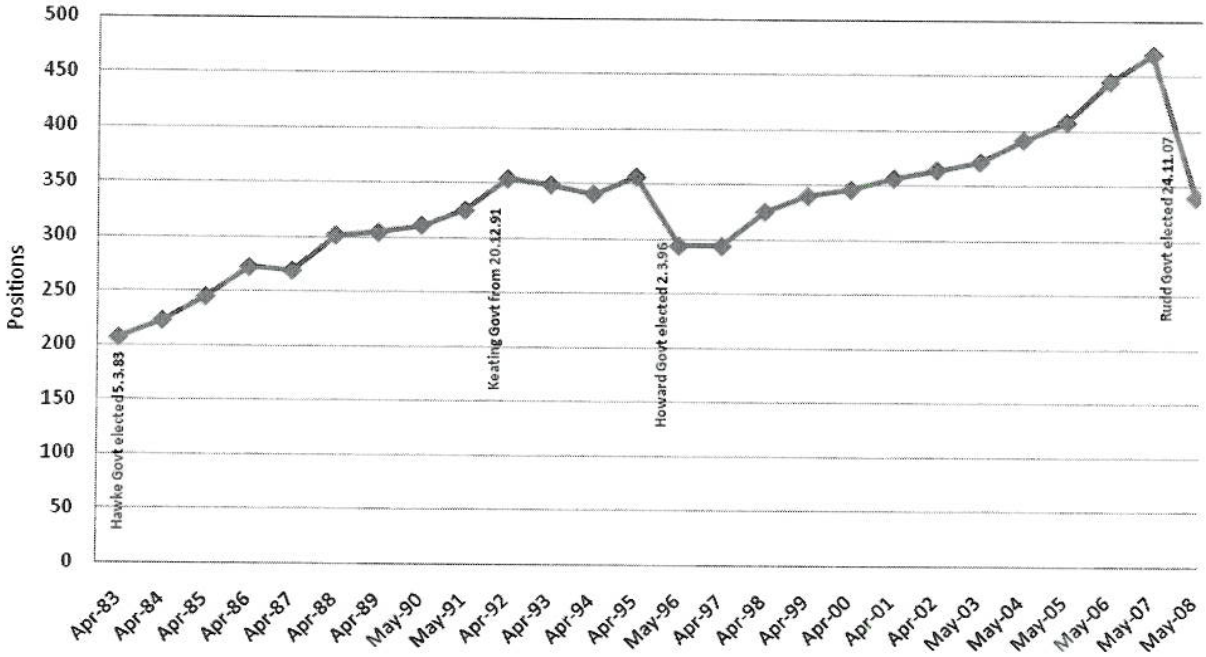
Thank you for considering this submission.

1 August 2011.

(**Appendix**: Graph on ministerial staff numbers, although these have increased since May 2008 and Table for Parliamentary Library staff numbers, although these have decreased since 2007-08)

5. The PBO would not need to be located within the Library or Parliament House if it is deemed more appropriate to locate it elsewhere. In short I feel the DPLPBO model has merit, but appreciate that the issue may be considered further in another forum

Figure 1: Ministerial Staff: Totals 1983 to 2008



Attachment B: Australian Parliamentary Library: average staffing level 1993-94 -2007-08

	Actual Average full time equivalent staffing level as at 30 June	Notes
1993-94	201.6	
1994-95	223.2	
1995-96	213.9	
1996-97	195.2	
1997-98	194.1	
1998-99	188.8	
1999-2000	177.1	
2000-01	181.3	
2001-02	164	
2002-03	169	
2003-04	153.6[4]	Department of Parliamentary Services formed. Corporate and support staff transferred to other areas in the department.
2004-05	149.6	
2005-06	139	
2006-07	132.6	
2007-08	137.6	Average to 30 May 2008