

Integrated Library and Research Services in the Australian Parliament.

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Abstract:

The history of the Australian Parliamentary Library is woven into the history of our national Parliament and our democracy. The Library was established in May 1901 during the very first session of the new Parliament. For many years it served as both a Library to the Parliament and as a Library to the new nation. The Research Service of the Parliamentary Library was created in 1967, positioned within the Library in recognition of the synergy between the two services.

The Library serves both Houses of the Australian Parliament. Its role is to provide high quality information, analysis and advice to senators and members in support of their parliamentary and representational roles, and to do so in a timely, impartial and confidential manner and maintaining the highest standards of scholarship and integrity. The office of the Parliamentary Librarian is established as an independent statutory office, and the Librarian reports directly to the Presiding Officers and also to the Parliament more broadly through the Joint Standing Committee on the Parliamentary Library.

Over time the two arms of the Library have become more integrated, driven in part by efficiency reviews but also by the findings of service evaluations and by the changing needs of our clients. Increasingly we are finding synergies between the skills of librarians and of researchers in finding/curating information. The Library faces many challenges. Chief of these is an increasingly financially constrained environment, where our budget remains under pressure, but other key challenges include anticipating new developments, and meeting our clients' changing expectations. In the contemporary environment, where Google is king, closer integration has enabled us to better provide fast, tailored advice to clients.

Beginnings

Australia became a nation on 1 January 1901 when the six colonies federated and the Commonwealth of Australia was proclaimed at a ceremony in Centennial Park, Sydney. It heralded 10 days of festival and spectacle throughout the city, and of affirmation of Australia's place in her Majesty's Empire. Celebrations were held across the continent. The *Sydney Morning Herald* declared that 'seldom indeed in the world's history have a people entered into full possession of their heritage under circumstances so auspicious and with an outlook so full of dazzling promise ...'¹ Only a few months later, on 9 May 1901, His Royal Highness The Duke of York and Cornwall (later George V) opened the first Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia at the Exhibition Building in Melbourne—the only building in the city big enough to accommodate the 1400 guests—on behalf of King Edward VII. Later that day the 111 members of the new Parliament (36 senators and 75 members of the House of Representatives) assembled for the

first time at their new home in the State Parliament Building, one of two possible sites which the Government of Victoria had graciously made available for the federal Legislature. Melbourne would continue to be the seat of Government until 1927, much longer than originally anticipated. During this time, the Victorian Parliament met in the Exhibition Building.

The choice of Melbourne as the temporary home of the new Commonwealth Parliament (as provided for by s125 of the Constitution) had been made at a 'secret' conference of the Premiers in January 1899.² However, this left unresolved the question of where the new Parliament would be housed. Discussions continued throughout 1900, the issue being whether the Commonwealth Parliament would occupy the State Parliament Building in Spring Street, Melbourne, or the Exhibition Building in Nicholson Street, Carlton. The question was the subject of debate in the press and among the Victorian parliamentarians, some of whom expressed reservations about being forced to move. The Victorian *Commonwealth Arrangements Act 1900* left the issue open. In April 1901, the Victorian Premier, Alexander Peacock, wrote to Prime Minister Edmund Barton recommending the Exhibition Buildings:

While leaving your Government perfectly free in its choice of which ever of the two buildings it may deem the more suitable, I desire to remark that such alterations are in progress at the Exhibition Buildings as will, it is considered, most fully meet the requirements and promote the comfort of the Members and the representatives of the Press, should that place be selected.³

To the Victorian Premier's undoubted disappointment, after 'most careful consideration and personal inspection of both buildings', Barton's choice was the Parliamentary Buildings—reputedly influenced by Attorney-General Alfred Deakin's strong attachment to the Parliamentary Library.⁴ Indeed, *the Argus* newspaper reported that '[o]ne of the main reasons that induced the Commonwealth Ministry to decide in favour of the permanent Parliamentary buildings rather than the temporary accommodation in the Exhibition building was the presence of the library in the former'.⁵ The long serving member for Maldon, Sir John McIntyre, declared to the house that '[i]t was only the Library that induced the Federal Government to make an effort to get possession of the Parliament buildings ... the Library was the great object of the desire of the Federal Government.'⁶

Barton's agreement with the Victorian Government for use of Melbourne Parliament House duly included access to the State's Parliamentary Library. For convenience, the officers of the Library remained State employees, their salaries reimbursed by the Commonwealth. Arthur Wadsworth acted as Commonwealth Parliamentary Librarian for over 26 years; he was finally transferred to the Commonwealth public service in 1927 (backdated to 1925).

While arrangements were put in place for the Parliamentary Library to serve the needs of both the state and federal legislatures, the Victorian members felt keenly the loss of ready access to their sumptuous reading rooms. The member for North Melbourne and future Premier, George Prendergast, described the library as 'one of the best Parliamentary Libraries in Australia, and ... probably the best in the southern hemisphere as a library of reference', and lamented having sent to the library to obtain books to use in a debate, only to find that '[b]y the time he finally got what he wanted, the member found that the House had gone three or four Bills ahead of the item ...'⁷ The issue continued to rankle. Thus, when a member of the Legislative Assembly, William Watt, found himself the brunt of 'scalding epithets' for citing out-of-date statistics, he defended himself by observing that 'the honourable member knows full well how hard it is to get information up from the other Parliament buildings'.⁸ For their part, the new Federal members were certainly keen to enjoy the benefits of their incumbency, with the member for North Melbourne enquiring of the Prime Minister on the very first day of sitting 'how soon the members of the Federal Parliament are to have the privileges of the library'.⁹

A Library for the nation

Adopting the pattern of Australian colonial legislatures, rather than of the Parliament of the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth Library would serve both chambers of the legislature. Of course, parliamentary libraries at the end of the Victorian era were quite different from those of today, providing traditional library services, including reading rooms which offered members refuge from the clamour of the chambers:

Parliamentary libraries grew up in the nineteenth century tradition of the cultured gentlemen's library and were, for many years, little more than well-appointed clubs where members could read their favourite newspapers and find the occasional literary allusion or quotation for speeches.¹⁰

This was manifest in the early reports and minutes of the Library Committee (presided over by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives) which detail acquisitions for the collection including subscriptions to magazines and newspapers, law reports, and works of history and biography as well as novels. The early Commonwealth library committees had, however, a larger vision which encompassed not only providing for the Parliament a 'suitable and sufficient library for its own use' but establishing the 'basis also for a collection of archives and for a Library worthy of the Commonwealth'.¹¹ This meant, in particular, a commitment to 'securing and preserving all works and documents connected with the discovery, settlement, and early history of the various States of the Commonwealth ... including all records relating to the establishment of the Commonwealth itself'.¹² In 1907, in part to encourage donations from Australian book collectors, the Committee issued a public statement entitled 'The Creation of a Great Library' setting out its aspirations to create 'in the Federal Capital, a great Public Library on the lines of the world-famed Library of Congress'.¹³

The Parliamentary departments were recognised in the first Commonwealth Public Service Act in 1902. With the 1922 Public Service Act the Parliamentary Library was recognised a department of the public service.

While the establishment of a Library for the new Federal Parliament and for the new nation was delayed by ready access to the holdings of the Victorian parliamentary library and State Library, under the Leadership of Speaker Frederick Holder the Committee pursued its remit conscientiously if not systematically. In 1909, after protracted negotiations, it finally acquired the Petherick Collection of Australiana, which at some 15,000 books and pamphlets remains one of the largest collections ever acquired by the Library. The *Endeavour* journal and other papers of Captain James Cook followed in 1923. In 1912 the Library acquired deposit rights. Between 1914 and 1925 the Parliamentary Library published the first 33 volumes of the *Historical Records of Australia*. And, in 1915, the first edition of the Parliamentary Handbook was produced.

The opening of Provisional Parliament House by His Royal Highness the Duke of York (later to become King George VI) in 1927 saw the seat of Government move to the the new National Capital Territory which had been founded in 1913. As the new city was still in the early stages of development, the functions of the Parliamentary Library were enlarged to embrace a much wider range of responsibilities, serving the Parliament, the Executive, the nation, and the inhabitants of the nascent city-state. By the 1930s, it had become Australia's sixth largest library.¹⁴ By 1935 the demands of this 'extra parliamentary' program had become so pressing that, at the request of the Library Committee, the Prime Minister agreed to provide additional funding in his department's appropriation to cover these services (thereby departing from the Library of Congress model):

the Government, at the request of and in consultation with the Library Committee, has considered the position of the Library in relation to its extra-parliamentary activities, and has provided an amount of £2,500 ... to cover these services. This additional amount is designed to assist the Library Committee in building up the special collections, such as Australian history and literature, which are the particular responsibilities of a national library, and in developing the national functions which the committee, with its limited resources, has in the past been carrying out only under difficulties.¹⁵

The Library's responsibilities continued to grow by a process of gradual accretion. By the 1950s, the Presiding Officers, assisted by the Library Committee, found themselves in the unusual circumstance of being charged with the overarching governance not only of a Parliamentary Library, but also: a National Library (which by then included historic film and sound recordings and other items of historic or national interest); the Commonwealth archives; and the provision of free public library services for the Australian Capital Territory, the Northern Territory, Papua New Guinea, Nauru and Norfolk and Cocos Islands. Many of these activities were shared with other departments in conduct or management and had reporting responsibilities to the Executive. The Library's extra-parliamentary responsibilities had become much more extensive than its services to the Parliament. Moreover, its work was in great part funded not by the Parliament's own appropriations but by monies appropriated to the Prime Minister's department

(with the Prime Minister being responsible for activities which in practice lay outside his control). The Legislative Reference Branch had become a relatively small part of one of six Divisions in what was known as the Commonwealth National Library. Even then, the provision of a 'general reading and reference service to Parliament' was only one of the branch's seven core functions which included services to executive departments, Canberra University College, and other universities and research institutions.

The appropriateness of these arrangements, and the Presiding Officers' authority to control such an enlarged sphere of extra-parliamentary activities, with no legislative underpinning, had been the subject of discussion in the 1930s in the Pinner report on the organisation and working of the parliamentary departments.¹⁶ The Parliamentary services continued to be based on a model of a central reading room and a reference service. However, organising and accommodating staff and the burgeoning collections to meet the demands of many masters became increasingly problematic; and, as Pinner foresaw, the provision of services to the Parliament necessarily suffered. Amongst at least some parliamentarians, there was a perception that their particular and increasing needs were not being met; and that, while library staff were 'efficient and courteous', they were 'encumbered with too many matters and so unable to provide quite the service that is given, for instance, by the great Library of Congress'.¹⁷

In 1956 the Menzies Government established a committee, headed by the Vice Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, George Paton, to look into the 'control of the National Library and its functions and advise whether any change in the present form of control is desirable and, if so, the changes which should be made'.¹⁸ The Committee duly recommended that the National Library, Commonwealth Archives and the Parliamentary Library each be a separate institution, with the latter controlled by the Presiding Officers with the advice of a joint committee. (A similar recommendation had been made as early as 1932 in the Pinner report but was vigorously opposed by the then Librarian.)¹⁹ After further deliberation and stakeholder consultation, in 1960 the Prime Minister introduced legislation separating the National Library of Australia, the Archives and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library, enabling the Presiding Officers to focus exclusively for the first time on creating a library that met the evolving needs of the Parliament. The legislation enjoyed the complete support of the Opposition. The focus of the debate was on the National Library and the need for a new building to properly house the national collections which were widely dispersed. However, the Prime Minister took pains to emphasise that the changed arrangements would 'not prejudice, but rather strengthen, the reference and reading services available to the Parliament itself' as

Members should be able to draw with freedom and confidence on facts and opinions affecting important public issues with which they have to deal.²⁰

A number of speakers took the opportunity to set out their aspirations for their own Library services, which centred on the desired introduction of specialised reference and research services:

I hope that one development will be that complete research facilities will be available. It is regrettable that those facilities are not fully adequate at the present time ... I hope that a strong research section will be added, because that is something which can be of vital value to the Parliament itself.²¹

...

We, the Library Committee of the Parliament, have very strong views on the sort of services which the Parliamentary Library should provide ... We are conscious of the shortcomings of the services. At present, the Library provides little more than general reference services. In addition to that, the material needed to inform members should be more highly organized so that it is immediately responsive to demand from members. This is not so now in most cases because it is impossible, in present circumstances, to organize the material properly ... but I believe that material should be analysed and presented in the form of prepared statements as is done in the Library of Congress, and in the Parliaments of the United Kingdom, India and Japan. That sort of analysis is increasingly available to Ministers of the Commonwealth Government through the research officers and through the resources in Commonwealth departments. If we, as a Parliament, are to do our job, with the increasing complexity of modern government, we also need services from our Library comparable, at least, to those which are provided for Ministers.²²

...

[O]ne of the most important functions of a parliamentary library is to place at the ready disposal of members of the Parliament such information as will enable them efficiently and sufficiently to gauge the value of proposals put forward by the government itself. This is very important. The government has behind it all the resources of its departments, all the information that they have been able to assemble and all the advice of many expert officers in those departments. Members of the Parliament, irrespective of the side on which they sit, are expected to deal intelligently with measures which come before the Parliament, and they should have at their disposal a complete reference organization ... of the kind which has been developed particularly for other national parliaments, so that members may be at least as well informed as is the government which introduces the measures on which members have to make judgments.²³

...

We should have at our hand and at call immediately not only reference material, but also reference officers who are able to supply us with up-to-date information, to coordinate it for us and to produce it in such a way that we can use it in our parliamentary work.²⁴

A Library for the Parliament

The *National Library Act 1960* enabled the Parliamentary Library to shape its services to meet the special and particular needs of the clients and of individual senators and members and to offer services beyond general reference and reading. The separation of the two institutions was a complex and prolonged process which was not completed until 1968. Even then, relations between the two libraries remained close as one of the specified functions of the National Library was to provide services to the Library of the Parliament.²⁵

However, freed from the responsibility of maintaining permanent and comprehensive collections, the Library, closely overseen by the Library Committee, was able to focus instead on building, *ab initio*, a modest and carefully selected collection of resources to meet the contemporary needs of the Parliament—such selectivity enabled by the Parliament's ready access to the National Library's extensive holdings.

A Current Information Section was established in 1969 to provide senators and members with ready access to current material on practically every matter of interest to the Parliament. Clippings from Australian and overseas newspapers and journals, press releases, bibliographies, parliamentary speeches and questions formed comprehensive subject files. Separate files were produced for each senator and member with their speeches and questions indexed chronologically, as well as a separate series of files for each ministry. New files were commenced each year so that 'in one or two minutes' staff could 'provide a file on the wood-chip industry, all the questions asked in the last three years on the export of merino rams, or a speech by an individual Member in 1969 on international affairs.'²⁶ By the time this service was replaced by digital clipping and indexing systems in 1999, the Library had amassed some 2,100 linear metres of subject and member files—a unique national resource which is still used by clients and which is currently being digitised for preservation purposes.

Over time library services continued to expand and become more sophisticated in order to meet members' requirements for quick access to material and information. Recognising its clients' need to keep abreast of current affairs, the Library introduced tailored Alert services, indexing and abstracting journal articles. In 1975, it began to monitor, record and transcribe radio and television news and current affairs programs. (The Library's collection of pre-2004 audio cassette tapes and audio visual tapes amounts to 55,000 hours of video footage and 38,000 hours of audio recordings. In many cases these are unique holdings as the television stations that produced them did not necessarily archive these broadcasts.) And in the 1990s, for the first time, on line access to library databases was made available to electorate officers and the Library was a pioneer in bringing the internet to the Parliament.

The Presiding Officers and the Library Committee also examined the Parliamentary Library's staffing establishment to ensure that it would be ready to provide the full suite of library services following the transfer of responsibilities from the National Library, and would also have the capacity to develop a new legislative research service. Improved staff skills, greater understanding of the needs of parliamentary clients, and better organisation and closer knowledge of the collection were seen to be critical. The Government agreed to provide additional funding to increase the staff establishment from 15 to 45.

Despite ongoing industry shortages, the Library's staff gradually increased in number and specialisation, including, in 1973, a cohort of subject specialist librarians covering the domains of economics, defence and foreign affairs, health, education and welfare, science and technology and law.

Legislative Research Service

More pioneering in the Australian context was the Library Committee's determination to establish in the Library 'specialised legislative research services'.²⁷ (There was no consideration of doing anything other than embedding the new service in the library.) This began in an embryonic way with the secondment of a statistician from the Bureau of Census and Statistics in 1963. However, it was not until 1966, after some false starts, that a more ambitious service was introduced with the appointment of three research staff. By 1968 this had grown to six, covering Statistics, Trade, Industry and Finance, Defence and Technology, Social Welfare, Science, and Foreign Affairs. At the time, not all senators and members were convinced of the necessity of the new service:

Some members who worked hard and used the resources of the Library on their own initiative, seemed to resent the fact that others, who did not display the same energies, could coast along and get an easy ride ... with the crutches that the new management would give them.²⁸

However, clients came to recognise the value provided by the new service, particularly in light of the increased parliamentary workloads and the development of committee systems in the Senate and in the House of Representatives. Requests for research increased by 300 per cent from 1966 to 1995.²⁹ The Parliament itself grew in size, the Senate increasing to 76 seats and the House of Representatives to 150. Changing demographics also played their part: 'as members were becoming better educated, [they] became more conscious of the need to research policy and speeches in greater detail'.³⁰ By 1974 the number of research staff had grown to 31.³¹ The primary service offered was the preparation of confidential answers to direct client inquiries; some position papers on topics judged to be of interest to senators and members were also produced as the service evolved. In 1976, at the Speaker's direction, the Library's Bills Digest Service commenced, initially to assist the Presiding Officers and the Chair of Committees to manage legislative debate. The service was extended to all senators and members the following year and proved immediately popular; today the Bills Digests remain our most in-demand publications.

For very many years the parliamentary research service worked in parallel to the library's reference service, both of which were organised into similar subject teams. While this arrangement made for 'administrative convenience',³² it also generated some professional friction and proved not to be optimum for the Library's clients who were not at all interested in the fine distinctions between reference and research questions and were confused as to where to direct their inquiry. After extensive consultation which went a long way in mitigating professional concerns expressed by both research and information staff, the issue was resolved in 1997 when the two arms of the Library were amalgamated and reference librarians integrated in subject specialist teams in the research service.³³ Despite initial staff concerns, the complementary skills of information professionals and research specialists were recognised and respected. Over time distinctions between librarians and researchers blurred, with both groups, with the exception of the Law Librarians, being identified simply as 'researchers'. While this is to the undoubted benefit of our clients, an unanticipated and entirely regrettable consequence has been, despite best endeavours, a difficulty recruiting Library professionals to positions in the seven subject sections that comprise Research Branch.

Structural change

In 1999 the Department of the Parliamentary Library along with the other five Parliamentary departments were constituted under the new Parliamentary Services Act 1999. This legislation had been developed in recognition that the parliamentary departments' primary focus is the Parliament not the government of the day as is the case for the public service.

The Parliamentary Library's structure was transformed in February 2004 when, by joint resolution, the Library combined with the Departments of Parliamentary Reporting Services and Joint House to form the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS). This, the biggest change in the structure of the parliamentary departments since their establishment in 1901, was driven by the need to significantly

reduce expenditure. Five earlier attempts at administrative rationalisation had foundered, in part due to concerns about the independence of the Parliamentary Library.³⁴ To address these concerns, the position of Parliamentary Librarian—which had been substantively vacant since 1992, with the Secretary of the Department of the Parliamentary Reporting Staff also Acting Librarian— was re-established. To provide the Parliament further assurance, the then President of the Senate, the Hon Paul Calvert, in concert with the Speaker, introduced a Bill to make the position of Parliamentary Librarian an independent statutory office. The *Parliamentary Service Amendment Act 2005* codified for the first time the functions of the Parliamentary Librarian, and hence of the Library, namely ‘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’ (section 38B(1)(a)). The Act goes further to enshrine in law the critical aspects of the Library’s services, that they be provided (section 38 B(2)):

- (a) in a timely, impartial and confidential manner; and
- (b) maintaining the highest standards of scholarship and integrity; and
- (c) on the basis of equality of access for all Senators, Members of the House of Representatives, parliamentary committees and staff acting on behalf of Senators, Members or parliamentary committees; and
- (d) having regard to the independence of Parliament from the Executive Government of the Commonwealth.

The Act contains a number of other important provisions to bolster the independence of the Library. First, the Librarian is appointed by (section 38C) and reports directly to the Presiding Officers (section 65(1)(c)). The Librarian also reports to a Joint Library Committee (section 38H) which has, for the first time, a statutory oversight role. Finally, each year the Librarian and the Secretary of the Department must conclude a Resource Agreement (section 38G) which specifies the resources and services provided to the Parliamentary Librarian by DPS to enable the provision of Library services to senators and members.

These provisions have enhanced the Library’s capacity to be recognised as independent and to provide ‘fearless’ advice that may not be welcomed either by the government of the day or the party whose policy or program may be the subject of its review. As the former Clerk of the Senate, Harry Evans, once observed, parliamentary libraries ‘necessarily live dangerously’ as:

[t]he holders of power do not necessarily welcome facts and analysis which do not support their cause. They spend a great deal of time and energy suppressing and manipulating facts and analysis which appear to threaten their hold on power. Anyone who produces facts and analysis contrary to that consideration is likely to be unpopular with the powers that be ... The power of facts and analysis to influence events and to make the holders of power accountable adds to the element of danger in the lives of parliamentary librarians and their institutions.³⁵

Contemporary Issues

The Parliamentary Library has continued to evolve to meet the changing needs of senators and members.

We provide ‘traditional’ library services such as books, journals and newspapers, as well as a comprehensive range of value-added services, including online media monitoring, specialist databases, and statistical and mapping services.

The Parliamentary Library has also become one of Australia’s major research libraries, providing parliamentarians with tailored and confidential research briefs and general distribution publications on current legislation and on a wide range of other issues of interest to the Parliament. Researchers work only with source material that is published or publishable.

The range of services and products offered to senators and members reflects both the wide range of issues before the Parliament and the personal preferences of individual clients as to how they access Library services. The Library tries to present its resources in the widest manner possible, from blog posts on emerging and hot issues to detailed published research papers on more enduring topics, from oral briefings and seminars to quick advice over the phone, and from hard copies of dictionaries and encyclopaedias to the online provision of e-books and serials. Increasingly services are delivered online,

giving parliamentarians and their staff immediate and 24/7 access to information and research at their desktop or on their mobile device, be it for chamber work or electorate matters. As at 30 May 2014, nearly 36 per cent of the Library's collection was available to clients online in full text, and there have been over five million online uses of the Library's publications in the 2013-14 financial year.

In 2012-13, Library staff answered nearly 13,000 individual client requests, added over 180,000 items to Library databases and over 4,000 new titles to the catalogue, and produced more than 420 publications, including 164 Bills Digests.

The Library is well used (by 100 per cent of our primary clients) and well regarded. Pleasingly, the most recent independent evaluation of Library and research services found 93% of respondents 'satisfied' and 80% either 'extremely satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the services offered; 98.5% said they would be likely to recommend the services to colleagues. Staff were highly regarded and the Library was seen to deliver well on its key performance measures, particularly accuracy, confidentiality and quality; however, any lapse in quality was judged harshly. Finally, Library services were regarded with greater trust and authority than other more regularly used online services.³⁶

However, the Library faces a number of challenges in fulfilling its statutory mandate.

Copyright

Copyright exemptions and concessions in the *Copyright Act 1968* have been significant enablers for the delivery of information services. However, the Act's drafters did not envisage the technological developments of the internet and digital publishing; and as a result the Act no longer provides the unimpeded access to information for senators and members which the Parliament had intended. At issue also is the extent to which parties may contract out of statutory exemptions. These matters, and many more, were canvassed in a recent review of Australian Copyright Law by the Australian Law Reform Commission, which recommended that 'the parliamentary libraries exceptions should be technology-neutral and should apply to all of the rights encompassed by copyright.'³⁷ The Government is still considering its response to the report.

Vulnerable collections

As noted previously, the Library has significant archives of paper and pre-digital audio visual material which constitutes a unique collection relating to Australia's political and public policy history dating from the 1940s and 1950s. Many of the paper files, amounting to some 10.5 million individual pages, have deteriorated significantly. The Library's historic audio visual and audiotape collections are in analog formats and players; copiers for this collection are not readily available and the shelf life for much of this material will probably expire 10-20 years from now. However the Library has only limited capacity to digitise this material. Expenditure on conserving this part of the collection needs to be balanced against the more pressing priority of ensuring that the collection meets the needs of contemporary clients by introducing, for example, new tools which enable real time monitoring of social media. Adopting new technologies is costly, both in terms of equipment and people.

Changing balance of work and changing client expectations

The environment in which we work has changed immeasurably over the last decade, and will continue to do so. Increasingly client expectations and demands are shaped by the 24/7 media cycle and their own rapid adoption of technology. Clients expect immediate and easy access to tailored information products which they can use on their desktop in their office or on their mobile device in an airport lounge or in the back of a taxi. They expect us also to be flexible and innovative, to adapt to emerging technologies quickly—to be on the cutting edge, if not on the bleeding edge of service provision.

At the same time, qualitative and quantitative data point to a shift in the type and complexity of work that parliamentarians ask of the Library. Library data indicate that between 2000-01 and 2012-13 there was an overall decline in the number of client requests of 35.1 per cent per Full Time Equivalent staff (FTE). However, over that same period there has been an increase in the average amount of time spent on individual requests. For example, in 2000-01 the average client request took staff 1.6 hours to complete; in 2012-13, it took 2.1 hours—an increase of 30.6 per cent. One explanation for this trend is that there seems to be a gradual change in the balance of research queries the Library receives. Clients are increasingly able to find the answers to simple, straightforward queries online, with the result that

the queries received by the library are increasing in complexity. As their access to information has increased, so has the clients' need for impartial analysis and advice. What has not changed is the urgency with which the Library's advice is required.

Workload is also influenced by the demands of the Parliament for example the increasing legislative load puts increasing demands on the production of Bills Digest; the increasing number of minor parties and independents potentially increase the demand on the Library's services.

Budgetary constraints

Like other legislative libraries, the Australian Parliamentary Library has experienced significant and increasing constraints in resourcing, with reductions in its budget of around 19 per cent in real terms between 2005–06 and 2012–13; at the same time, FTE decreased from 139 in 2005–06 to an anticipated 121.3 in 2013-14. This decrease has coincided with a significant increase in the workload of Parliament. This is true both for the two chambers and for their committees.

The Library has focused on making productivity savings for many years, with considerable success, particularly in Information Access Branch where improving technology has had greatest impact on productivity. Research services, however, can only be provided by having skilled staff with subject-based knowledge and expertise. Improvements in technology and training can assist staff to access a wider range of information more quickly. However, making sense of that information and tailoring responses for clients cannot be automated and is resource intensive. Great care needs to be taken to allocate and reallocate resources strategically to avoid the tipping point at which the Library would lose the capacity to genuinely add value through critical analysis. This includes consideration of how to strike the optimum balance between the breadth and depth of policy coverage, and how to draw most effectively upon outside sources of expertise. It also demands flexibility and creativity on behalf of staff. For example, the introduction of an automated indexing system meant that indexers had scope to take on additional tasks. This provided an opportunity for this cadre of skilled library professionals to work across branches to assist researchers with information retrieval. Both groups have welcomed the opportunity, which has the potential to at least partially address the ongoing difficulty recruiting Library professionals to positions in the Research Branch.

Conclusion

The history of the Australian Parliamentary Library is woven into the history of our national Parliament and our democracy. While the scope and scale of services has changed immeasurably since 1901, and will continue to do so, its purpose has remained constant: to provide high quality information and advice to support the work of the Parliament and of individual senators and members and so to help strengthen democratic governance. To quote former Australian Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam:

Australians cannot have responsible government unless their representatives have adequate parliamentary libraries. Ministers have access to all relevant information in their own departments. The men and women who sit behind and opposite them have to depend on their Library.³⁸

¹ "NEW YEAR'S DAY, 1901", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 Jan 1901, page 14, accessed 17 Mar 2014, <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article14366147>>.

² V Isaacs, 'Parliament in Exile: Aspects of the Victorian Parliament at the Exhibition Building, 1901 to 1927', *Australian Study of Parliament Group Journal*, 17(1), Autumn 2002, pages 79-97.

³ National Archives of Australia, A8, 1901/163 cited in V Isaacs, 'Parliament in Exile: Aspects of the Victorian Parliament at the Exhibition Building, 1901 to 1927', *Australian Study of Parliament Group Journal*, 17(1), Autumn 2002, page 81.

⁴ National Archives of Australia, A8, 1901/163 cited in Isaacs, *Ibid.*, page 81.

⁵ *The Argus*, 26 July 1901, page 4.

- ⁶ J McIntyre, 'Parliament Buildings, Spring Street', Victoria, Legislative Assembly, *Debates*, 19 December 1901, page 3748.
- ⁷ G Prendergast, 'State Reading Room', Victoria, Legislative Assembly, *Debates*, 12 December 1901, page 3448.
- ⁸ W Watt, 'The Governor's Speech: Address in Reply', Victoria, Legislative Assembly, *Debates*, 29 June 1905, pages 87-88.
- ⁹ H Higgins, 'Special Adjournment', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 9 May 1901, page 24.
- ¹⁰ P Biskup and D Goodman, *Libraries in Australia*, Centre for Information Studies, Wagga Wagga, 1994, page 280.
- ¹¹ House of Representatives, *Report from the Library Committee (Sitting in Conference with the Library Committee of the Senate)*, Melbourne, 1903, page 4.
- ¹² House of Representatives, *Report from the Library Committee (Sitting in Conference with the Library Committee of the Senate)*, Melbourne, 1903, page 5.
- ¹³ House of Representatives, *Report from the Joint Library Committee*, Melbourne, 1907, page 3.
- ¹⁴ P Biskup and D Goodman, op. cit., page 6.
- ¹⁵ A Parkhill, 'Estimates 1935-36', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 8 November 1935, page 1483.
- ¹⁶ Public Service Board of Commissioners, *Report to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by the Public Service Board of Commissioners in compliance with request contained in letter of 25th August, 1932*, Canberra, 1932.
- ¹⁷ J McCallum, 'The Senate Appropriation Bill 1960-61', Senate, *Debates*, 18 October 1960, page 119.
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