

E-Tabling of Parliamentary Documents

Proposal: To replace hard copy tabling of documents in Parliament with electronic copies.

Background

The tabling of documents refers to a process by which documents are presented in Parliament. This process is guided by the *Guidelines for the presentation of documents to Parliament* and administered by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Current protocol requires entities to transmit hard copies of government documents to Parliament for distribution. Hard copy documents must be printed to the standard set by the Joint Committee on Publications, which specify size, colour and paper. Around 100 hard copies are delivered to different locations (depending on the document type and whether Parliament is sitting).

A more detailed process of tabling documents is set out in Attachment A.

E-Tabling

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet is looking to simplify the process by replacing hard copy documents with an e-tabling model. With the exception of those documents legally required to be printed, printing hard copies of Government documents for tabling in Parliament is costly and unnecessary.

In August 2015, an independent review of whole of government internal regulation (the Review) recommended PM&C and the Department of Finance work with relevant entities and Parliament to scope and develop a system of centralised electronic tabling of government documents (Attachment B). Reasons for the Review's recommendation included:

- parliamentarians and journalists do not make extensive use of tabled material;
- delivering documents is not an appropriate use of officers' time;
- electronic copies of documents is consistent with government operation becoming increasingly digital;
- unnecessary costs involved in printing hard copies (Department of Finance data showed that Australian Government entities spent around \$101 million on printing in 2011-12).

New South Wales and Queensland Parliaments have recently undergone significant reform to limit hard copy printing of annual reports to 2 and 10 copies respectively.

The Joint Committee on Publications is currently conducting an inquiry into printing standards for documents presented to Parliament. Submissions closed on 3 March 2017.

Next Steps

A system of electronic publication would need to:

- be able to provide safe passage of documents (otherwise required under embargo)
- be accessible to people with a disability
- meet other legislative requirements

PARLIAMENTARY TABLING REQUIREMENTS

Sitting Days

Government Reports
(annual reports, periodic reports, royal commissions)



Approval by relevant Minister



Hard copies distributed to the following locations prior to tabling (in accordance with printing standards for documents presented to Parliament):

- 5 to PM&C Tabling Officer
- 109 to Ministerial Embargo Room - to be delivered to Senate Table Office (30), House of Representatives (30), Parliamentary Press Gallery (40) and Parliamentary Library (9) after tabling
- 27 to Commonwealth Library (after tabling)



Report to be made available online as soon as possible after tabling. Department to notify Parliament once published online.

Government Responses to Parliamentary Committee Reports



Approval by Prime Minister or Cabinet



Hard copies distributed to the following locations prior to tabling (in accordance with printing standards for documents presented to Parliament):

If Senate Report :

- 5 to PM&C Tabling Officer
- 82 to Ministerial Embargo – to be delivered to Senate PLO (21), Senate Clerk Assistant Table (2), Senate Table Office (10), Press Gallery (40) and Parliamentary Library (9)

If Joint Report:

- 5 to PM&C Tabling Officer
- 92 to Ministerial Embargo – to be delivered to Senate PLO (21), Senate Clerk Assistant Table (2), Senate Table Office (10), House of Representatives (10), Press Gallery (40) and Parliamentary Library (9)

If House of Representatives Report

- 5 to PM&C Tabling Officer
- 69 to Ministerial Embargo – to be delivered to Senate Table Office (10), House of Representatives (10), Press Gallery (40) and Parliamentary Library (9)

Ministerial Statements



Approval by Prime Minister or Cabinet



Hard copies distributed to the following locations prior to tabling (in accordance with printing standards for documents presented to Parliament):

- 5 copies to PM&C Tabling Officer
- 102 to Ministerial Embargo Room - to be delivered to Senate PLO (21), Senate Clerk Assistant Table (2), Senate Table Office (10), House of Representatives Table Office (10), Press Gallery (40) and Parliamentary Library (9)
- Additional 30 copies to PM&C Tabling Officer for distribution to non-government senators and members.

Senate not sitting

Government Reports, Responses and Ministerial Statements



Approval by Minister, Prime Minister or Cabinet (depending on document)



Minister's letter provided to Senate Documents Officer for the President



Hard copies distributed to the following locations prior to tabling (received by the President):

If Government document:

- 1 to President (Senate Documents Officer SG25), 5 to PM&C Tabling Officer, 30 to Senate Table Office (SG25), 30 to House of Representatives Table Office (RG89), 40 to Press Gallery (S2), 9 to Parliamentary Library (M2) 27 to Commonwealth Library deposit.

If Senate Committee Report:

- 1 to President, 5 to PM&C Tabling Officer, 10 to Senate Table Office, 21 to Senate PLO, 40 to Press Gallery, 9 to Parliamentary Library

If Joint Committee Report:

- 1 to President, 5 to PM&C Tabling Officer, 10 to Senate Table Office, 21 to Senate PLO, 10 to House of Representative Table Office, 40 to Press Gallery, 9 to Parliamentary Library

If Ministerial Statement

- 1 to president, 5 to PM&C tabling officer, 10 to senate table office, 21 to Senate PLO, 10 to House of Representatives Table Office, 40