

Changes to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library

On 24 March, the speaker of the House of Representatives, Neil Andrews issued a statement on Parliamentary Library matters. Following is an outline of the proposals suggested to protect the independence of the Parliamentary Library.

The 2002 Report on Aspects of the Administration of the Parliament by the Parliamentary Service Commissioner, Mr Andrew Podger, and the House's August 2003 resolution establishing the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS), both included important elements intended to protect the independence of the Parliamentary Library.

In response, a package of proposals has been developed to give effect to the Parliament's wish to protect the independence of the Parliamentary Library.

The package consists of proposals for a more formal establishment of the joint Library Committee, drafting instructions for amendments to the *Parliamentary Service Act 1999*, and a duty statement and selection criteria for the position of parliamentary librarian, to be created as a statutory office.

The proposal to establish a Joint Standing Committee on the Parliamentary Library arises from the parliamentary resolutions establishing the DPS, and will be the subject of further consultation with Senators and Members.

The Parliamentary Service Commissioner's report proposed that the parliamentary librarian have a senior position with the DPS. The resolutions passed by the House and the Senate require that the parliamentary librarian be a statutory position with direct reporting lines to the presiding officers and the relevant library committees.

It is proposed that the Act be amended to create a statutory position of parliamentary librarian, set out the functions of the parliamentary librarian, and require those functions to be performed, among other things, in a timely, impartial and confidential manner and on the basis of equality of access for all Senators and Members.

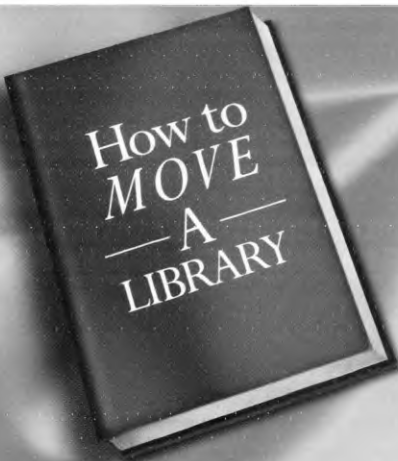
The Bill will require the parliamentary librarian to have professional qualifications in librarianship or information management, and to hold professional

membership of a recognised professional association in such a discipline.

The Bill will contain provisions relating to the statutory appointment that largely mirror those covering the secretary to the DPS, including that an appointment may only be terminated by the presiding officers after receiving a report from the Parliamentary Service Commissioner.

As proposed in the resolutions passed by the House and the Senate, there will be a significant role for the Library Committee in advising the presiding officers on the annual resource agreement between the parliamentary librarian and the secretary to the DPS. As well, the parliamentary librarian will report to the Library Committee at least once a year.

When a draft Bill is available, further consultation will take place with party leaders and independents. At this stage, preliminary recruitment action will begin, although an appointment to the statutory position of parliamentary librarian will have to await passage of the Bill. ■




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