

The Parliamentary Library:

The Parliamentary Library of the Commonwealth of Australia is as old as the Parliament – it commenced providing services to members of Parliament in May 1901 in the Parliament's temporary home in Melbourne.

The original Australian Parliamentary Library served as both a library to the Parliament and as a library to the new nation. It wasn't until 1960 that an Act of Parliament formally separated the National Library from the Parliamentary Library.

Today, the Parliamentary Library is part of the Department of Parliamentary Services, which provides a range of services to the Parliament. It is located in Parliament House.

The Office of the Parliamentary Librarian is established as an independent statutory office, and the Librarian's role and functions are defined by the *Parliamentary Service Act 1999*.

The Act provides that the role of the Parliamentary Librarian is, firstly, 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.

These functions must be performed in a timely, impartial, and confidential manner; maintain the highest standards of scholarship and integrity; provide equal access for all Senators, MPs, parliamentary committees, and their staff; while having regard to the independence of the Parliament from the Executive Government of the Commonwealth.

The current Parliamentary Librarian is Dr Dianne Heriot, who took up her permanent appointment as Parliamentary Librarian in May 2012. To assist her fulfil her statutory obligations as Librarian, Dr Heriot has her own Office of the Parliamentary Librarian (4 staff), the Research Branch (70 staff), and the Information Access Branch (53 staff), a full-time equivalent staff of 127. The library has a higher head count, with ongoing part-time staff in both the Research and Information Access Branches.

Temporary positions are advertised in both Branches as the need arises to fill unexpected or short-term gaps. A summer scholarship program is being trialled this year. As well, from time to time, the library has used casual student labour – most recently to assist with shelving and with the retrospective digitisation of parts of the print collection. These temporary engagements can be a useful stepping stone to anyone with a longer term aspiration to work in the parliamentary library world.

Access to impartial, current, accurate, and timely information is fundamental to democratic legislatures. In their legislative and their representative roles, parliamentarians need information as they monitor current issues, develop policy solutions, and influence government decision-making.

Services are available to all members and senators on an equal basis, in confidence, and to agreed deadlines. Analysis and advice to support the Parliament fluctuate in demand according to the parliamentary cycle.

Long-term changes in demand have been apparent as more services and content are provided to the desktop on a self-help basis and use of these services continues to rise each year.

The range of services and products we now offer to MPs and Senators is extensive, reflecting the wide range of issues which come before the Parliament, but also the personal preferences of MPs and Senators in how they prefer to access our services. From blog posts on emerging and hot issues to detailed published research papers on more enduring topics, to oral briefings and seminars to quick advice over the phone, from hard copies of dictionaries and encyclopaedias to the online provision of e-books and serials, the library tries to present our resources in the widest manner possible.

The Research Branch of the library includes researchers who have subject specific skills such as law; social policy; statistics & mapping; economics; science; technology; the environment; politics and public administration; foreign affairs; defence and security. The researchers have to maintain a flexible attitude as the current interests of Parliament are issues-based and can change rapidly in focus and intensity. Parliamentarians work hard and expect those delivering responses to their direct enquiries to work just as hard. Timeliness is very important – deadlines are very real in the parliamentary environment.

The Information Access Branch includes librarians, library technicians, systems administrators, and front desk staff. The staff of IAB work to deliver services either online or face-to-face and have similar pressures to the researchers in the timeliness requirements for these services. Collection items are often requested and needed within the same working day; online news services are expected to be available seven days a week by 7:30am. The library is very much an embodiment of the 'just in time' not a 'just in case' principle.

The library provides the following services:

- **Research services** to the Parliament, including responding to requests from individuals for information and research services and the production of general distribution briefs and publications.
 - o Last financial year, the Research Branch:
 - * provided services to all 226 Senators and Members of the Parliament, including responding to 15 500 individual confidential requests for analysis and advice
 - * released over 420 publications available for all to use through the web, including 178 Bills Digests
 - * published in several different formats including e-books
 - * had 4.8m online uses of these publications
 - * launched ParlMap (a self-help mapping service for Senators and Members and parliamentary staff)
- **Information services** to the library's clients through collection building – print and online including the library databases in ParlInfo and the Electronic Media Monitoring Service, and providing access to information resources through the library catalogue, ParlInfo, web and intranet sites, and the Electronic Media Monitoring Service.

working for parliament

- o Last financial year, the Information Access Branch:
 - * added over 4600 new titles to its catalogue and added 185 600 items to its databases and Electronic Media Monitoring Service
 - * achieved 33% of titles available online in full text
 - * introduced new online services including Summon (a resource discovery service that assists clients to find information held in the library's collections)
 - * digitised some 6700 historic press releases (1959-1999) and completed digitisation of party political documents (policies and major speeches) back to the 1900s.
 - * recorded over 3.48m uses of its collection and data bases

In 2011-12, the Parliamentary Library again had proof that its services are on target as it achieved a 93% satisfaction rate in a client evaluation of library Services, with over 98% of respondents reporting that

they would be likely to recommend Library services to colleagues.

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References

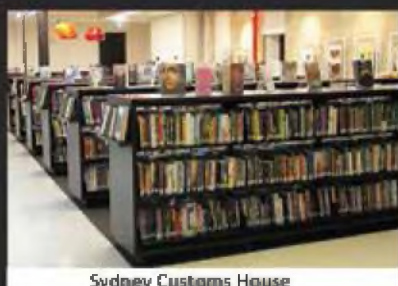
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See also: Parliamentary Library, www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library

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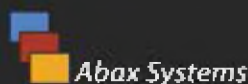
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