

## Parliamentary Papers

### **What is a Parliamentary Paper?**

A Parliamentary Paper is a document which has been:

- formally presented to a Parliament – this is usually described as being tabled in Parliament, and
- ordered by Parliament to be printed – this means that it is available to the public in printed form.

Each Australian Parliament (that is, the Federal Parliament, those of the States, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory) publishes Parliamentary Papers. Their systems for organising and numbering Parliamentary Papers differ – this fact sheet is about the Parliamentary Papers of the Federal Parliament.

Each Parliamentary Paper is allocated a number. The first Parliamentary Paper of each session of Parliament is allocated the number 1, and subsequent papers are numbered serially. The Parliamentary Papers for each session of Parliament are usually bound together in volumes and available for reference as sets.

### **How does a document become a Parliamentary Paper?**

When a paper is tabled, that is, laid or placed on the table of the Senate or the House of Representatives, it may be accompanied by a recommendation or motion to print and circulate it. The effect of this recommendation is to:

- include the paper in the official set of Parliamentary Papers for that session of Parliament, and
- have it printed and available for sale to the public.

### **What sorts of information do Parliamentary Papers contain?**

Most Parliamentary Papers are about the workings of the executive government. They are very useful sources because they are readily accessible, provide a solid overview of their subjects and contain valuable pointers for further research. Parliamentary Papers cover a remarkable range of subjects. For example:

- reports of Royal Commissions, eg Secret Drugs, Cures and Foods (1906–07); Moving Picture Industry in Australia (1927)
- reports of experts, delegations or committees, eg Reports of the Public Accounts Committee; The Aborigines and Half-Castes of Central Australia and Northern Australia – Report by JW Bleakley (1928); Report of the Australian Delegation to the United Nations General Assembly (1961–62)
- annual reports of departments and agencies
- budget papers – each year the budget papers contain details about receipts and expenditure
- White Papers (statements of government policy on significant matters), eg Australian Defence (1976).

## Using Parliamentary Papers

One quick way of identifying if there is a Parliamentary Paper on a subject of interest to you is to consult the publication *First Consolidated Index to the Papers Presented to Parliament 1901–1949*. This initial publication has been followed by indexes to Parliamentary Papers for later Parliaments.

The bound volumes of Parliamentary Papers for each session can be consulted fairly quickly. There is usually an index to the papers for the session at the beginning of the volumes for each session. The index lists all the papers ordered to be printed for that session.

Alternatively, you can consult the indexes to publications called *Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives* and *Journal of the Senate*. The Votes and Proceedings and the Journal constitute the daily record of the business transacted by each House of Parliament. These daily records are bound together in volumes representing the work of a parliamentary session. Each bound volume is usually indexed. The indexes to these publications usually contain an entry like 'papers presented' under which every paper presented is listed together with cross references to the Votes and Proceedings or Journal in which it is mentioned and, if printed, the year in which printed and its number. There is no single comprehensive index to the Votes and Proceedings and the Journal.

For each day that the House sat (i.e conducted business) the Votes and Proceedings and the Journal set out information like – the time the House sat; what delegations were present; the petitions lodged; the divisions taken; the papers presented or deemed to have been presented; who was present; the Bills considered; and the messages received.

## Where can you find Parliamentary Papers?

An [index to papers presented in the House of Representatives and the Senate](#) is available on the Parliament of Australia website.

The National Library of Australia, as well as state and territory libraries, and some university libraries, should hold copies of Parliamentary Papers.

Digitised [Hansard](#) dating from 1901 is also available on the Parliament of Australia website. The collection of documents is searchable using a number of criteria and downloadable as PDF files.

### **What happens to papers that are tabled but not printed?**

Each year thousands of papers are tabled in Parliament. Most are not ordered to be printed – therefore Parliamentary Papers are a subset of the papers tabled in Parliament. Those papers that are tabled but not ordered to be printed are listed in *Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives* or in the *Journal of the Senate*.

Papers that are not ordered to be printed are maintained by the House in which they were tabled – by the House of Representatives in the Bills and Papers Office or by the Senate in the Table Office.