



5 April 2019

Parliamentary Budget Office activity report

Overview

This activity report provides an update on PBO activities since the last report dated 13 February 2019.

Requests from parliamentarians and parliamentary parties

In the nine months to 31 March 2019, the PBO received 1,663 requests from parliamentarians for policy costings and analyses and responded to 1,547 requests at an average turnaround time of 26 business days and a median time to completion of 19 business days (refer to Table 1). The longer completion times than in previous periods reflected the volume of requests submitted to the PBO since the Budget in May 2018.

The PBO makes information requests to Commonwealth agencies to support its responses to parliamentarians (and its research program). In the nine months to 31 March 2019, the PBO received 305 responses from Commonwealth agencies to information requests at an average turnaround time of nine business days. Requests were provided, on average, three business days ahead of the due date (refer to Table 2). Table 3 contains details of the responsiveness of Commonwealth agencies to information requests during this period.

In the period since the last activity report, six policy announcements that were made by parliamentarians or parliamentary parties included references to PBO policy costings. None of these costings were subsequently publicly released (refer to Table 4).

Research program

The PBO's research program is set out in the 2018–19 corporate plan. Two research papers on fiscal policy matters have been released since February:

- On 14 March 2019, the PBO released a report *Net debt and investment funds – Trends and balance sheet implications*, which examines the impact of growth in government investment funds on net debt.
- On 1 April 2019, the PBO released a report titled *Australia's ageing population - Understanding the fiscal impacts over the next decade*, which builds on the 2015 Intergenerational Report by providing a detailed analysis of the impacts of an ageing population on revenue and spending over the next decade.

On 3 April 2019, the PBO released a graphical snapshot of the key information in the 2019–20 Budget. The snapshot presents key budget information in an accessible form with the aim of improving public understanding of budget issues.

In addition to these, the PBO released a publication on 21 March 2019 titled *Unlegislated measures carried forward in the budget estimates— March 2019*, which provides updated estimates of the medium-term impact on the Commonwealth budget of measures with significant financial implications that have been announced but are yet to be implemented.

In terms of future research, good progress has been made on reports examining alternative financing mechanisms and expenditure on the Newstart allowance. The PBO intends to publish these in 2019.

In advance of the next election, the PBO will also release a guidance note on how it will engage with parliamentary parties to produce its post-election report of election commitments.

External engagement

The PBO continues to seek input from its panel of expert advisors to assist with elements of its work program.

The PBO continues to work with Commonwealth agencies to arrange access to electronic data warehouses, where possible. This ongoing access reduces the time it takes to respond to parliamentary requests and reduces the ongoing burden on agencies in responding to individual requests for information.

Staffing

As at 31 March 2019, the PBO had 48 staff, including six people on secondment from other Commonwealth agencies. This is an increase in staffing levels compared with previous periods. The PBO has undertaken recruitment and secondment activities to ensure it has sufficient staff to manage the increased demand for its costing services during the forthcoming election period. The PBO receives additional funding every third year in the lead up to a general election to boost its staffing.

The PBO is continuing to participate in the Parliament of Australia graduate program. Five graduates have joined the PBO during 2019.

Resourcing

In the 2019–20 Budget, the PBO has been provided with additional resourcing of \$5.3 million over four years and ongoing funding of \$2.0 million a year from 2023–24. This resourcing enables the PBO to maintain the level of modelling and analysis services it provides and includes additional funding for staffing, consultancies and data purchases. Receiving this funding in 2019–20 enables the PBO to retain its special appropriation balance, to be able to respond flexibly to changes in demand throughout the election cycle.

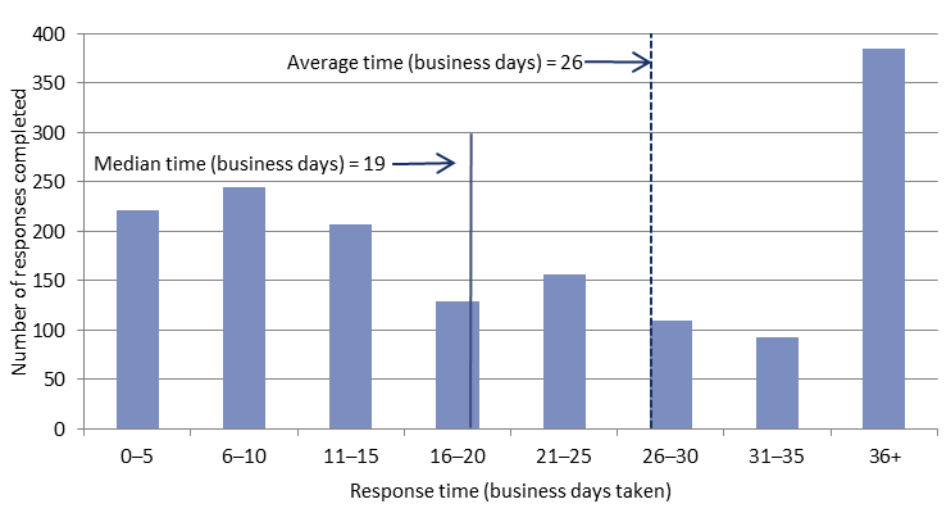
Requests from parliamentarians and parliamentary parties for costings and budget analyses

Table 1: Costing and budget analysis requests from parliamentarians and parliamentary parties to 31 March 2019

	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2018–19	2018–19	2018–19
	Total	Total	Total	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Total
Requests outstanding at start of period	76	138	20	180	586	336	149	586
Requests received in period	973	4,146	2,572	2,218	438	296	929	1,663
Requests withdrawn in period	42	1,013	524	252	51	146	123	320
Requests completed in period	869	3,251	1,888	1,560	637	337	573	1,547
Average time to completion (business days)	20	19	20	20	29	24	23	26
Median time to completion (business days)	12	16	12	15	25	13	19	19
Requests outstanding at end of period	138	20	180	586	336	149	382	382

Note: The table identifies the number of ‘options’ received by the PBO, noting that a single request can contain multiple options.

Figure 1: PBO response times for completed requests in 2018–19 to 31 March 2019



Requests by the PBO for information from agencies

Table 2: Information requests to agencies to 31 March 2019

	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2018–19	2018–19	2018–19
	Total	Total	Total	Total	Q1	Q2	Q3	Total
Responses outstanding at start of period	16	3	1	16	11	9	83	11
Requests sent in period	203	743	523	424	82	159	66	307
Responses received in period	216	745	508	429	84	85	136	305
Responses received by due date	147	695	499	425	80	83	135	298
Responses received after due date	69	50	9	4	4	2	1	7
Percentage late (%)	32	7	2	1	5	2	1	2
Average time taken to respond (business days)	13	7	8	9	7	5	12	9
Average punctuality (business days late)	3	-1	-2	-1	-1	-4	-1	-3
Average lateness of late responses (business days)	11	3	3	3	3	3	2	2
Responses outstanding at end of period	3	1	16	11	9	83	13	13

As at 31 March 2019, there were no overdue responses to a request for information.

Table 3: Information request responsiveness by agencies in 2018–19 to 31 March 2019

Department/Agency	Responses received in period	Average time taken to respond (business days)	Responses received after due date	% Late
Attorney-General's Department	9	6	1	11%
Australian Bureau of Statistics	1	17	0	0%
Australian Competition and Consumer Commission	4	8	0	0%
Australian Securities and Investments Commission	4	11	0	0%
Australian Taxation Office	45	6	0	0%
Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre	1	10	0	0%
Commonwealth Superannuation Corporation	1	9	0	0%
Department of Agriculture and Water Resources	3	7	0	0%
Department of Communications and the Arts	4	8	1	25%
Department of Defence	4	8	0	0%
Department of Education and Training	18	8	0	0%
Department of Finance	28	6	1	4%
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	5	5	1	20%
Department of Health	16	10	1	6%
Department of Home Affairs	16	13	0	0%
Department of Human Services	8	6	0	0%
Department of Industry, Innovation and Science	5	6	0	0%
Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities	4	7	0	0%
Department of Jobs and Small Business	8	6	0	0%
Department of Social Services	43	13	0	0%
Department of the Environment and Energy	10	10	0	0%
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet	4	7	0	0%
Department of the Treasury	52	9	2	4%
Department of Veterans' Affairs	12	6	0	0%
TOTAL	305	9	7	2%

Table 4: Policy announcements with reference to PBO costings — in the period since the last Activity report (to 1 April 2019)

Description of policy announcement	Party or parliamentary announcing policy	Method of announcement	Date of announcement	Date of release of costing minute
A Home for All	Australian Greens	Media release	21/02/2019	Costing minute not released
Pension for politicians	Australian Greens	Media article	4/03/2019	Costing minute not released
Household Solar Storage Scheme	Australian Greens	Media article	19/03/2019	Costing minute not released
Clean Energy Small Business Fund	Australian Greens	Media article	21/03/2019	Costing minute not released
Renew Australia 2030 - Powering past coal for a future for all of us	Australian Greens	Media release	28/03/2019	Costing minute not released
Build To Rent and Affordable Housing and Negative Gearing	Australian Labor Party	Media release	1/04/2019	Costing minute not released