



30 January 2025

Parliamentary Budget Office Activity report

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At a glance

This report provides an update on Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) activities since the last Activity report published on 28 October 2024. Key highlights include:

- Demand for costings and budget analysis services continues to be strong, accelerating as we approach the election. Completed request options in Quarter 2 of 2024-25 were an all-time record for a December quarter, and the second highest quarter for the 47th Parliament after Quarter 1 of 2024-25 (Figure 1).
- Time to delivery for requests exceeded our performance benchmark. Median time to completion was 13 days against a target of 15 days for requests, reflecting the impact of proactive prioritisation with requestors.
- We continued to refine our election readiness, rolling out election related training to all staff, enhancing our critical tools and reducing the stock of outstanding requests. We also briefed agencies on election arrangements.
- We published 4 self-initiated items – a *Budget Explainer: Australia’s tax mix, 2024-25 National fiscal outlook, 2024-25 MYEFO Snapshot* and an update of the *Historical fiscal data*. Two parliamentarian request responses were published, and we completed a MYEFO update of our interactive tools, Build your own budget (BYOB) and the Small model of Australian representative taxpayers (SMART).

PLANNED ACTIVITIES BY FUNCTION

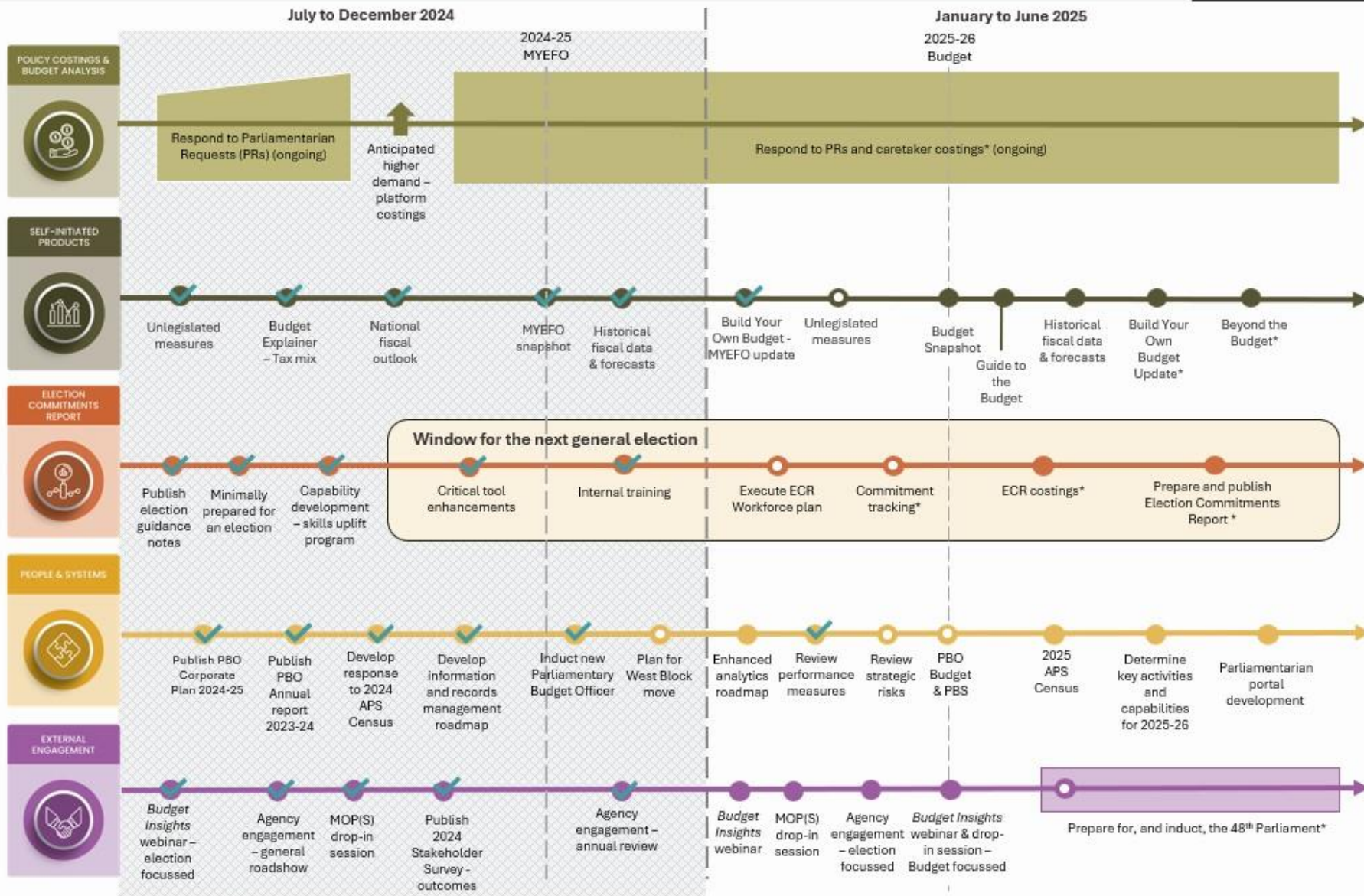
JULY 2024 TO JUNE 2025*



Parliamentary Budget Office

LEGEND

- ✓ Activity complete
- Activity commenced



* This plan recognises that the PBO will need to prepare for an election but makes no assumption about when the election will be. The timing and delivery of some activities will be affected by the election.

Our activities in detail

This report provides an update on our key activities since our previous Activity report (28 October 2024) with information up to 31 December 2024. Our Activity report is produced 3 times per annum in advance of Senate Estimates appearances and supports transparency about how we are delivering against the priorities in our [Corporate plan](#). More information is in our [Annual report](#) and previous [Activity reports](#).

Parliamentarian requests

We continue to experience strong demand for costing and budget analysis services (see Table 1 and Figure 1). During Quarter 2 2024-25, we completed 298 requests with 727 request options, an all-time record for a December quarter, and the second highest of any quarter in the 47th Parliament to date (after Quarter 1, 2024-25) (see Box 1).

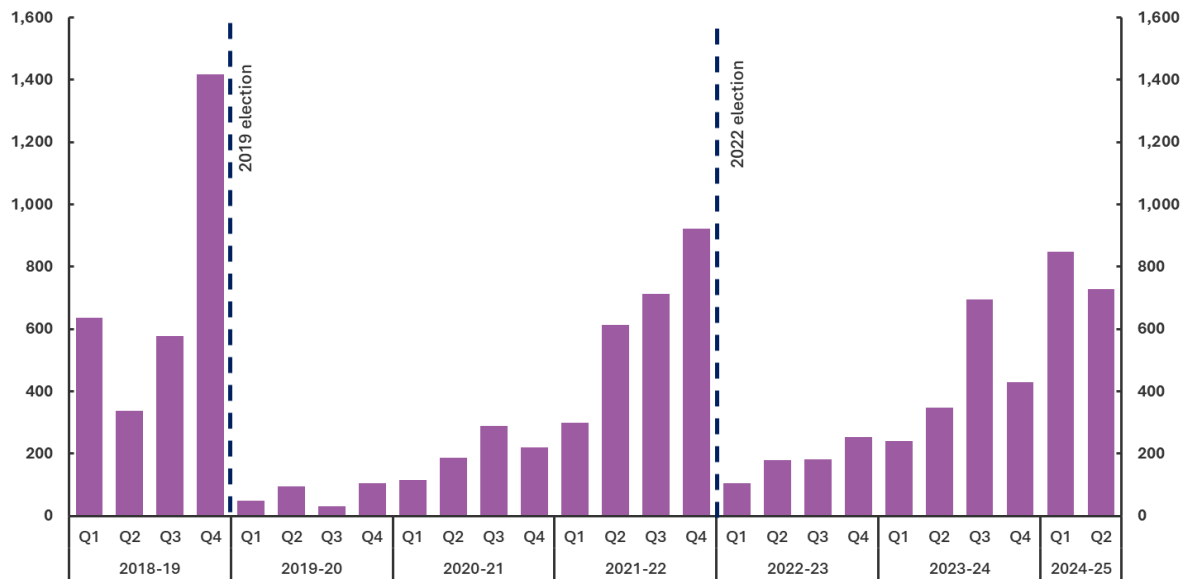
Table 1: Costing and budget analysis request performance to 31 December 2024

	19-20 total	20-21 total	21-22 total	22-23 total	23-24 total	24-25 Q1	24-25 Q2
Request options outstanding at the start of period	20	40	343	35	86	380 ^(c)	462 ^(d)
Request options received in period	332	1,253	3,241 ^(a)	786	2,046 ^(c)	975 ^(c)	532 ^(d)
Request options completed in period	279	813	2,550 ^(a)	721	1,711	847	727
Average time to completion (business days)	27	31	29	15	19	20	17
Median time to completion (business days)	25	35	18	14	15	15	13
Request options withdrawn in period	33	137	999 ^(b)	14	41	46	14
Request options outstanding at the end of period	40	343	35	86	380 ^(c)	462 ^(c)	253 ^(d)

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

- This includes 316 costings prepared for the 2022 Election commitments report. 314 costings were for commitments by parties and 2 additional costings were for interactions between policies.
- Most of these requests were automatically withdrawn due to the expiration of the 46th Parliament in accordance with the PBO’s legislative mandate which does not allow for requests to carry over between parliaments.
- Since the publication of the last report, we have re-examined metadata for the final quarter of 2023-24 and the first quarter of 2024-25 and recalculated the number of options for requests that were outstanding or received and have since been completed. This has led to the following changes to (i) total options received in 2023-24 revised upward from 2,035 to 2,046, and in Q1 2024-25 revised upward from 829 to 975 and (ii) total outstanding options at the end of 2023-24 revised upward from 369 to 380, and Q1 2024-25 revised upward from 305 to 462.
- This is a preliminary number based on an initial assessment of the number of options involved in each parliamentarian request and is subject change on completion of the costing.

Figure 1: Number of completed request options from parliamentarians



Demand continues to be stronger than we would usually expect at this point in the election cycle, with the cumulative total of requests received and completed for the quarter well in excess of the same period in previous election cycles (see Box 1). We expect demand to continue to accelerate as we approach the next general election.

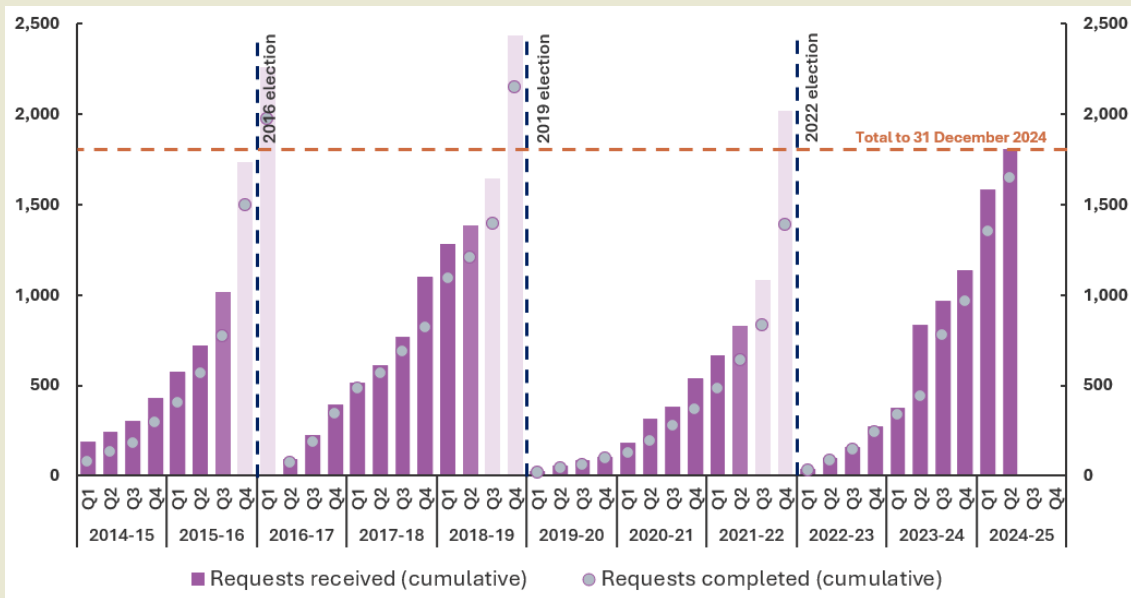
With higher request volumes, it will be challenging to maintain our service levels for parliamentary requests as well as meet our publication and election related responsibilities. To manage this, the PBO continues to work closely with Parliamentarians and parliamentary parties to prioritise the costings that we complete.

Box 1: Parliamentarian requests throughout the Parliamentary cycle

Request volumes follow the parliamentary cycle, tending to reduce immediately after a general election before scaling up as policy platforms are developed and finalised, peaking in the election year (Figure 2).

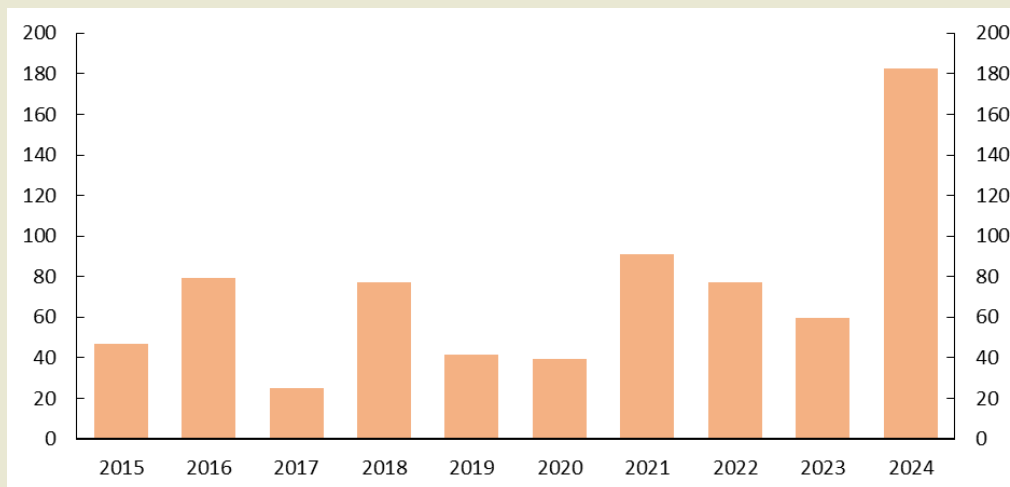
Since the 2022 general election, the PBO has received 1,843 requests from parliamentarians (to 31 December 2024), compared to an average of 955 requests received by the equivalent time during the 3 previous election cycles (Figure 2). During the 2024 calendar year, the PBO has completed 1,209 requests from parliamentarians, compared to an annual average of 478 completions and a previous high of 998 completed requests in 2016 (an election year).

Figure 2: Total number of parliamentary requests received and completed



Despite this record high of completions, the average stock of requests on hand in 2024 was around double previous years (Figure 3). The PBO has worked closely with parliamentarians and their offices to prioritise requests, while also seeking to reduce the backlog.

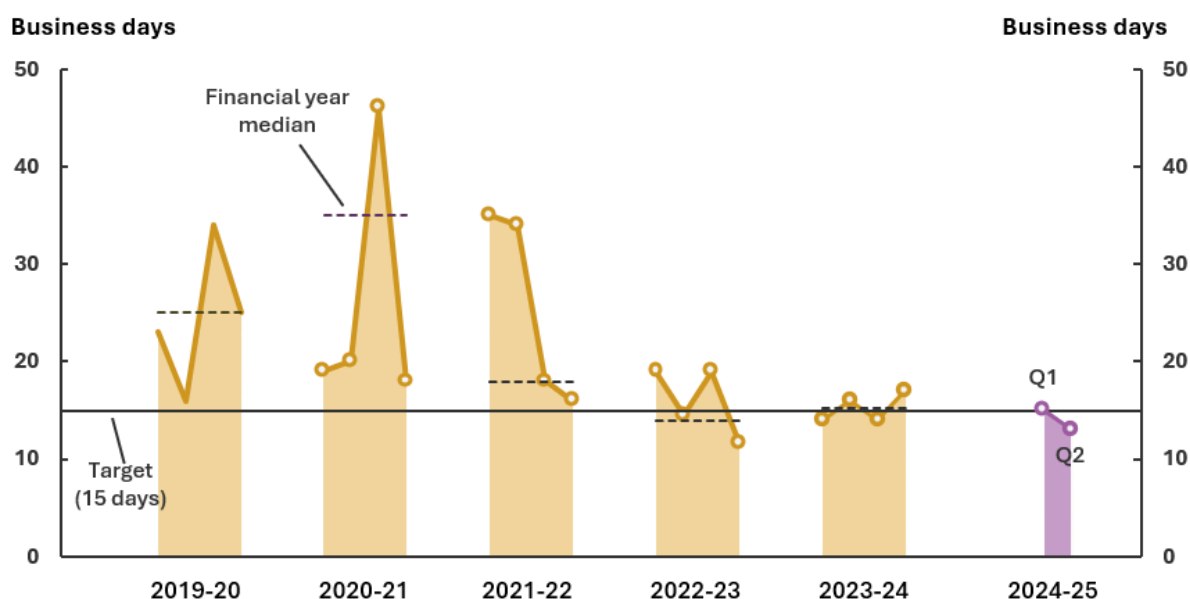
Figure 3: Average stock of requests on hand by calendar year



Despite continued strong demand, our median time for completion of parliamentary requests across the second quarter of 2024-25, has improved from 15 to 13 business days, against a performance benchmark of 15 days (Figure 4). The primary reason for this improvement has been active management and prioritisation of requests, including placing lower priority requests on-hold in consultation with requestors. Requests completed during Quarter 2 2024-25 had been placed on-hold for an average of 29 days within the PBO, compared to 17 days for requests completed during Quarter 1 2024-25 and an average of 13 days for all of 2023-24.

Internal workflow efficiencies, automation, strong stakeholder relationships and the maturation of the OnePBO organisational model have also assisted in sustainably reducing completion times.

Figure 4: Median response time for policy costing and budget analysis requests



A key driver of the time to completion is whether the PBO needs to source information from agencies to complete the request. Agencies usually have 10 days to provide information to the PBO. Median time to completion statistics for each request are significantly shorter where an information request is not required (Table 2).

Table 2: Completed costing and budget analysis requests, disaggregated by whether the request required an associated information request to 31 December 2024

	22-23 total	23-24 Q1	23-24 Q2	23-24 Q3	23-24 Q4	23-24 total	24-25 Q1	24-25 Q2
Request options completed	721	240	347	694	430	1711	847	727
With information requests	220	102	84	136	66	388	156	86
Without information requests	501	138	263	558	364	1,323	688	641
Percentage with information requests	31%	43%	24%	20%	15%	23%	18%	12%
Average time to completion (business days)	15	14	18	19	22	19	20	17
With information requests	22	19	27	36	30	29	26	28
Without information requests	13	11	15	15	21	16	18	16
Median time to completion (business days)	14	14	16	14	17	15	15	13
With information requests	22	19	23	36	25	25	22	29
Without information requests	10	9	13	7	14	11	10	11

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

PBO requests for information from agencies

Table 3 shows the time taken by agencies to respond to information requests. On average, requests are usually answered in 10 days, with complex requests sometimes taking longer. In October 2024, the PBO held 3 Commonwealth Agency Roadshows involving over 210 APS staff on responding to PBO requests including during an election period. These roadshows help maintain PBO's strong relationship with agencies, improving the provision of information and models to the PBO to support costing and budget analysis.

Table 3: Agency responses to PBO information requests to 31 December 2024

	19-20 total	20-21 total	21-22 total	22-23 total	23-24 total	24-25 Q1	24-25 Q2
Responses received in period	175	523	538	354	429	130	86
Percentage received on time (%)	99	99	99	99	99	100	99
Average response time (business days)	12	11	6	10	12	11	9

Note: Average response time excludes agency standing information requests without due dates.

Table 4 provides the breakdown of responsiveness for individual agencies for the period 1 October to 31 December 2024 (the top 10 agencies and their responsiveness are highlighted in Figure 5). While there were 2 late responses, they were not significantly delayed. The PBO negotiates extensions with agencies on timeframes to complete requests where appropriate.

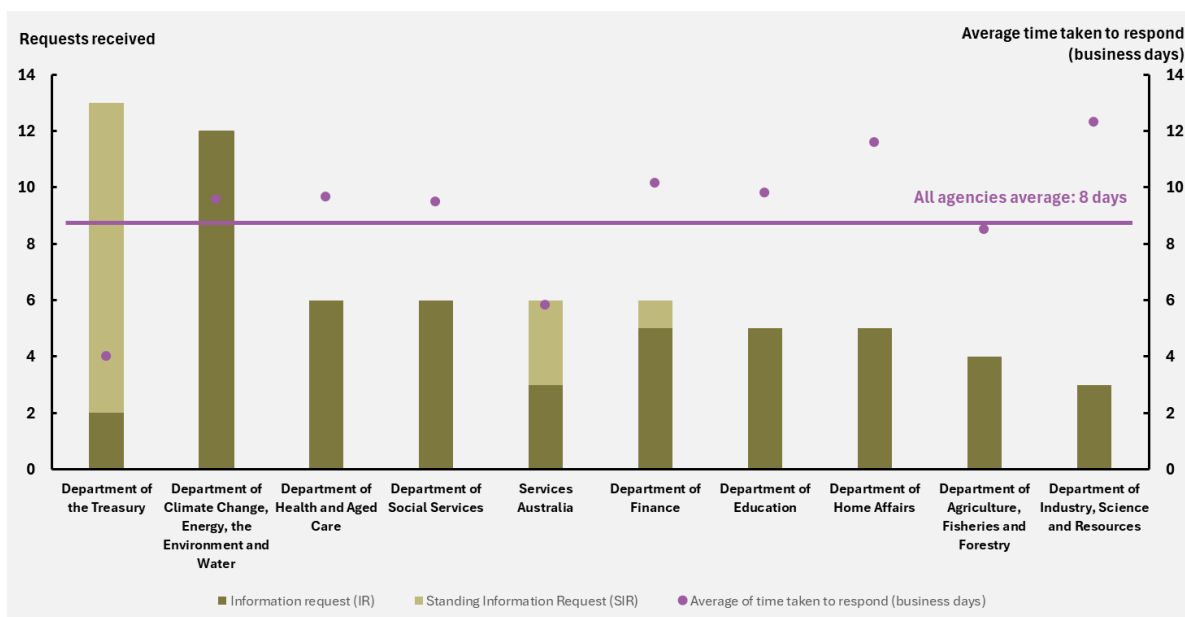
Table 4: Information request responsiveness by agencies: 1 October to 31 December 2024

Commonwealth entity	Responses received in period	Average of time taken to respond (business days)	Responses received after due date	% late
Department of the Treasury	13	4	0	0%
Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water	12	10	0	0%
Department of Finance	6	10	0	0%
Department of Health and Aged Care	6	10	0	0%
Department of Social Services	6	10	0	0%
Services Australia	6	6	0	0%
Department of Education	5	10	0	0%
Department of Home Affairs	5	12	0	0%
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry	4	9	0	0%
Department of Industry, Science and Resources	3	12	1	33%
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications and the Arts	3	8	0	0%
National Indigenous Australians Agency	3	11	0	0%
Department of Defence	2	11	0	0%
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet	2	10	0	0%

Commonwealth entity	Responses received in period	Average of time taken to respond (business days)	Responses received after due date	% late
Attorney-General's Department	1	10	0	0%
Australian Bureau of Statistics	1	7	0	0%
Australian Securities and Investments Commission	1	9	0	0%
Australian Taxation Office	1	12	0	0%
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	1	12	0	0%
Department of the House of Representatives	1	10	0	0%
Department of Veterans Affairs	1	0	0	0%
Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority	1	10	0	0%
National Disability Insurance Agency	1	4	1	0%
National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation	1	10	0	0%
Total	86	9	2	1%

Note: Average response time excludes agency standing information requests without due dates.

Figure 5: Top 10 Agency responses to PBO information requests with average response time, 1 October to 31 December 2024



Publicly released parliamentary requests referenced in the public debate

PBO responses to parliamentary requests are usually confidential, except for those prepared for parliamentary committees. If a requestor asks the PBO to publicly release their request, it is subsequently published on the PBO website (Table 5). Two costings were publicly released since the last Activity report, related to issues before the Parliament.

Table 5: Costings or budget analysis publicly released and referenced between 19 October and 31 December 2024

Description of policy	Party or Parliamentarian	Date of PBO release	Number of references	Media type
Breakdown of spending on Maintaining an Effective Foreign Service measures	Senator Simon Birmingham	5 November 2024	1	Senate Estimates Committee
Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme (TFES) class review	Senate Select Committee of the TFES	19 December 2024	1	Select Committee Report

Note: While the PBO endeavours to capture all policy announcements that reference PBO costings, there may be announcements missing from the table above, for example, because the announcement was not reflected in any media monitored by the PBO.

Misrepresentation of PBO responses

We routinely monitor references to the PBO in media articles to ensure we, and the information or advice we prepare are referenced correctly. Our policy for correcting the record is on our website. We recently updated this advice to include reference to our legislation, and to be clear about how our response reflects whether the underlying material is published or not.

Between 1 July 2024 and 31 December 2024, we have requested a minor clarification or correction 17 times. This is a slight increase from previous reports coinciding with the public release of some costings. The vast majority of these were minor and were addressed.

We report this information at an aggregate level for transparency while maintaining confidentiality.

Self-initiated program

We retain flexibility within our self-initiated work program and periodically re-evaluate our priorities, given available resources. Our projects explore the themes of fiscal sustainability, medium- and long-term fiscal risks, improving understanding of the budget, and distributional analysis. Since the last Activity report we have released 4 publications, consistent with our planned publication schedule (see Attachment A):

- *National fiscal outlook 2024-25* (30 October 2024)
- *Budget Explainer: Australia's tax mix* (14 November 2024)
- *2024-25 MYEFO snapshot* (18 December 2024)
- *Historical fiscal data – MYEFO update* (19 December 2024).

We have also completed a MYEFO update of our interactive tool, Build your own budget (BYOB) (17 January 2025) and the Small model of Australian representative taxpayers (SMART) (23 January 2025).

In 2024-25, we expect to produce fewer self-initiated products than a non-election year, given our focus on preparing for the next general election. Uncertainty in the timing of the election impacts timing for fiscal updates and when we will need to prepare and release the Election commitments report.

Election preparedness

The PBO is prepared for the next general election and is working to ensure that Parliamentarians have the best support we can provide in terms of costings availability and timeliness in advance of the election. We have enhanced our critical systems and tools, updated our models, and engaged with departments to ensure we have access to appropriate data. We have established systems, process and ICT capability to be ready to produce the Election commitments report. We continue to enhance the capability of our workforce through election focused internal training. We have also sought to reduce the stock of outstanding parliamentary requests as part of election preparation.

External engagement

A key priority for the PBO is to enhance our interactions with parliamentarians, their staff, and committees. We are committed to continual improvement in our service delivery and to making our work accessible to our audience.

Parliamentarians and staff are welcome to call, email or come past our office at any time. Occasionally parliamentarians and other stakeholders request bespoke training and education sessions. Where appropriate, the PBO partners with the Parliamentary Library to deliver these sessions either in person or via Teams. We have started our work with Parliamentary departments to ensure a smooth induction of the 48th Parliament.

On 25 November 2024, we held our annual Commonwealth Agency meeting with partners attending in person at the Australian Parliament House and virtually via GovTEAMS. PBO staff presented PBO activity over the past year and spoke about the election year ahead, before opening the session for questions and roundtable discussion. A number of presentations have been provided to individual agencies and departments to ensure there is an understanding of the PBO role and their responsibilities in providing data and models in a timely manner.

Since the last report we:

- Presented at the Department of Finance's Finance and Accounting Month (October 2024) on the role of the PBO during an election.
- Hosted a workshop with delegates from the Indonesian Ministry of Finance (October 2024).
- Presented at the ANU symposium 'Financing issues for Higher Education policy reform' (December 2024).

Digital engagement statistics – 1 October to 31 December 2024

Interest in our products can be seen through webpage view statistics (Figure 6). The PBO website generally receives an increase in views when products are released. The greatest number of views in a single day was on 14 November 2024. This coincided with the release of the *Budget Explainer: Australia's Tax Mix*. Across the reporting period, the *Budget Explainer: Dividend imputation and franking credits*, published in June 2024, continues to receive the highest page views (Table 6).

Figure 6: Overview of website views and release of PBO products (1 October to 31 December 2024)

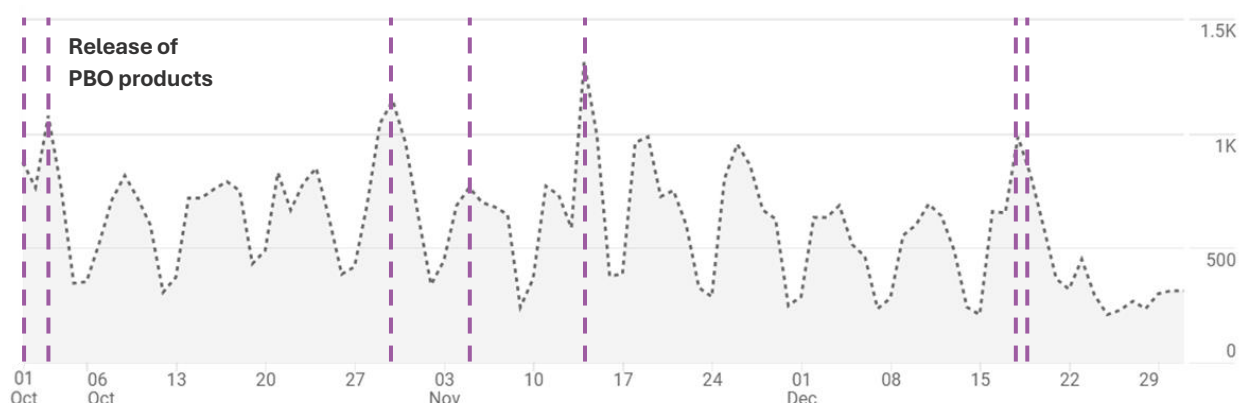


Table 6: Top 10 performing PBO product web pages by views (1 October to 31 December 2024)

	Page title#	Date first released	Type	Total page views*
1	Budget Explainer: Dividend imputation and franking credits (1)	13 June 2024	Publication	5,349
2	2024-25 National fiscal outlook (new)	30 Oct 2024	Publication	1,622
3	Budget Explainer: Fuel taxation in Australia (2)	21 Sep 2022	Publication	786
4	Beyond the budget 2024-25: Fiscal outlook and sustainability (8)	28 Jun 2024	Publication	700
5	Budget Explainer: Australia’s tax mix (new)	14 Nov 2024	Publication	657
6	Online budget glossary (3)	2019	Publication	606
7	Build your own budget (BYOB) (5)	16 Dec 2022	Interactive tool	597
8	Increasing the income threshold for the Commonwealth Seniors Heather Care Card (4)	14 Jul 2022	Costing (2022 Election)	481
9	Compensation for Stolen Generation Survivors (-)	14 Jul 2022	Costing (2022 Election)	449
10	JobSeeker Payment (-)	8 Oct 2020	Publication	440

* Adjusted for bounce rate. Where a product has been updated, the ‘Date released’ is when it was first released. Views are for the quarter.

The information in the brackets is the position in the top 10 for the product in the previous quarter.

People and systems

We continue to invest in our people and systems to build depth, drive efficiency and improve resilience. A key focus is to maintain a high-performing team culture and embed an agile arrangement where all technical teams are involved in completing parliamentary requests, engagement and self-initiated activity, promoting cross-team collaboration and operational flexibility.

Staffing

At 15 January 2025, we had 53.4 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff and a headcount of 57. This figure reflects PBO staff only. We continue to supplement our workforce with graduate and other secondees.

On 18 November 2024, we welcomed and inducted the new Parliamentary Budget Officer, Ms Sam Reinhardt.

Employee Census

We participated in the 2024 Australian Public Service Employee Census that ran from 6 May to 7 June 2024. We continue to have a highly engaged workforce, with an employee engagement index score of 80 (up from 74 in 2023), and a response rate of 97%, up from 87% in the previous year. Our 2024 Census highlights report has been published and is available on our [website](#).

The PBO's Staff Consultative Forum have developed an action plan to respond to feedback from the 2024 Census. It was published in December 2024 and is available on our [website](#).

Information and communication technology (ICT) capability

The PBO operates in a modern, collaborative, and integrated cloud-based ICT environment. We continue to work with the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS) – our ICT provider – to ensure technology meets our business needs.

Over the past year, this included development of a parliamentarian portal. We have made a decision not to pursue the solution in its current form. This reflects a PBO decision to prioritise the current costings workload and election preparedness activities. After the election, we will examine options for an improved digital solution for parliamentarians to interact with us.

Attachment A: Self-initiated program

Table A1: 2024-25 Self-initiated program – planned and published

Title of publication	Publication		Fiscal update or other
	Planned	Actual	
Quarter 4			
Build your own Budget (BYOB) – 2025-26 Budget update (scaling only)	May 2025*	-	Fiscal
Small Model of Australian Representative Taxpayers (SMART) – 2025-26 Budget update	May 2025*	-	Fiscal
Historical fiscal data and forecasts – 2025-26 Budget update	April 2025*	-	Fiscal
Quarter 3			
Guide to the 2025-26 Budget	March 2025*	-	Fiscal
2025-26 Budget snapshot	March 2025*	-	Fiscal
Unlegislated measures tracker (post MYEFO)	February 2025	-	Other
SMART – 2024-25 MYEFO update	-	23 Jan 2025	Fiscal
BYOB – 2024-25 MYEFO update##	December 2024**	17 Jan 2025	Fiscal
Quarter 2			
Historical fiscal data – MYEFO update	December 2024**	19 Dec 2024	Fiscal
2024-25 MYEFO Snapshot	December 2024**	18 Dec 2024	Fiscal
2024-25 National fiscal outlook	October 2024	30 Oct 2024	Fiscal
Budget Explainer: Australia’s tax mix	Q2	14 Nov 2024	Other
Quarter 1			
Unlegislated measures tracker (post Budget) #	-	9 Aug 2024	Other

* The Government has indicated that the 2025-26 Budget will be published on 25 March 2025.

** Our target is for the MYEFO snapshot and historical fiscal data to be published within 3 days of its publication, and for the MYEFO update of BYOB to be published within 2 months (see performance measure 2.2). All these updates were scheduled for December, in anticipation that the MYEFO would be released early in the month, consistent with the 2023-24 MYEFO released on 13 December 2023. In the event, MYEFO was released on 18 December 2024, later than we had expected.

Unlegislated measures tracker update was originally expected to be delivered in the previous quarter.

The MYEFO update of BYOB was expected to be delivered shortly after MYEFO’s release, assuming this would occur early in December. However, MYEFO was released a week later than expected, and it was not possible to update the model as planned. It was published in January 2025.