



Australian Government
Office of Parliamentary Counsel

First Parliamentary Counsel

Our ref: 09/10696
Your ref: 11/1371

The Hon. Mr Robert McClelland MP
Attorney-General
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Attorney,

OPC Statement of Intent for 2011-2012

1 Thank you for your letter of 14 September setting out your Statement of Expectations for the Office of Parliamentary Counsel for 2011-12. I appreciate you setting out the actions that you would like OPC to take.

2 Below I have set out OPC's Statement of Intent for the year.

General

3 OPC will continue to operate in a way which promotes collaboration and demonstrates accountability and transparency. In doing this, I will take do the things that you have set out in your Statement of Expectation.

Clearer laws

4 I agree with your observations that legislation should be as clear and simple as possible and that complexity is driven by the complexity of the policy and the complexity of the expression of policy.

5 In your letter you set out your expectation that OPC will continue to promote the Clearer Laws initiatives in its day to day work. I can assure you that OPC will continue to do this through the matters that you have set out in your letter as well as through looking for other approaches to achieve the objectives of the initiatives.

High quality responsive drafting services and ongoing workforce planning to achieve this

6 As you note OPC has worked for many years to ensure that it produces high quality, timely legislative drafting that meets the Government's needs for clear and accessible legislation. OPC is also very responsive to Government priorities.

7 OPC has invested substantial resources in building an office consisting of a pool of highly skilled drafters to ensure that we can continue to delivery this.

8 OPC will continue to give a high priority to workforce planning and to the recruitment, training and retention of our staff to ensure that we can continue to meet the Government's legislative drafting needs into the future.

9 Over the past decade OPC has done a substantial amount of work on workforce planning. I believe that we are now in a strong position with a stable workforce of drafters at various levels of experience. This places us in a good long term position.

10 A factor that has become more important in recent years is the number of staff taking maternity leave. A large proportion of our drafters are female and aged between mid-20s and early 40s. In recent years, a sizeable number of them have had children. Generally, they have then taken at least a year of leave. For example, in one year we had 5 drafters (out of about 30) on maternity related leave. We expect that this trend will continue. We are therefore factoring the likely absences in to our estimates of the number of drafters who will be available in particular years.

11 One initiative that OPC has undertaken to assist staff to return to work after having had a baby, is obtaining accreditation as a breastfeeding friendly workplace.

12 Retirements are less of an issue for the next few years due to the age profile of our drafting staff.

13 A fundamental part of our workforce planning is to retain talented staff. To do this, OPC needs to be a place that people want to work. Staff morale is a measure of this.

14 OPC has outstanding levels of staff morale. This has been shown in the last two surveys of staff that have been done using the APSC State of the Service staff survey.

15 The results for OPC are consistent much better than the average for the APS.

Close liaison with the Attorney-General's Department

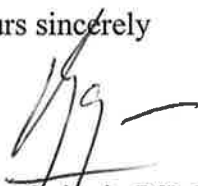
16 OPC and OLDP have substantially increased our level of liaison over the past couple of years. We are now working much more closely than we have in the past.

17 For example, at the moment we are working on ensuring that the Drafting Directions (the guidance to drafters) for both organisations are the same. We are also working towards a project to get OLDP to use OPC's IT system. A part of this will be for the format of Regulations to become the same as for Bills and Acts.

18 We have also been working more closely with the Department on matters related to legislation being prepared for the Department. In particular, I have commenced liaison meetings with the area that has overall responsibility for the Department's legislative program. I have also had very constructive discussions with senior Departmental staff about areas for improvement.

19 I look forward to maintaining and increasing this contact over the next year.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Quiggin', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Peter Quiggin PSM
First Parliamentary Counsel
22 September 2011