

ASSOCIATION OF PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARIES OF AUSTRALASIA

Parliamentary Libraries 2029 Discussion

**TRANSCRIPT OF HYPOTHETICAL FORUM HELD
AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE, WESTERN AUSTRALIA
ON 29 JULY 2005**

Panel Members

**Dr Harry Phillips
Ms Giz Watson
Dr Janet Woollard
Ms Sue Walker
Mr Terry Waldron
Ms Margaret Quirk**

Forum commenced at 3.10 pm.

Ms CAROLE KERR: Welcome, everybody. You've been hard at it for a couple of days now, and we've been robbed of afternoon tea. We'll try to ensure that we get you through what is left of Friday afternoon. It's been a heavy couple of days. It's time to mix pleasure with work and don the Dr Who disguise and jump into the TARDIS to see where it leads us in the year 2029. For all the lovers of botox, we'll not look a year older at all in 24 years. We'll have a little fun and achieve something. The hard work is over. It's time to speculate and pretend, and time for all of us to make history. We'll consider what your colleagues will be doing 24 years from now. We hope that many of them will be well paid and not be working as hard as perhaps all of you work now. They might marvel at the brilliant foresight of those of us in this room and our esteemed leaders and will take away valuable information from today to make a difference in going into the future. We have with us today the cream of Australian and New Zealand parliamentary librarians and the cream of WA parliamentary representatives.

Ms SUE WALKER: We'll not argue with that.

Ms CAROLE KERR: Welcome to parliamentarians from all parties. I start with the National MLA from beautiful Wagin in Terry Waldron - we hope it's raining down there. Labor MLA Margaret Quirk is in the government hot seat - so be kind. We have Greens MLC Giz Watson, Independent MLA Janet Woollard, Liberal MLA Sue Walker and the king of political analysis, Dr Harry Phillips. I'm not sure what they are in for. Are we going to roast or toast them? I'm not sure. Will we challenge them or be gentle on them, or will they challenge us? We're here to have fun. We encourage a relaxed chitchat. Don't be afraid to throw questions. My job is to keep it going and to put up questions and to get away with the silly ones - I'm not an expert. Let the discussion begin.

If we gaze forward into the crystal ball 24 years from now, the Australian population will be 24.5 to 26 million people, and the New Zealand population will be 4.8 to five million. We are moving ahead. What sort of world will we live in? Let's give some possibilities. Will John Howard have retired by then? Peter may still be waiting in the wings. Will the Western Australian chambers have airconditioning? We can only dream. Will Dannii Minogue have a hit single? Will Katie and Tom still be jumping on the furniture? Will the Fremantle Dockers have made a grand final yet? Will Posh and Becks have run out of silly names for their kids? Will it be "God save the King" or will we pay homage to President Eddie? Who knows? Most importantly, will parliamentary libraries exist, and in what form? Will you be a forgotten species? We hope not. To help start off, I handball to a fellow Eagles fan, Dr Harry Phillips, to open proceedings. To have parliamentary libraries, we need Parliaments. Will it be that we will have the status quo in 2029, or will Parliaments be leaner and meaner or bigger and bolder? Dr Harry will set the scene.

Dr HARRY PHILLIPS: It's a great privilege to speak in the company of parliamentarians and the wonderful library staff. I've had the privilege over many years of working with members of Parliament. I sometimes get disappointed that the public do not recognise the quality of our parliamentarians and the work that they do. Looking ahead 30 years, the important question is the legitimacy of Parliament. It must maintain its place as the apex of all institutions in society. I think it still has to be an electoral college, as Walter Bagehot said in 1897, that forms a government. I prefer an elected government, not an unelected separate executive. I'm concerned about an executive appointed to cabinet. Having experts responsible to the electorate without being elected is a concern. We need a government elected through the Parliament. We hopefully will have a viable opposition. Also, we've benefited in recent times from Independents. Last year, the parliamentary privileges bill - a very important bill - went through Parliament in Western Australia. In fact, that bill gave us independence in Western Australia in terms of parliamentary privilege because an Independent was prepared to give up his time to deal with that matter. That's how

significant that was. Parliament also has to broadly represent the community, and the community has to believe in that system. If you're going to have a bicameral system, I would favour the retention of proportional representation in the upper house that accommodates the Greens, the Democrats, One Nation and the Independents. They have an important review role. Parliament, in the eyes of the public, has to retain its legitimacy and representativeness in some broad way. I would like to see parliamentarians at the time, given their capabilities, not give the media so many opportunities to criticise them.

Ms SUE WALKER: How do we do that?

Dr HARRY PHILLIPS: It's just my view. Having said that, future parliamentarians will need a lot of library assistance in terms of research. As parliamentarians have a social role - I don't think that's going to change, as a lot of people come in and want a parliamentarian to help them - librarians have to take into account what members need. You can't just give them loads and loads of reams of paper and media clippings, as they would get overwhelmed if that were the case. Preparing the library for those sorts of roles is very important. Hopefully, we will have a viable democracy in 30 years. We can't really foretell the technological changes. In the last 25 years, we've developed the shadow opposition and the upper house with proportional representation. We've developed electorate offices, Internet systems and a whole range of services for parliamentarians. Of course, I think that we have to become more sophisticated these days.

In summary, Parliament has to maintain its place as the apex institution, and it mustn't give too much authority to outside bodies like the Auditor General and independent commissioners. Otherwise, after a while, they become laws unto themselves and become above Parliament. They all must come back to Parliament as a check as the elected institution of a society. I see an important role for state governments. Despite the fact that we constantly discuss federalism, federal representatives look at state problems, save for foreign policy. That's the way I see the future. Parliament must maintain its place, and the parliamentary library plays a very important role in that process. Civic education must be considered broadly, too. We must educate our children coming through about Parliament's place in the system.

Ms CAROLE KERR: We can expand on the technology side shortly. Before we jump ahead to that, I would like an idea from the panellists. Obviously, from the Western Australian point of view, we are unique: apart from the ACT, we are the only place that doesn't have designated research staff to help politicians. Everybody sitting here would say that they would love that service. Maybe we can put pressure back the other way from the WA point of view. I start with Janet, because we spoke earlier about the value of the wonderful people here - the librarians - to politicians across Australia. Janet is an Independent. I know that Independents and members from smaller parties and members in opposition probably tend to utilise the services more than other members. You probably know because you see the same people coming back time and again. They value the work you do and place value on the library service. Please tell us where your demands are, and maybe reflect upon where we are going into the future.

Dr JANET WOOLLARD: I'm a people person. I appreciate being able to go to the library and speak to someone and phone someone to say that I need some help. I phone up for help on all sorts of things, not only regarding bills on the table in Parliament. Somebody comes into my office on an issue, and I phone the library: "What do you have about such and such? What help can you give me?" That's not because I'm computer illiterate. I keep coming up to the library, and the superb staff members show me how to work through the databases to get to articles and things. It's not the same when I do it, because you as librarians have those research skills at the tip of your fingers. The role of a member of Parliament is from seven o'clock in the morning to 11 o'clock at night, and you don't know what the next phone call will be about. You think of something. You need to do some homework on that matter. It's wonderful to phone. You set something in train. It may be that something comes back from the library two or three days later. You've started research in an

area. Having looked at the facilities that some of the other states have, it is a poor reflection - but not on Margaret!

Ms GIZ WATSON: It's started!

Ms CAROLE KERR: I said I would get the cold water.

Ms MARGARET QUIRK: It's okay; I've broad shoulders.

Dr JANET WOOLLARD: It's a reflection on both the big political parties. The more support we get as members of Parliament, the more we help our community. When I've looked into doing this and I've seen that you have research officers in some of the other libraries who specialise in areas like economics, I think of the economics of the state budget when it's released. It's so hard to get around the budget. To have someone who is independent - not just receive a briefing from the government - to sit down with to go through the budget, and not just to give a party line, would be great. You have people specialising in health at some libraries. There are different specialities. It must be a good thing. For me, it's great to be invited to see what we have and don't have. I'm sure it will come from all of us. We now have seen how far WA is behind in terms of what support is provided. We get wonderful support. In particular, as an Independent, I don't have a party behind me. I have fantastic support from the library. It's a case of us as members of Parliament giving a bit of support back to our library staff to get more support for them. It will be a virtual library in future, yes. Harry said there would be Parliament in 25 years. It will still be the apex. At the moment, you know from all your Parliaments that you could have two minutes to join a debate: we may be in our offices, and we could push a button to vote and to join in a debate.

Ms MARGARET QUIRK: The Whips would love that.

Ms GIZ WATSON: There would be a photo of members pushing the button!

Dr JANET WOOLLARD: All those things come into it. But most of us appreciate the personal contact. I think we're very lucky to have a library in the building. I think the parliamentary library should be very close to where members of Parliament meet. It's a great asset. In some states, the libraries are outside Parliament. I wonder how much use members make of such libraries. I hope that our library will have more staff and support and be very much hands-on, so that people like me who like to talk to people will be able to go in and discuss issues with library staff.

Ms CAROLE KERR: Giz Watson, I understand that you're a regular user of the library. Its environmental section is well used by the Greens. I read in your inaugural speech in Parliament that you're a champion of revolution. Is this a time for the library to revolt? Where would you like to see it go? Is there anything you would like to see, particularly as we peer into the future? You are in a different position because you're a member of the upper house. Is that reflected in the way you use the library? Is there any shortfall or wish list that would prove useful?

Ms GIZ WATSON: I think the research capacity is the key thing. I know we don't have the dedicated research people in Western Australia. The library staff do the research, as far as I am concerned, in terms of tracking things down. As Janet said, it would be a fantastic addition to dedicate a researcher to a particular topic. I think with the other aspects, we know it's not a shortage of information - it's an information explosion. It's good to have an abstract and good summary of new material coming into the library so in our limited time we can appraise the new material coming into the library. I can see that expanding so that information is accessible quickly. The media search capacity is fantastic. I can see that expanding to include more publications. That would be great. I don't think you could have too much library capacity. It's almost the bottom line. We're asked to make decisions about complex issues. If you look at the issue of sustainability, synthesising the information to be able to make good laws about that issue is very complex. I took a book out from the library about that policy area, and halfway through reading it my brain was throbbing. That's an indication that it's important for the staff to be able to assist us in homing in on what we need. Homing in on the facts to absorb the information you need to make good

decisions is the challenge, and hopefully wise decisions will be made. It's not a lack of information, but a matter of getting to the information in a timely way and broadly enough. I refer to matters like some of the international research on climate change and some of the other prominent issues. It's exciting. It's frustrating that there's a bottleneck because of capacity. That's what I would like to see. I'm sure electronic communication will help greatly - it will only increase - but it must be presented in a way that you know where to look for it and to find it quickly and home in on what you want.

Ms CAROLE KERR: Someone we were talking to the other day was asked how easy it would be for librarians to find things. The answer was, "You fund me, I'll find it for you." I'm sure all of us would like more money and staff. You're in a unique position because your clients have the purse strings. Unfortunately, you're bound by the people in this room.

Ms GIZ WATSON: Only some of them.

Ms CAROLE KERR: You're in a situation in that they control the budget. I'm sure as different parties come through, a different emphasis is put in governments in Australia and New Zealand on how much money is spent in this area. So I don't pick on anyone, I throw it open to the panel. I encourage people to throw questions about looking ahead to 2029, and perhaps looking forward the next couple of years. Offer suggestions to the panel and seek responses from a funding point of view. Does anything urgently need to be addressed to enhance the future of the job you do?

Ms GAIL DUNSTAN It is not funding per se. You spoke as an Independent. I'm interested in going forward in the increased representation of the minor parties. We've seen the emergence of Family First and Greens people in state Parliaments and federally and more widespread. To what extent do you as Independents or minor party persons expect your perspective to be reflected in library collections and services? If there were 10 Greens senators, would you expect more green-type material in the library? If you were a Family First member, would you expect that philosophy to be represented in material? It's a counterbalance to the mainstream information to put up a certain point of view. What's your point of view? What is the library's role in supporting putting that point of view?

Ms GIZ WATSON: That's a good point. I guess the agenda of the Parliament is driven by the government of the day and the legislative program. Those issues need to be addressed. That must colour the emphasis. I think emerging issues must be covered. I think quite honestly that our library does a great job in identifying topics and material that are at the cutting edge. That's across the board. I obviously have an interest in environmental issues. There's always good new material coming through there. There's as much as I can absorb; as much as I have the capacity to take in. I hope that more of that policy area might be provided for other members to be interested in reading, too. The representation in the library is not bad.

Ms CAROLE KERR: When talking about the line this forum is taking us down, the line of material and the nature of politics is more influenced by the party in government at the time. From an outsider's point of view, I imagine the parties and representatives with the least number of staff are not government members. I refer to the opposition and smaller parties and Independents etc. These members would be the biggest users of the library. Would that be a fair comment? I speak to the panel. If so, does it put a lot of power in the party running the budget as they have their staff and don't see the library as being much use to them when they are in power and vice versa?

Ms MARGARET QUIRK: I use Canberra as an example. We can understand what's happened to the parliamentary library in Canberra - it may be a reflection of that issue. The exposure I've had to the material produced by the federal parliamentary library indicates it is first class and very useful from a parliamentarian's perspective. It's a very sad reflection if we don't value our libraries and don't value parliamentarians of all persuasions being properly informed. We've had debate from time to time during which we wince at some of the things said in our respective chambers because there is quite often very little foundation in fact to the comments made. For members to better

inform themselves wouldn't take a lot of effort. As I said, librarians would be more than happy to inform them.

I quickly go to something that Harry said. Although there's a trend for people to lack trust in politicians, people's expectations are getting higher - we have to be experts on everything. There will be an expectation, and this will require an increase in resources, for members to be proactive and track issues through. They will be required on the spot to know more. In terms of information technology, there will be alternatives to the Internet with integrated software to add to the process. I hope that things will be in a larger font. All those things are likely to happen in the future. Another thing that's interesting, to be a bit parochial, is that there will be more focus on regional allegiances than only on country or state matters. I could envisage a South East Asian library group servicing various democracies in the region. I could see more allegiances internationally with emerging democracies and an exchange of information. I refer to dialogues and research. I think it's quite an exciting time for librarians. I don't want to deflect from the very important question of resources. I think there are a lot of ways you could demonstrate to people who hold the purse strings - I wish I had more influence on them, actually - that you are very useful in what you do, and in the range of other activities you will be doing in the future that will enhance democracies here and overseas.

Mr TERRY WALDRON: When Margaret was speaking about unresearched speeches etc, she obviously had been listening to my speeches! I'm one of the pollies who doesn't use the library enough. I wondered why. I thought back to my boarding school days. Dr Harry Phillips was a housemaster at my boarding school, so I blame Harry Phillips! He's come a long way. I see from his socks that he's supporting the right football team. I look to the future. I will be aged 78 in 2029. I will certainly want the big writing in the books as well.

I think in all honesty that libraries will change a lot. The parliamentary library will change. I learned about the industrial revolution at school. We live in a technological revolution, and people tell me that it's only just started. I wonder what form the library will take. I think there will always be books - that will always have to happen. I think the film and screen will become even more important. Phones are similar instruments; they will be more important in our library. In country towns in Western Australia, communities use telecentres and utilise technology. People don't always have the computers etc at home. The telecentres are becoming the hub of country communities, and libraries and telecentres work closely together. Outside the parliamentary library, country libraries will perhaps be similar to the telecentres. Maybe our parliamentary libraries will head that way. My staff tell me that I have to use the library better. If you drive my staff, they will drive me. The parliamentary library staff do a wonderful job. The point was made about material within particular interest areas, and I think libraries need to provide things I don't know about rather than things I have a background in. In some ways, you need the provision of things you don't know about.

Ms CAROLE KERR: We can debate that in a moment. Sue Walker's background is as a lawyer. I imagine that the library is a valuable information source that not only she has used in the past but also is important to her currently and into the future. What are your usage, beliefs and needs? I guess from a parliamentary librarian's point of view and in an IT age, it seems to be that you're sucked constantly into something that may be as scary to you as it is to me, and possibly to a lot of people in this room.

Ms SUE WALKER: Following on from what Harry said, I think we could do away with the upper house - apart from Giz, as she could find one of the eight new seats that the government will provide. When I came into Parliament, I had been a lawyer beforehand, but I also had a background in research. I researched legal opinions for John McKechnie, the former DPP, for the first three years. I developed a skill of writing for the first-time reader. That is quite important, because someone can take a report and summarise it for you, but it could be all over the place. The

skill of taking a report and summarising it in a way that enables the information to hit you square between the eyes is very important. I actually do all my own research, apart from the library, but they do give me a lot of assistance; I love going up there. I write a lot of my own debates.

Dr JANET WOOLLARD: Who does it for other people, then?

Ms SUE WALKER: I do not get any research assistance from the party; I will correct you there. It is a skill that I have. Just getting back to what was said earlier, the legal profession in Sydney draws on the judicial research from the Judicial Commission of New South Wales. Laptops are used in court by the prosecution, the judges and the defence. They are all reading the same information. For instance, if we mention a debate that will emerge strongly, such as the nuclear debate, politicians will try to score political points, but if we had a funding body here and if each parliamentarian were given the fors and againsts of an argument, it would be very valuable. Politicians would then be more informed, instead of just standing and talking off the top of their heads. I have heard Tuck's speeches: what he says is always commonsense, but sometimes people just stand. There are debates that come on that members have to research that I know nothing about, and that takes time. I think proper research is essential if you are going to have a body of people who are looking at issues in-depth and making considered decisions on behalf of the community. I will support research funding and will make sure that it is independent, so that the government of the day, Margaret's, does not have to persuade people to give information that is perhaps biased.

Ms CAROLE KERR: Never!

Dr JANET WOOLLARD: I will go to research. Two years ago there was an issue that came up in my community. It was a development, heritage-type issue and I probably spent months trying to get some background information on it. Then one day I was talking to one of the librarians in the library - I think it was Niamh. I had just been to a tute at Murdoch Uni, which has this most fantastic database where you can bring up the bill that you want and you can put in the issue and it will bring up any cases that have been done. Niamh turned around to me and said, "We have that." I had spent three months working on that. As a new Independent member, I had been given all the paperwork from the library that told you everything that could be done in the library, but when you read through that, it is just words - jargon - and it doesn't mean anything to you. For those of you who get Independents in your libraries - I assume that the party people may get support in this - apart from the paperwork that is given to members, having someone in the library who comes back later and asks, "Have you used our databases? Do you know how this works?" and sits down with you would be valuable. I go back time and again to use databases and call in somebody to get me started because it is not something that I use every day. As I use it maybe only once a month, it is not like opening a dictionary and finding a word - it's hard. There are some wonderful facilities in the library, such as the databases, but you need help to access them. As Harry said, in 25 years, he hopes that Parliaments will still be the same, with people being elected. We can look at the background of the people who are elected. One thing that I hope will be a big change, just like in the Senate, which has six members from each state, is that in 25 years there will be equality of the sexes; there should be 50 per cent men and 50 per cent women. My background is nursing. Whatever happens in 25 years, it will be nurses, teachers, shopkeepers - people from all walks of life - who will become members of Parliament. They will not previously have used these databases, which to you are very simple. They are really complex for someone who's not used them previously. I really appreciate the support that I'm given with those databases. Maybe you could just spend a bit of time helping new members to ensure that, like me, they don't spend three months before they come to someone and say, "I've just found this wonderful tool," to be told, "We've had it all along, Janet."

Dr HARRY PHILLIPS: In response to Sue's comment on upper houses, if we abolished the upper house, we would need to go to a New Zealand-type system, which uses two electoral laws -

proportional representation and first-past-the-post or electoral preference voting. In New Zealand, it is very difficult for a party to govern in its own right; it is checked by coalitions. What is done in New Zealand, which I think is a very important role for libraries, is that they service a very sophisticated committee system. I see the committee system as one avenue that can be important with many new issues, like outcomes-based education. They are looking at that very thoroughly. It is a bit of a New Zealand lesson.

Ms CAROLE KERR: We can learn something. I want to take us down the track and get a little feedback from you and get you to use the panellists if you have questions. We will open it up for discussion a little about, I suppose, some of the issues that have been raised. Perhaps you are undervalued, or we might be ignorant about what you do and how valuable you are. Is there an image problem, not from your point of view but from the point of view of the people who should be using you? Are you going to have to be a breed or profession that will have to adapt to new skills? Do librarians feel that they will have to have a new range of skills because of the demands that Parliament will place on you and because of the demands that technology is placing on everybody? I would be curious to know, I guess, whether you have that feeling that perhaps you are under threat - an endangered species.

Mr HOWARD COXAN: There's gender representation around the chamber.

Ms CAROLE KERR: There are quite a few boys here.

Mr ROB HUNTER: We're not all librarians, though.

Ms JUDY BALLANTYNE: It's an evolution. It has changed in the past 10 years.

Mr ROB HUNTER: We can look around the panel.

Mr HOWARD COXAN: You made the point about gender representation.

Dr JANET WOOLLARD: There should be equality in all areas. I get just as much help from Andrew as from everyone else.

Ms CAROLE KERR: Even if he does support the Western Bulldogs!

Ms MARGARET QUIRK: It's a bit like primary school teachers, who are predominantly female, in terms of status, salary and everything else. As primary school teachers are predominantly women, the occupational recognition is not as high as it should be. I think to that extent gender may be relevant. Life is not fair, but I believe that it may well be some of the case. I also saw a doll in a shop yesterday, and it was a librarian doll. When you pressed the button it went, "Shush". I expect that, constitutionally, librarians are not used to being bolshie and talking out.

Ms KATE CURR: To pour some cold water on proceedings, you're being far too nice and friendly to one another; this is not what parliamentarians do. One point Carol made about funding was that the library is always in opposition.

Ms CAROLE KERR: I guess we are saying that the library is perhaps not perceived as being as vital to the government in power at the time, because it has the numbers and support already. The people who use the library more are those who don't control the purse strings.

Ms KATE CURR: It could cut the information flow to the opposition by strangling the library.

Ms CAROLE KERR: Is it being used as a political funding war?

Ms KATE CURR: Do we feel strongly enough that it should be written into our constitution and not just into the Parliament?

Ms SUE WALKER: Unless you tell parliamentarians what's going on, they will not know. You could slip a note under the door of well-connected opposition members to raise some of your issues.

Mr HOWARD COXAN: There will not be any parliamentary libraries because Rob will make them so mean and lean. He said that this morning. We will not need the Parliament because it will go to a vote - capital punishment, yes or no. That has come from today's sessions.

Ms CAROLE KERR: Are librarians, or those in the future, going to have to be computer geeks and IT people?

Ms KATE CURR: We are IT people. It is a legitimate role for libraries. It is the engine on which our vehicle runs. Librarians are doing IT stuff. That is our bread and butter. Another recognition is that as individuals we are running departments that are bigger, sometimes, and have more staff than do the houses of Parliament. They are infinitely more complex because they involve several communities of practice - researchers, librarians, writers, historians, IT people and training people all mixed up in a very complex soup. I don't think that the complexity of running a modern library service in a Parliament is recognised internally within the Parliament. I don't think it is an issue of gender because gender comes and goes. This issue has been around for a long time.

Ms ROS MEMBREY: The other thing with us being IT geeks is that library staff are not only expected to master this technology, but also to teach it tomorrow without any budget for training at all.

Ms CAROLE KERR: It raises the whole question of archiving, because I know that when I use a computer, I download what I need there and then. I might then have to go back to find it later, but it is not accessible: it has been moved on from the web site where I found it in the first place. That raises the archival issue of a greater workload.

Ms JUDY BALLANTYNE: With the type of information that we have to manage and collect, it needs to be put into some semblance of order so that it can be extracted and searched, and this is using different mediums. Yesterday it was microfiche and today it is CD-ROM and DVD. What will it be tomorrow?

Ms CAROLE KERR: I will throw a question to Terry, who is from regional Western Australia. Cookies today rely more and more on the Internet for weather forecasts and other things. People in remote areas can't walk up the Terrace to Parliament or to a library. Is it more beneficial to you in a large area out of the city that these people take on the responsibility and have libraries that are more IT central?

Mr TERRY WALDRON: It's greatly beneficial. That's my point about telecentres. In one of my regional centres, Katanning, the library is taking on that role much more because the telecentre is not operating. It is important for financial management as well. Farmers rely more on the computer and the Internet - these types of things. Probably the greatest thing about technology and getting used to it for my generation, the baby boomers, is the propensity to be scared of it. That has been what I have been like with the library here. It needs more support and funding, and more awareness. Perhaps - I say this to the people from the libraries - we need to be more informed.

Dr JANET WOOLLARD: Now we know.

Mr TERRY WALDRON: As a politician, you are so busy doing so many things. I have seen other politicians accessing things and say to myself that I must get to do that, but when the pressure goes on, you decide to do it next time, next month or next year. We do not use it enough. I think it would be really good for parliamentary libraries to get greater support from politicians. Perhaps you need to be more proactive in telling parliamentarians how to access it. That is probably my problem in not being more aware.

Ms KATE CURR: You are running so fast in that direction that you need to slow down for a millisecond and veer to the left, and it will be better. You are going so fast trying to get to where you're going that you do not have time to ask whether we know a better way to do it, and we can't attract your attention.

Mr TERRY WALDRON: A great way to do that it is called your electorate officer. They're a bit like mum in a lot of ways, because they suddenly make you take a step backwards - "Hang on a minute, Tuck, have you thought of doing this?" The girls from my office have been up here this week. They say, "Tuck, you should be doing that." Maybe, for the pollie, the electorate officer is the vehicle.

Ms KATE CURR: We do that in New South Wales. We have an induction program where we send them off, but even they are hard for us to catch. They are not always in Sydney, especially if they are based in the regions.

Ms JUDY BALLANTYNE: You are juggling at times. They have busy lives. When do they have time?

Ms KATE CURR: They are too busy to come to the library, but they've got to make time. Then they might not be so busy.

Mr TERRY WALDRON: I think you're right. They have Minties in the library.

Ms MARILYN HARRINGTON: I respect that view, but I take a contrary view. I think we need to go out to you guys. I am from the commonwealth Parliament and we have contact programs for new parliamentarians. For every new member and senator, a service of the library is for staff members to go to your office, to talk to the member, to explain the services and to configure screens. We even help them master the telephones in the beginning. We offer that service as a dedicated service for six months, but the aim of the service is to make the member an effective independent user of the library. I don't think you guys have time to come to us. We can't wait for you to come to us. We must go out and grab you.

Ms CAROLE KERR: As the conference is in Western Australia this year, it is beneficial for local politicians. As much as they have talked to you, they need to hear your opinions. I will open up the floor so that they can be educated by the time they walk out of here today. In brief terms, what do you feel you need to do in terms of skills development? We have heard about changes in terms of awareness and communication. As you head forward in the next 24 years, is there anything glaring to you where your skills or responsibilities need to go in a certain direction? We touched on the IT side of things. Tell them.

Ms ROS MEMBREY: The first is that we have to organise the information. You were talking earlier about needing the precise information that you want at the right time. Our skills are in organising that. It is the most boring job in the world, but some enjoy it. We need to spend more time doing that. The second aspect we need to do - it follows on from what Marilyn said - is to be more proactive; that is, to get out of the libraries and to go to offices to listen, train and demonstrate.

Dr JANET WOOLLARD: You need the staff to do that.

Ms CAROLE KERR: You need funding to do all the work.

Ms JUDY BALLANTYNE: If you have two people in the library and those two are out in the electorate, it leaves you with not many people.

Mr ROB HUNTER: I'm not trying to make a leaner library, because I think it should be resourced. One thing that's interesting is that you're competing with the media now. I'm not having a go at members, but I've heard members quoting from the media. You know that the media does not source the information.

Mr HOWARD COXAN: Very often members find out at 5.30 that they are going to speak on something, so the opportunities for research are very limited. They look at a few newspaper sources and make a speech - they are talking off the top of their heads, but some people are very good at it.

Mr ROB HUNTER: I think that it would be somewhat of a competition. Libraries pursue something because they hear it in the media. More often members are using the media as the primary source of information.

Dr JANET WOOLLARD: Because it is really hard to get hold of the reports that have all the information in them, but if you go back through 12 months of media statements, say for the Swan River, you can find out that there was a spill at this time at this place. You can get the facts very easily.

Ms SUE WALKER: Journalists distil issues. One good thing is to take whatever legislation is on - say for this week, X is on - and for someone to distil the issues or point people in the right direction. Bear in mind, of course, that the major parties have party rooms or caucus meetings. I am not sure what they do in caucus. Not a lot, I don't think. They then come to a decision. It would be good to have that.

Ms CAROLE KERR: I will ask you, Harry. This was raised earlier, specifically in terms of libraries being a political football and having to bend with whomever wants to fund it at the time, depending on the party that is in power. Someone suggested that someone else should be in charge. Could that guarantee the future of libraries if we were to take funding away from the government of the day? I don't know how to do it. Is there a way of protecting these people and their futures in the political stage so that they are not at the whim of budgets?

Ms KATE CURR: It's not about protecting us but about protecting the democratic process. When we ask for funding, a lot of the time people think that we are doing it for our own amusement. We do not care. We want to make sure that we can serve you. It is not about us sucking in resources but about us supporting the democratic process.

Dr JANET WOOLLARD: When I looked at the figures for some of the libraries, some have 40 or 50 staff members compared with our 12.

Ms JUDY BALLANTYNE: Ten.

Dr J.M. WOOLLARD: I only got those figures yesterday. I made a few phone calls to see whether the members, particularly the Independents, in those states have research officers in their electorate offices. They have the same. In fact, in New South Wales, they have three staff in their electorate offices rather than the two here.

Ms KATE CURR: The Independents in New South Wales get us as researchers as well.

Dr JANET WOOLLARD: When you look at that, you have to ask why it is that Labor has been in power for so long in all the states. It would be interesting to see how much support those members have. I know that I'm more effective as a member because of the support I have in my office, but it also increases your profile in the community. I would think the more support we get from the library, the more effective we are, and the more chance there is that we will be re-elected. This is really aimed at Margaret. Maybe Margaret should be taking this back and saying, "No, you give our members more support, and they will be more likely to keep their seats."

Ms CAROLE KERR: I will take it back to Harry to answer the question.

Ms ROS MEMBREY: I will answer on Harry's behalf. Harry is used to me doing this, so it's okay. This has aggravated me for the 26 years that I have worked in parliamentary libraries. Why is it government funding? The Parliament, the executive and the judiciary are all supposed to be separate. Why does the Parliament not just say to the government that we need X amount of dollars to operate next year and for that funding to be given to the Parliament without any question? We shouldn't have to wait for Treasury to decide what we get. We should have our bundle of money and not have to fight the rest of the government for it. It seems to me to be a contradiction there. We have to go with our hats in our hands every year and ask for money when we are the Parliament.

Ms MARGARET QUIRK: We are having this debate, but the Western Australian Parliamentary Library is never raised in the estimates committee process. I'm not sure where it should be raised in estimates; that is, whether questions should be directed to the Speaker or the Premier or elsewhere. Presumably, it would be the Speaker. We are usually more concerned about airconditioning for the chamber.

Dr HARRY PHILLIPS: We must remember that once presiding officers become presiding officers, they become committed to their Parliament, and that is above their party most of the time. I have a lot to do with the presiding officers; they are the first people to work through. The Clerks are quite powerful in the administration of Parliament. The Commission on Government sought important funding for Parliament and sought a better building. The Commission on Government said a new Parliament with new offices was needed. There was a chance that Richard Court could have run with that recommendation in 1997. Even Dr Gallop could have done so if he wanted to provide better resources and a better building. It's a bit of a political process in the end. The main avenues are the presiding officers and the Clerks, and I would play the game a little through the people in the press up here. Rebecca Carmody from *Stateline* has an office next to the library. Peter Kennedy can listen. That could sift through the system. The view could be put that Parliament must be resourced and budgets provided for changing times so we have well-informed members of Parliament etc. Having said that, the situation has improved a fair bit in recent years. Not that many years ago, there was not really a library here. Ros did most to put that in place.

Ms CAROLE KERR: We could go on strike.

Ms SUE WALKER: I ask Harry a question. Based on what you said when you first spoke about what the media states about politicians from time to time, do you think the fact that politicians don't get pensions now will lead to people coming into Parliament with different qualities? Therefore, they will have to rely more on the library. I have observed, for instance -

Dr HARRY PHILLIPS: Are you claiming that they would not use the library as well?

Ms SUE WALKER: I do not reflect on the professionalism. There is one lawyer on our side of politics, and no accountants have put their hand up. I don't get a pension; I don't think Janet does - I can't speak for anybody else. It is like a salaried position, and there is not that carrot for people to go through, for the want of a better word, the crap you can get from the media.

Dr HARRY PHILLIPS: I don't think Liam Bartlett will interview me on this, but I have defended the need for excellent pay for parliamentarians. It is ridiculous that they are not well paid and well resourced with good research facilities. I think it was a mistake to roll in all parliamentarians' superannuation. It was too generous in a couple of cases and needed to be adjusted. I agree there must be better incentives for people in all walks of life to go into Parliament. Parliament needs to have what you might call a few mavericks, as that is what is found in the community. Parliament in the community's eyes must reflect the community more in the future, and that means more women. That is the community expectation. At the same time, in Australia, not like the United States, where the system is based on individual wealth, we are short on lawyers and accountants.

Ms CAROLE KERR: I bring it back to the parliamentary library question. Sue is saying there is a change in the people coming into Parliament. Does that put more responsibility on the group of people here in terms of workload and role? More importantly, are librarians recognised for the important work with which they are presented? The general public wouldn't have any idea of the expertise and the professional officers in libraries. Most don't know about the library in Parliament.

Ms MARGARET QUIRK: Before I get from that thought, I disagree with Harry and Sue. Because of the change in financial standards of members of Parliament, members need to maintain their professional skills because they will need to get a job in the real world when this gig is over. It will provide incentives to maintain the skills.

Dr JANET WOOLLARD: Who has time to maintain those skills?

Ms SUE WALKER: You have time when in government. You have 12 000 lawyers working for you!

Ms MARGARET QUIRK: I don't think it will dumb down the membership. It may lead to people with a different perspective. They may keep in touch if they are to be flung out into the real world. They have to earn a living. I don't think what Sue is saying is right in that there is a corollary that you will dumb down.

Ms CAROLE KERR: I don't want to be distracted from what we are here to talk about.

Mr DARREN BROWN: On the subject of the role of the library in the future, there's the question of funding. In the past, there was a significant cost war about staffing and purchasing of resources outright. There will be more resources available in the future and the use of pay-per-view resources: you log onto the Internet and pay \$2 to look at a book once. Everything has to be budgeted. When a library is running close to the end of a limited budget, and a parliamentarian comes in and says, "I would like to look at this book," the librarian would know it is expensive to view that book. What ethical issues does it raise? Is it a party political matter in determining who has access? Is it an ethical issue?

Ms CAROLE KERR: We discussed this the other day.

Ms ROS MEMBREY: We could start to charge for our services.

Ms CAROL KERR: That is one way to retain objectivity.

Ms GIZ WATSON: I think what we are trying to get is an independent assessment of the value of the service and a value of the resources to the democracy. It is timely. We are having that argument with the government, which should not decide the allocation of resources to a minor party in the balance of power. It should be assessed independently on our workload, and ditto this issue to do with the library and the resources it provides. The only body that comes to mind is the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal. If it had a broader role, people would say, "That's the value for the sort of work the parliamentary library is producing." I recognise that it makes the case for the service, rather than devaluing the service. It's not entirely our fault that as an institution the general public has a fairly low opinion of us - to be honest, it's up to all of us to make it work. I think the answer is an independent assessment of the capacity and need. Resources should be allocated according to that assessment. It should not be a political decision.

Ms CAROLE KERR: We have to start winding up. The feedback from some of you so far - Giz touched on this - is that funding is an issue. That funding must be tied to the democratic process and the roles in providing objectivity to all. It is suggested that funding needs to be independent, looking to the future, from the government of the day. That would resolve a lot of issues in terms of who uses and who doesn't use the service. The other thing is the awareness of politicians of the parliamentary library and your service, skills and professional standards, and how they benefit politicians at large. As an outsider from near the side, I suggest that the awareness by the general public be increased so your professionalism and your skills are recognised, not only internally in Parliament, as people who contribute a great deal of value to the political process in each state or the country. Are there any issues that we've missed?

Ms ROS MEMBREY: What's worrying me is: do you think you'll have extensions to this building by 2029?

Ms JUDY BALLANTYNE: Will we be in one location?

Ms CAROLE KERR: Somehow I think there will be a super city in Perth and everybody will be in one place. Harry, will Parliament have many more politicians?

Dr HARRY PHILLIPS: We've not expanded our Parliament in Western Australia from 1950. We had 50 members in the Legislative Assembly in the 1900 Parliament and 30 members of the

Legislative Council. It was 80 in total. We had a metropolitan population of 28 000 or 30 000 in 1900. We have gone to 57 members and are going to 59 members in two years.

Dr JANET WOOLLARD: Provided we maintain a bicameral Parliament, we will maintain the same number of constituents in our electorate as we have now.

Ms SUE WALKER: One point you have is that by the year 2029, the largest amount of the population will be baby boomers who are very demanding and get what they want.

Ms CAROLE KERR: Every book will be reprinted in large print.

I thank you all. I believe that you will walk out of here at least having gotten your point of view across to the Western Australian politicians. You have on the record some of the issues that some of you who are not locally based can take back so all Parliaments around Australia are aware of these matters. I speak on behalf of the panel - I think the panel has learnt a lot today in terms of roles and concerns and how valuable the parliamentary library service is. Hopefully, the local crew will continue the push as momentum has begun for funding. Is that right, Rob?

Mr ROB HUNTER: Uh-huh.

Ms CAROLE KERR: Regarding research from the WA point of view, there are no dedicated research facilities. I hope you have taken away the point that people are listening. I believe that you'll be extremely valuable in the future in 2029. You are on the education committee, aren't you, Terry?

Mr TERRY WALDRON: I am.

Ms CAROLE KERR: Perhaps it's something that should be taught in schools; that is, the important role of the parliamentary library in the democratic process, and that it exists. People at the front cannot do their jobs unless you guys are doing yours. I thank all of you for your time. I hope it's been a nice way to get some of the stuff off your chests and that you've learnt from each other.

[Applause.]

Forum concluded at 4.30 pm
