

**Vote Office of the Clerk**

# Baseline Alignment Proposal

2 March 2010

Submitted by:

**Hon Dr Lockwood Smith**

**Speaker of the House of Representatives**

## Section 1: Alignment to Parliament's Priorities

The Office of the Clerk is the legislature's secretariat. It provides specialist advice on parliamentary procedure and parliamentary law, and administrative services to the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives in the performance of their duties as members of the House, and makes the proceedings of the House and select committees accessible.

*The outcome of the Office of the Clerk is a legislature in which members of Parliament are able to discharge their constitutional duties in respect of the consideration of legislation and other parliamentary business, and interested parties are informed and able to participate.*

The Office aligns its activities to the priorities of Parliament, rather than government priorities. Parliament's priorities are determined by its members and expressed in its day to day operations by the Speaker, and in a more strategic sense by the Standing Orders Committee. These are codified in Standing Orders and most of the Office's activities flow from this document.

Since the reforms of the 1980s, and the introduction of MMP, the House has been relatively stable in its structure and operational rules, and is likely to remain so in the medium term. This stability indicates that our strategic focus should be on the development of existing services to keep pace with users' expectations through embracing information technology developments, and enhancing our people capability.

Work on enhancing access to parliamentary information over the past few years has focussed on developments such as improvements to parliamentary publishing systems, Parliament TV and simultaneous interpretation of Māori into English. Many of these projects have now come to fruition and the Office will focus on making the most of the opportunities these new systems present to increase participation and openness. A major area where there is work still to be done is in the televising of select committees. The Standing Orders Committee has directed the Office to progressively develop parliamentary TV coverage. Televising of select committee hearings of evidence is significant in New Zealand because of the importance of committees in our parliamentary system. Developments in this area are not being pursued due to the current funding circumstances. However, in the mid-to-longer term future, Parliament may see the televising of select committee hearings as a priority and funding may be sought.

In addition to its secretariat role supporting the day-to-day functioning of the House and select committees, the Office also has an important role as a continuous repository of parliamentary knowledge, and consequently as a provider of advice on how to preserve and enhance the institution of Parliament. As with parliamentary information, much has been achieved over the past few years with the establishment of a legal unit and the introduction of systems to capture and "corporatise" knowledge. The emphasis over the next few years will be to build on these new developments. This will include the development of the business processes necessary for the regular capture of parliamentary information across the broad spectrum necessary for the preparation and publication of further editions of *Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand*, the copyright in which has now been assigned to the Clerk of the House of Representatives.

Government priorities can have a significant impact on Parliament. Government pressure on the legislative process may require Parliament to develop solutions, which provide additional time for the Government's legislative programme. If the achievement of Government priorities is dependent on the passage of significant amounts of legislation within limited time frames, new systems and additional services will be required. New capital and operating funding will be necessary if such Government expectations are to be met.

If Parliament's expectations do not change significantly, the Office expects to be able to satisfy its servicing expectations for the next few years through its existing offering of services and systems. Despite this, there are still some risks to the Office's ability to continue to provide services within its existing resource base brought about by demand expectations and cost escalation.

## ***Demand***

### Opening of Parliament 2011

The next general election will be held in late 2011. The cost of the opening of Parliament is difficult to absorb within a relatively small vote and the Office may seek one-off funding for 2011/12. The 2008 opening was funded by a one-off increase of \$90,000.

### Irregular pattern of inter-parliamentary travel programme

Clearly there will be no additional funding for inter-parliamentary travel. However, the inter-parliamentary travel programme does not operate on a fixed annual basis. The number of visits in the annual programme fluctuates significantly during the parliamentary term. Therefore, the Office seeks to have a standing authority to retain savings from the inter-parliamentary travel programme.

### Demands on House sitting time

The House faces an ambitious Government legislative programme. There are options available to the House to increase the time available for the consideration of legislation. Some options would have a significant financial impact that would need to be factored into any decision making.

### Extra select committees

Currently the Office is able to support all subject and specialist select committees. Its ability to support extra committees is marginal. The 2009 Auckland Governance Committee and the Emissions Trading Scheme Review Committee have placed major calls on all staff servicing select committees and operating funding. Further ad-hoc committees are anticipated (e.g. Electoral Matters). Without extra resources, services to committees generally may well be compromised and Government priorities put at risk.

## ***Cost escalation***

### People capability

The Office of the Clerk's reputation for high quality service delivery is built on its values of accuracy, impartiality, expertise and integrity. Maintaining these requires high quality, well trained and experienced staff. Staff retention and recruitment are critical factors for the Office. If funding constraints mean that the Office is not able to retain and recruit quality staff, service quality and Parliament's priorities will be put at risk.

The 2009 pay negotiation in the Office resulted in a zero percent movement. Depending on market conditions, this may be difficult to achieve again in 2010, and beyond.

### Operating costs

We manage some major contracts, e.g. radio broadcasting, TV operations, TV broadcasting. There is a high risk of cost increases when time comes to renegotiate. These will be difficult to absorb within the Office's relatively small vote, given the large size of the contracts.

### Website

Cost shared with Parliamentary Service. Not specifically funded. Big cost risks in two or three years for technology refresh.

## **Section 2: Reprioritisation**

Reprioritisation may be necessary, if additional funding is not available to meet the costs of servicing enhanced legislative activity driven by Government priorities. In a small vote saving of the magnitude that would be required cannot necessarily be found through efficiency gains. If such saving had to be achieved, they would more than likely require review of major areas of service delivery, such as communicating Parliament, e.g. radio vs TV vs print publications vs Web, or the mix thereof. Changes in public accessibility to Parliament clearly involve political risk.

### **Section 3: Summary of Financial Movements**

The Office is currently not planning any significant movements of funds.