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## UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY LIBRARY: FINDING GOVERNMENT REPORTS

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### Summary

After completing this learning tool, you should be able to:

- Identify the different types of Government Reports
- Identify when a document is a Government Report
- Find Government Reports using the library's catalogue and website, and Government websites

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## WHAT IS A GOVERNMENT REPORT?

A report is a formal written document of collection of documents presented together and authored by an expert or group of experts.

The main types of Government Reports are Parliamentary Reports, Reports of Government Departments and Reports of Government Agencies.

## PARLIAMENTARY REPORTS

Parliamentary Reports are a sub-group of Parliamentary Papers. They're documents presented to State or Commonwealth parliament. They include white papers, parliamentary committee reports, reports from Royal Commissions, Commissions of Inquiry, annual reports from Government Departments and Agencies, and budget papers.

### 1. White Papers

Are prepared at the direction of a Minister and provide a statement of current or intended government policy in a particular area.

Example: Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment, Securing Our Water Future Together: a Victorian Government White Paper (2004)

### 2. Parliamentary Committee Reports

Parliamentary Committees are established by the House of Representatives or Senate (or their State equivalents) to scrutinise bills (proposed laws) or investigate issues in greater detail than time allows during parliamentary debates. Parliament establishes an inquiry, provides its terms of reference, invites public submissions, calls witnesses, and conducts hearings.

- *Joint Committees* are made up of members of both Houses of Parliament.
- *Standing Committees* exist for the life of the Parliament and deal with a particular subject area over the course of the Parliament.
- *Select Committees* are established to examine a specific issue and disband after delivering their final report.
- *Estimates Committees* scrutinise Government budgetary spending.

### 3. Royal Commission Reports and Commission of Inquiry Reports

Royal Commissions and Commissions of Inquiry are types of major inquiries which are set up by Governments to investigate important matters of public concern. They feature an independent Commissioner, and have the power to compel witnesses to appear and answer questions. They usually attempt to establish how and why a particular situation or incident came about, and how it can be prevented in the future. To this end, a major report is produced recommending changes to policy or legislation.

### 4. Departmental and Agency Annual Reports

Annual Reports, tabled in Commonwealth or State Parliament on a yearly basis, provide detailed information about the policies and programs of Government Departments, and associated Agencies. They are also designed to provide financial information about that particular Government body in a transparent manner. These reports are legislative requirements for Government Departments.

Commonwealth and State Governments establish Departments, each of which are broadly responsible for implementing Government policy in a particular area (Eg. the NSW Department of Health administers hospitals and other health related matters in NSW). These Departments, each responsible to a Government Minister, are the main agencies of executive government in Australia. As well as releasing Annual Reports providing detailed information about their year to year activities, Government Departments also release research and technical reports, policy evaluation reports, strategy update reports, audit reports, and consultancy reports. These, and various other types of reports, either describe the activities of the Department, or are the published results of research into areas administered by the Department, the findings of which often help to influence Government policy.

In order to assist Government Departments to carry out work in their administrative area, often a range of non-departmental agencies –Statutory Authorities, Statutory Corporations, and Advisory Bodies – are appointed. Each of these Government agencies will have a role in a specific area more broadly administered by a Government department, and will release reports providing information to the Government about that particular area. For example, the Australian Bureau of Statistics is a Government Agency associated with the Commonwealth Department of Treasury. Its role is to provide reports containing statistical data and analysis of

many aspects of Australian society and industry etc. These reports assist Government in developing appropriate public policy. It can often be difficult to tell whether a particular agency is a government agency. If you're in doubt, look for the government badge, or coat of arms to appear in the report, although some agency reports lack this feature. Government websites will often provide a list of agencies associated with their Departments.

### **5. Budget Papers**

Budget papers are released in support of the annual budget speech of the Treasurers of the Commonwealth and States. They indicate proposed Government income and expenditure for the coming financial year, including taxation and other important financial and economic details. Recently it has become common for budget papers to be released as a series of booklets, including budget related documents addressing wider social policy from an economic and financial perspective.

### **HOW DO I KNOW IT'S A GOVERNMENT REPORT?**

To determine whether it is a government report you can use these questions:

- Does it have the official logo?
- Is it referred to as a report?

### **HOW CAN I EASILY FIND GOVERNMENT REPORTS?**

If the Library has copies of individual reports you can search the catalogue. Just make sure you are using the right search terms eg. corporate corruption is too general whereas corporate report governance works well as does report insider trading.

Government reports are often presented (tabled) in Parliament. They can be at Federal, State or even Local Government level and you can search their websites. The Library's "Finding Australian Government reports guide" (<http://libguides.library.usyd.edu.au/govreports>) can be a useful starting point.