



28 October 2024

Parliamentary Budget Office Activity Report

Contents

Our activities in detail	3
Parliamentarian requests	3
Self-initiated program	10
Election preparedness.....	10
External engagement	11
People and systems.....	13
Attachment A: Self-initiated Program.....	14

At a glance

This report provides an update on Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) activities since the last activity report published on 21 May 2024. Key highlights include:

- Demand for costing and analytical services continues to be strong. In the 3 months to 30 September 2024, we received 829 request options and completed 847. Median time to completion was 15 days against a target of 15 days. Demand is expected to continue to accelerate as we approach the election.
- We completed the 47th Parliament stakeholder survey. The results continue to indicate high levels of satisfaction with the PBO's services and provide insights on where we can do more to ensure our services are timely, available and accessible to all stakeholders.
- Our preparations for the next general election are substantially complete. The focus is now on de-risking our preparedness through enhancing the capacity and capability of our workforce, improving critical systems and reducing the stock of outstanding parliamentarian requests.
- We completed the budget updates to the self-help tools *Build your own budget* and *SMART*, and published *Beyond the budget 2024-25*, *Unlegislated measures tracker* update and a Budget Explainer on *Dividend imputation and franking credits*.
- We published our 2023-24 Annual Report, 2024-25 Corporate Plan, and 2024 APS Census highlights report.

PLANNED ACTIVITIES BY FUNCTION

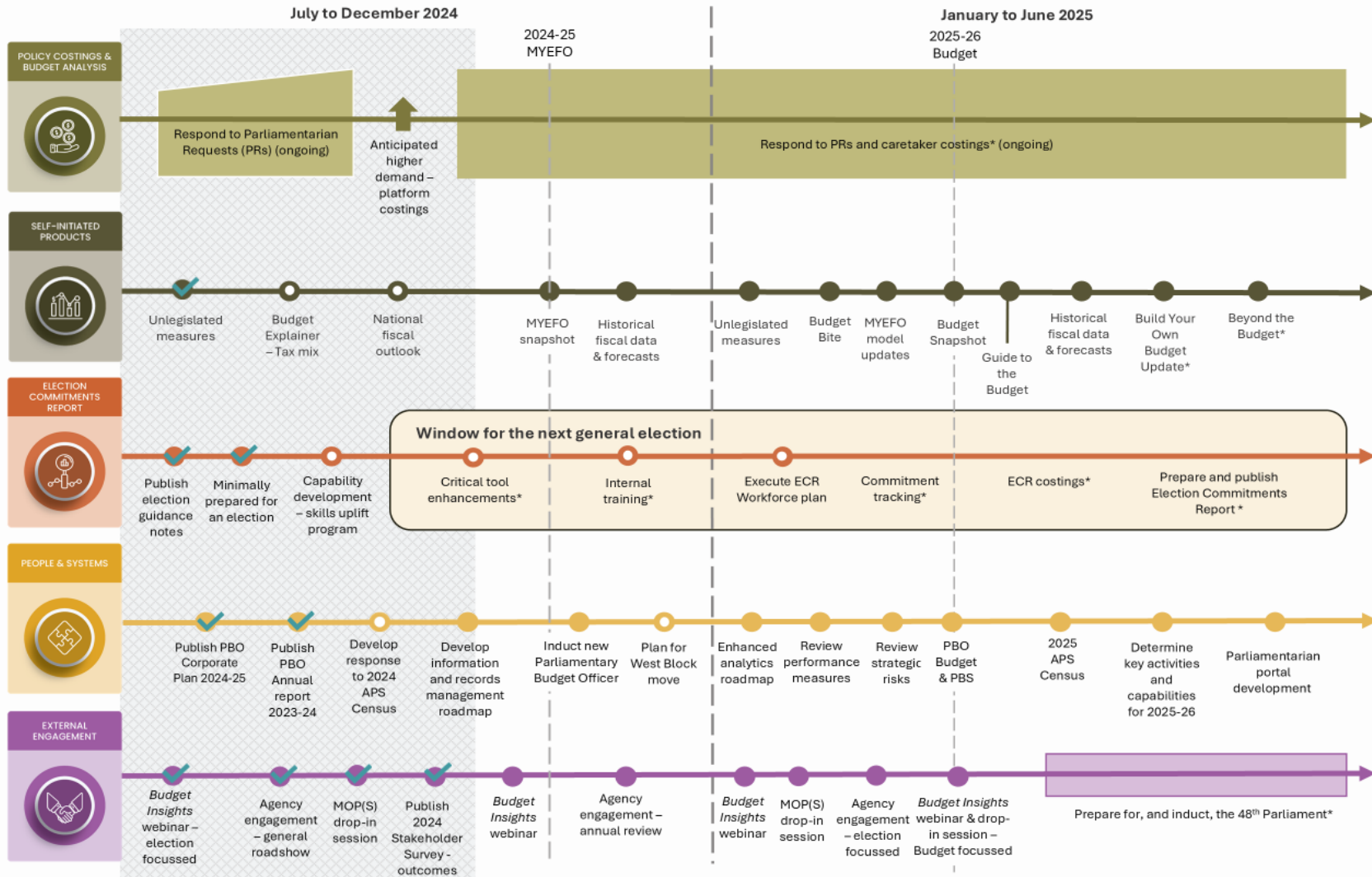
JULY 2024 TO JUNE 2025*



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, published on 21 May 2024. Reporting is generally on a quarterly basis to 30 September 2024 with detail up to 18 October 2024 where relevant. This 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). The number of request options completed in 2023-24 was more consistent with the third year of an election cycle than the middle year (see Box 1). The number of completed options in quarter 1 of 2024-25 was higher than any quarter in the 47th Parliament to date, and more than the total number of options completed in 2022-23.

Preliminary analysis of October activity shows as at 18 October 2024 we received 70 request options and completed 113.

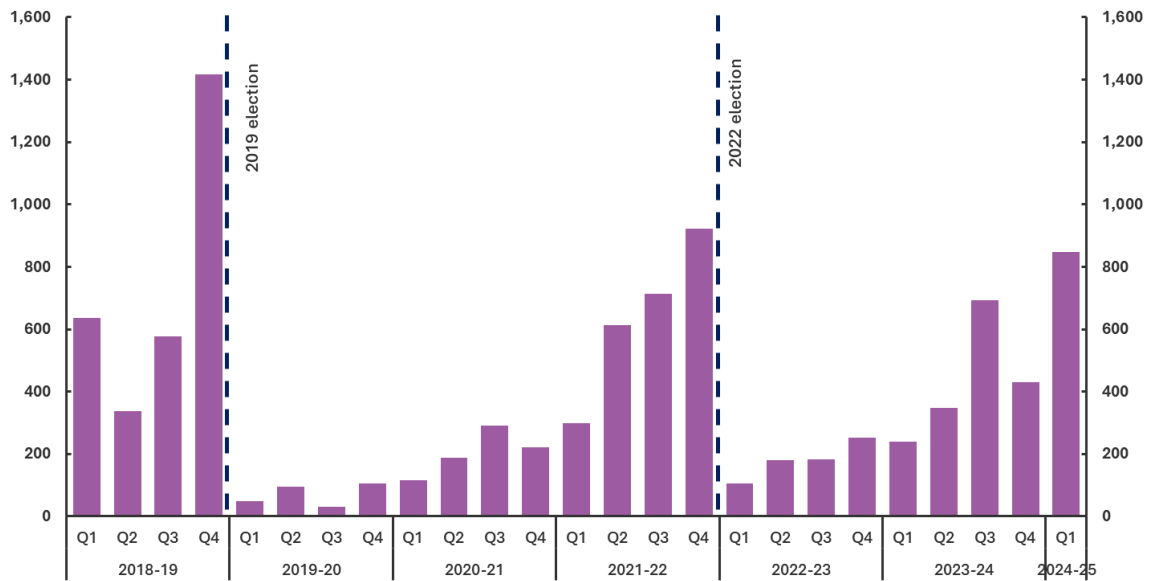
Table 1: Costing and budget analysis request performance to 30 September 2024

	19-20 total	20-21 total	21-22 total	22-23 total	23-24 total	24-25 Q1
Request options outstanding at the start of period	20	40	343	35	86	369
Request options received in period	332	1,253	3,241 ^(a)	786	2,035 ^(c)	829 ^(d)
Request options completed in period	279	813	2,550 ^(a)	721	1,711	847
Average time to completion (business days)	27	31	29	15	19	20
Median time to completion (business days)	25	35	18	14	15	15
Request options withdrawn in period	33	137	999 ^(b)	14	41	46
Request options outstanding at the end of period	40	343	35	86	369 ^(c)	305 ^(d)

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

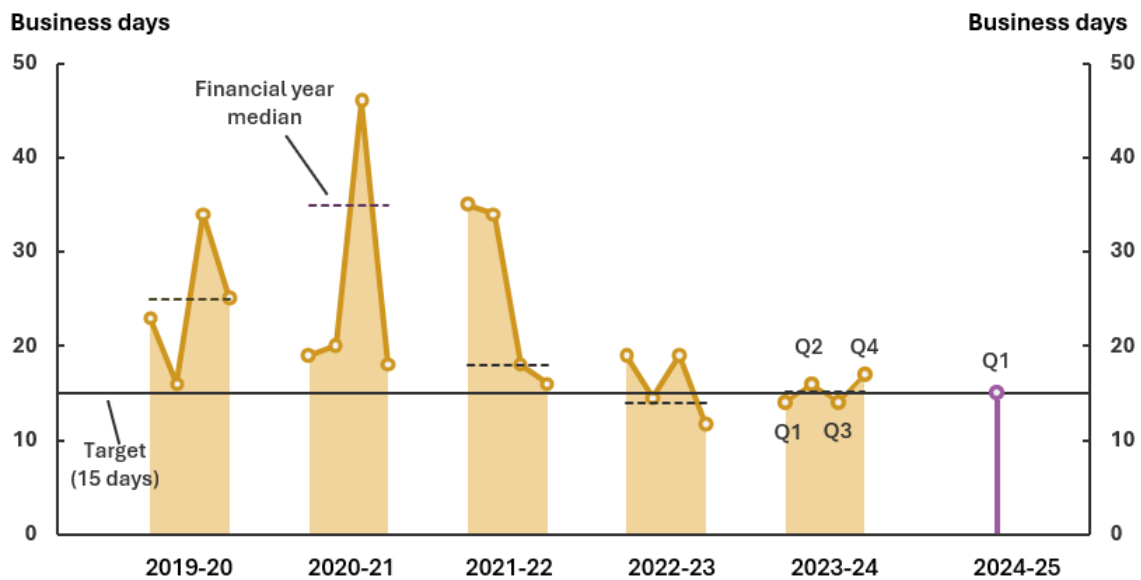
- This includes 316 costings prepared for the 2022 Election commitments report. 314 costings were for commitments by parties and 2 additional costings were for interactions between policies.
- Most of these requests were automatically withdrawn due to the expiration of the 46th Parliament in accordance with the PBO's legislative mandate which does not allow for requests to carry over between parliaments.
- Since the publication of the PBO's Annual Report, we have re-examined metadata for the final quarter of 2023-24 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 1,996 to 2,035 and (ii) outstanding options at the end of 2023-24 revised upward from 330 to 369.
- 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



Despite continued strong demand, our median time for completion of parliamentarian requests across 2023-24, and the first quarter of 2024-25, was maintained at 15 business days, against a performance benchmark of 15 days (Figure 2). This has largely been achieved through active management and prioritisation of requests, including placing lower priority requests on-hold in consultation with requestors. Internal workflow efficiencies, automation, strong stakeholder relationships and the maturation of the OnePBO organisational model have also assisted.

Figure 2: Median response time for policy costing and budget analysis requests

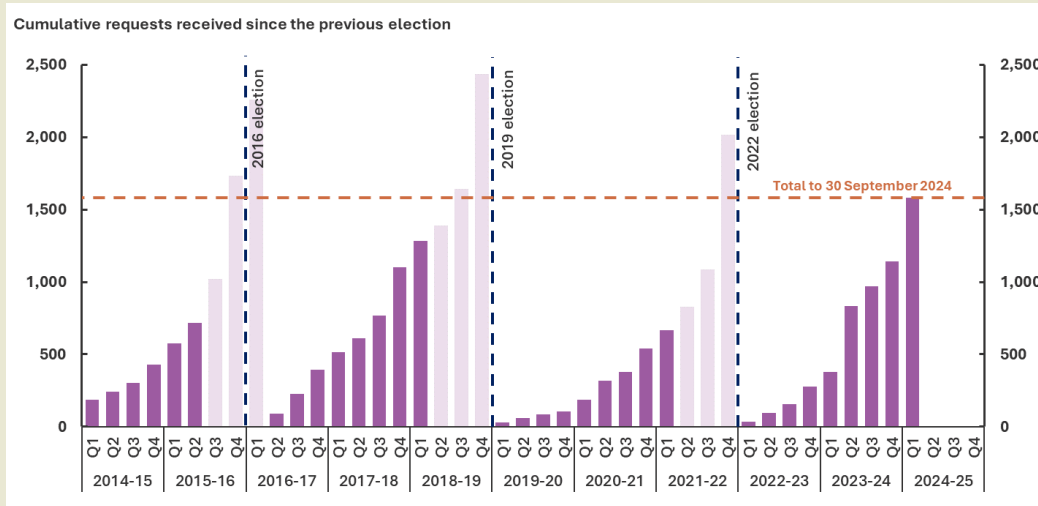


Demand continues to be stronger than we would usually expect at this point in the parliamentary cycle (Figure 1). We expect it to continue to accelerate as we approach the next general election. With higher request volumes, it will be challenging to maintain our service levels for parliamentarian requests as well as meet our publication and election related responsibilities.

Box 1: Parliamentary requests throughout the Parliamentary cycle

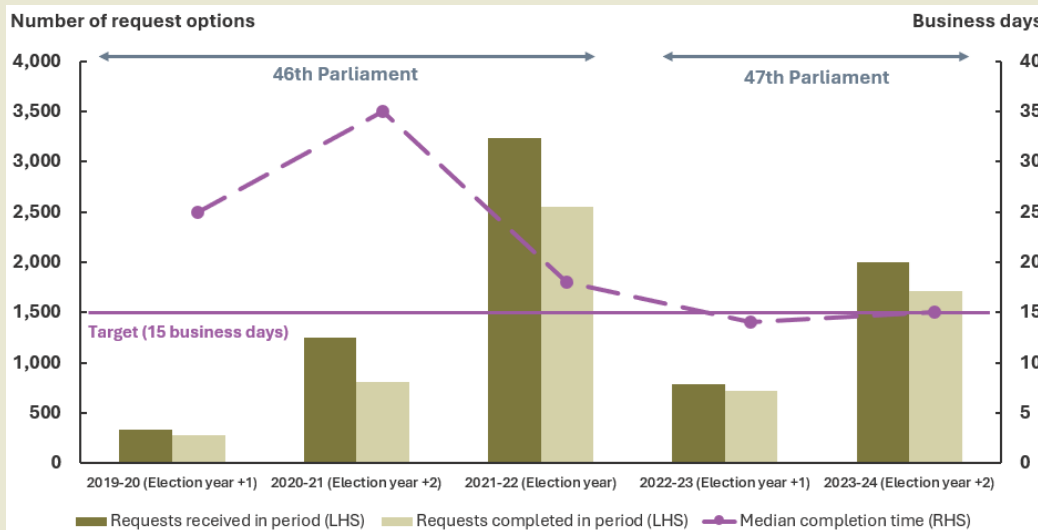
Request volumes follow the parliamentary cycle, tending to reduce immediately after a general election before scaling up as policy platforms are developed and finalised, peaking in the election year (Figure 3). The cumulative number of requests received since the 2022 election is currently at a level expected to be observed towards the end of the parliamentary cycle.

Figure 3: Total number of parliamentary requests received



Demand for our costing and budget analysis services has been unexpectedly stronger in the 47th Parliament than the previous one. In 2023-24, we received over 50% more request options and completed more than double the amount than in the comparable period after the 2019 election (2021-22) (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Total number of received and completed parliamentary request options



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 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

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

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 11 days, with complex requests sometimes taking longer. In October 2024, the PBO undertook 2 Commonwealth Agency Roadshows involving over 160 staff on responding to PBO requests including during an election period. The 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

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

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

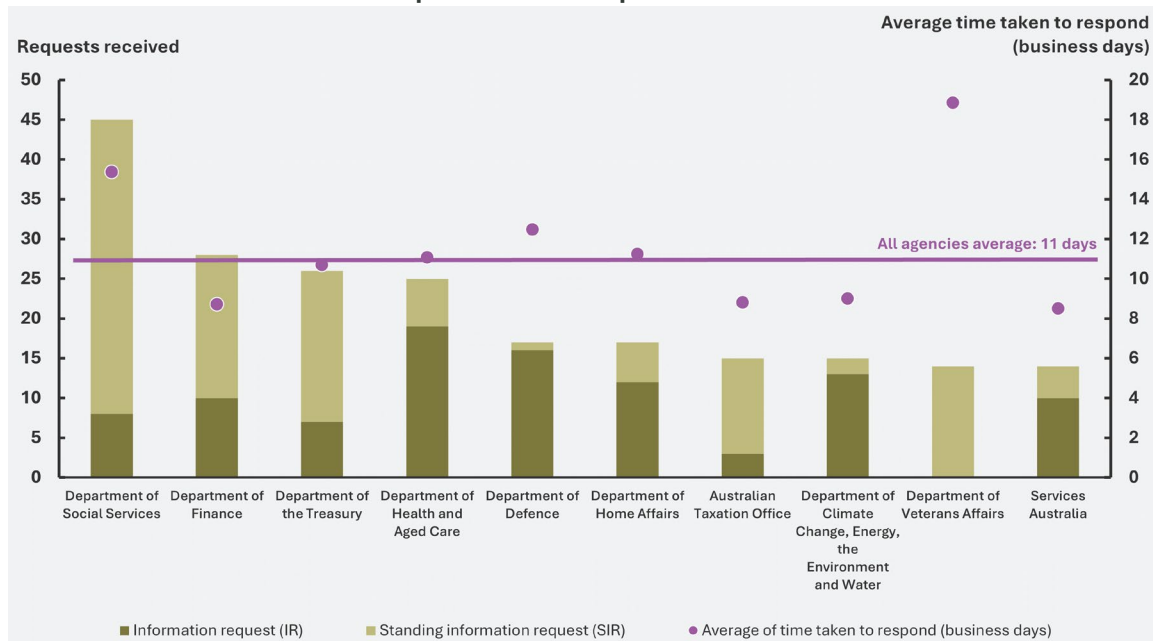
Table 4 provides the breakdown of responsiveness for individual agencies for the period 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024 (the top 10 agencies and their responsiveness are highlighted in Figure 5). There were no late responses in this period. The PBO negotiates extensions to agencies to complete requests where it is appropriate to do so.

Table 4: Information request responsiveness by agencies: 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024

Commonwealth entity	Responses received in period	Average of time taken to respond (business days)	Responses received after due date	% late
Attorney-General's Department	6	6	0	0%
Australian Competition and Consumer Commission	1	10	0	0%
Australian Electoral Commission	1	12	0	0%
Australian Federal Police	2	12	0	0%
Australian Institute of Family Studies	1	10	0	0%
Australian Office of Financial Management	1	3	0	0%
Australian Public Service Commission	2	9	0	0%
Australian Taxation Office	15	9	0	0%
Bureau of Meteorology	2	12	0	0%
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry	3	10	0	0%
Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water	15	9	0	0%
Department of Defence	17	12	0	0%
Department of Education	13	8	0	0%
Department of Employment and Workplace Relations	9	9	0	0%
Department of Finance	28	9	0	0%
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	10	12	0	0%
Department of Health and Aged Care	25	11	0	0%
Department of Home Affairs	17	11	0	0%
Department of Industry, Science and Resources	8	15	0	0%
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications and the Arts	12	11	0	0%
Department of Social Services	45	15	0	0%
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet	2	8	0	0%
Department of the Treasury	26	11	0	0%
Department of Veterans Affairs	14	19	0	0%
Digital Transformation Agency	2	15	0	0%
Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission	2	7	0	0%
National Disability Insurance Agency	4	8	0	0%
National Emergency Management Agency	1	10	0	0%
National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation	1	10	0	0%
National Indigenous Australians Agency	3	8	0	0%
NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission	1	0	0	0%
Services Australia	14	9	0	0%
Total	303	11	0	0%

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 April 2024 to 30 September 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). Of the 19 costings publicly released since the last activity report, 15 (79%) were referenced in the media or other relevant sources.

Table 5: Costings or budget analysis publicly released and referenced between 18 May and 18 October 2024

Description of policy	Party or Parliamentarian	Date of PBO release	Number of references	Media type
Impact of super for housing on Commonwealth Rent Assistance	Senator Andrew Bragg	19 June 2024	2	Print
Subsidise insulin pumps for all Australians living with type 1 diabetes	Dr Mike Freeland MP	24 June 2024	0	n/a
Subsidising GLP-1 RAs on the PBS for obesity and individuals with type 2 diabetes requiring intensive insulin therapy	Dr Mike Freeland MP	24 June 2024	0	n/a
Limit marketing of unhealthy foods on radio, television, print and social media, especially for children	Dr Mike Freeland MP	24 June 2024	0	n/a
20% tax on sugar sweetened beverages	Dr Mike Freeland MP	24 June 2024	24	Print, online, radio

Description of policy	Party or Parliamentarian	Date of PBO release	Number of references	Media type
Cost of Negative Gearing and Capital Gains Tax Discount	Mr Adam Bandt	2 July 2024	47	Parliamentary speech, print, online, radio, media release
GST on Building Materials	Senator Malcolm Roberts	17 July 2024	0	n/a
Increasing the size of Federal Parliament	Mr James Stevens MP	26 July 2024	12	Print, online, radio, media release, television
Impact of super for housing on Commonwealth rent assistance for 35-45 age cohort	Senator Andrew Bragg	2 August 2024	10	Print, online, radio, media release
Big corporations tax (Excessive profits)	Mr Adam Bandt MP	29 August 2024	40	Print, online, radio
Big corporations tax (Oil and gas)	Mr Adam Bandt MP	2 September 2024	16	Print, online, radio
Big corporations tax (Coal and mining)	Mr Adam Bandt MP	2 September 2024	17	Print, online, radio
Putting dental care into Medicare	Mr Adam Bandt MP	2 September 2024	14	Print, online, radio
National rental protection authority	Mr Adam Bandt MP	2 September 2024	13	Print, online, radio
Impact of super for housing on commonwealth rent assistance for 35 to 59 age cohort	Senator Andrew Bragg	17 September 2024	18	Print, online, radio
Distribution of property tax concession benefits	Mr Adam Bandt MP	1 October 2024	2	Print, media release
Triple the bulk billing rate	Mr Adam Bandt MP	3 October 2024	10	Print, online
Trainee Doctors to have equal pay	Mr Adam Bandt MP	3 October 2024	10	Print, online
Free Local Healthcare Clinics	Mr Adam Bandt MP	3 October 2024	10	Print, online

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.

Since 1 July 2024, we have requested a minor clarification or correction 15 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. Where the issue was not addressed, we determined they were not of sufficient materiality to warrant further public action by the PBO.

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 (see Attachment A):

- *Unlegislated measures tracker* – update (9 August 2024).
- *Beyond the budget 2024-25 Fiscal outlook and scenarios* (27 June 2024)
- 2024-25 Budget updates to *Build your own budget* (27 June 2024) and *SMART* (19 June 2024)
- Budget Explainer: *Dividend imputation and franking credits* (13 June 2024).

In 2024-25, we are expecting to produce fewer self-initiated products 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

We achieved our aim to be minimally prepared for the next general election ahead of the election window of August 2024 to May 2025. Since the last report, we have:

- published election guidance notes to support parliamentary parties, Senators and Members of Parliament engage effectively with the PBO in an election context
- written to all Independent Senators and members, and minor party leaders advising them of their ability to opt-in to the ECR
- updated and further developed our suite of ICT tools for the accurate tracking of election commitments and aggregation of their financial implications.

Our focus is now on enhancing our preparations, by ensuring we have sufficient people with the right skills and experience, effective processes and tools to be as efficient as possible in undertaking our work, and that we are communicating early and effectively with key stakeholders about how the PBO will work with them in an election context and in preparing the Election commitments report. Our focus on reducing the stock of parliamentary requests is an important aspect of our risk management strategy.

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.

Since the last report we held a *Budget Insights* webinar and a drop-in session focussing on the PBO and the next general election for parliamentarians and their staff. The *Budget Insights* series aims to support parliamentarians and their staff to better understand the budget process and fiscal issues.

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.

Since the last report we also:

- hosted a member of the US Congressional Budget Office who presented to staff on costing experiences through the US government system (August 2024)
- met with delegations from Indonesia (July and October 2024), Thailand (August 2024) and Vietnam (September 2024)
- together with other Parliamentary departments, participated in the Work Exposure in Government (WEX) event, providing an opportunity for First Nations high school students to travel to Canberra for a hands-on experience, gaining knowledge about career pathways in the Australian Government (October 2024)
- presented at the ANU's Crawford School of Public Policy Managing Government Finances course (October 2024).

We had the opportunity to support the Australian Government's Office for Youth in the development of their new digital Youth Hub, scheduled to be launched online in October 2024. We contributed to the 'life stuff' subject area, with a high-level overview of the budget process.

Triennial Stakeholder Survey and feedback

Between April and June 2024, we completed our stakeholder survey for the 47th Parliament. As in the 2021 survey, the results continue to indicate high levels of satisfaction with the PBO's services. Our thanks go to all who participated in the survey – a total of 18 direct stakeholder interviews and 83 respondents to an online survey (see [Stakeholder feedback](#))

The 2024 results demonstrate the changes we have made to improve the timeliness of our responses to parliamentarian requests and the accessibility of our work, especially via our new website, and the availability of our services have been well received and provide a strong foundation for the future. Results from the survey show continued high awareness of the PBO (95%) and strong agreement that we are a trusted source (85%) producing high quality work (85%).

Whilst these results indicate that the changes we have made are in the right direction, we know there is more that we can do to:

- maintain the timeliness and relevance of responses to parliamentarian requests

- expand our outreach to parliamentarians to ensure they know and are easily able to use our services, and are kept up to date on progress with responding to their requests
- continuously improve the accessibility of our information, leveraging our website, self-help tools and self-initiated analysis to achieve our vision of enriching Australia’s democracy through independent budget and fiscal analysis.

We are developing an action plan as part of our Engagement and Communication strategy for the 48th Parliament that will continue to address opportunities for further enhancement.

Digital engagement statistics – 1 April to 30 September 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 15 May 2024. This coincided with the release of our Budget products and the public release of a parliamentarian request. Across the reporting period, the *Budget Explainer: Dividend imputation and franking credits* received the highest page views (Table 6).

Figure 6: Overview of website views and release of PBO products (1 April to 30 September 2024)

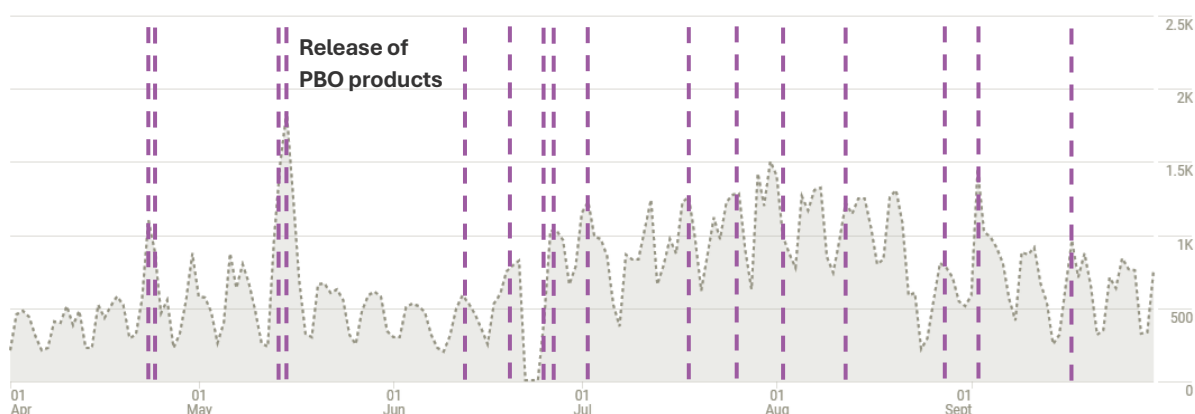


Table 6: Website analytics – Top 10 performing web pages by views (1 April to 30 September 2024)

Description of policy	Views*	Average time
1. Budget Explainer: Dividend imputation and franking credits^	7,215	02:27
2. Budget Explainer: Fuel taxation in Australia (previously 2)	3,139	02:19
3. 2023-24 National fiscal outlook (previously 3)	1,656	01:54
4. Online budget glossary (previously 4)	1,596	02:02
5. Build your own budget (BYOB) (previously 5)	1,555	02:24
6. 2024-25 Budget Snapshot^	1,370	02:41
7. 2023-24 Budget Snapshot^	1,152	03:21
8. Policy reform options for negative gearing and capital gains^ (Parliamentarian request)	1,029	02:12
9. Increasing the income threshold for the Commonwealth Seniors Health Care Card^ (2022 Election commitment)	1,080	02:26
10. 2023-24 MYEFO Snapshot^	976	02:29

* Adjusted for bounce rate ^ New to the top 10

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.

Since the last report, we have published our 2023-24 Corporate Plan, and the 2024-25 Annual report.

Staffing

At 10 October 2024, we had 50.4 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff and a headcount of 54. This figure reflects PBO staff only. We continue to supplement our workforce with graduate and other secondees.

Diversity and inclusion

The PBO is committed to being a workplace free from discrimination, and a model employer that both celebrates our differences and embraces what we have in common. The PBO's *Diversity and Inclusion Strategy* has been updated and draws on consultation with PBO staff and current best practices for workplace diversity initiatives, while mindful of our small size and unique working context. The Strategy includes an action plan with 21 specific, measurable actions with clear accountabilities. The September quarterly progress report indicates that all but 3 actions have been progressed, with plans in place to advance the outstanding initiatives by the end of the year.

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. The Census provides valuable insights to determine activities that will optimise staff engagement addressing elements such as leadership, communication, and wellbeing.

Our 2024 Census highlights report has been published in alignment with the Australian Public Services Commission requirements 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.

We have been working with DPS on a parliamentary portal that allows authorised users to submit, manage, and download costings and budget analysis requests. This will be supported by real-time management of status and prioritisation of requests. Reflecting the current focus on election preparedness, we have paused this work with the view to pick it up for the 48th Parliament.

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			
BYOB – 2025-26 Budget update	May 2025	-	Fiscal
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)	Q3	-	Other
Quarter 2			
BYOB – 2024-25 MYEFO update	December 2024		Fiscal
Historical fiscal data – MYEFO Update	December 2024	-	Fiscal
2024-25 MYEFO snapshot	December 2024	-	Fiscal
National Fiscal Outlook 2024-25	October 2024	-	Fiscal
Budget Explainer: Tax Mix	Q2	-	Other
Quarter 1			
Unlegislated measures tracker (post Budget)#	-	9 August 2024	Other

* The planned publication schedule assumes a 25 March 2025 Budget.

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

Table A2: 2023-24 Self-initiated program – planned and published

Title of publication	Publication		Fiscal update or other
	Planned	Actual	
Quarter 4			
Beyond the budget 2024-25: Fiscal outlook and scenarios	End June 2024	27 June 2024	Fiscal
BYOB (2024-25 Budget update)	End June 2024	27 June 2024	Fiscal
SMART (2024-25 Budget update)	Q4	19 June 2024	Other
Budget Explainer: Dividend imputation and franking credits	Q4	13 June 2024	Other
Guide to the 2024-25 Budget	May 2024	15 May 2024	Fiscal
Historical fiscal data (2024-25 Budget update)	May 2024	15 May 2024	Fiscal
2024-25 Budget snapshot	May 2024	14 May 2024	Fiscal
Unlegislated measures tracker (Budget update*)	May 2024	-	Other
Quarter 3			
Budget Explainer: Contingency Reserve (update)	Q3	24 April 2024	Other
Build your own budget: (2023-24 MYEFO update)	March 2024	26 March 2024	Fiscal
Unlegislated measures tracker	Q3	1 February 2024	Other
Quarter 2			
SMART – Consultation Draft	Q2	18 December 2023	Other
Historical fiscal data (2023-24 MYEFO update)	December 2023	15 December 2023	Fiscal
2023-24 MYEFO snapshot	December 2023	13 December 2023	Fiscal
2023-24 National Fiscal Outlook	October 2023	31 October 2023	Fiscal
Budget Bite: Why do costings change?	Q2	26 October 2023	Other
Quarter 1			
Historical Budget forecasts	-	13 September 2023	Other

* The update to the dashboard ‘unlegislated measures’ was originally planned for publication in May 2024, but was published in August 2024.