About this report

This is the first annual report of the Victorian Parliamentary Budget Office and covers the activities of the office to 30 June 2019. In this report, we provide information about the value the office creates and report against our performance measures.

This report contains summary financial information, not financial statements. The office is included in the financial statements for the Parliament of Victoria, published in the *Department of Parliamentary Services Annual Report 2018-19*.

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2018-19 was our first full year of operation and involved our first election period and new services for all members of parliament outside the election period.

I am very pleased with the overwhelmingly positive response by members of parliament to the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO).

**Summary of 2018-19**

We established the office and prepared for the 2018 general election—tracking election commitments, preparing election policy costings and preparing reports for parliamentary leaders and the public. Since the election, demand from members has been strong and growing.

We publicly released one third of the responses we provided to members, at their request. Publicly released responses have been referenced in parliament and the media, informing public debate in parliament and the community.

The other two thirds informed members' policy development, remaining confidential to them.

**Client satisfaction**

Members from a broad range of political parties value the way we work and what we produce. On average, they scored satisfaction with our advice and service quality at 9.5 out of ten in a recent independent survey.

**Public sector information**

This is a strategic issue. Our independent policy costings and advice are impacted by the timeliness and completeness of public sector responses to my information requests. I issued 335 information requests during 2018-19, with less than half responded to in-time and less than half complete.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) provides independent advice on designing effective independent fiscal institutions, such as ours. OECD research indicates that, in the early years, there is a temptation to constrain these institutions' actions to avoid criticism in the short term, which negatively impacts ongoing effectiveness.

Our clients are impacted the most by this issue when they request our services to inform parliamentary debate. In these instances, timeframes are often tight, from when a member becomes aware of a bill to when it is debated.

In response, I continue to actively pursue strategies to improve public sector information supply, develop our own independent costing models and identify alternative sources of credible information. These strategies meant that in 2018-19, we were able to respond to 96 per cent of member requests with policy costings or advice. I will continue to deliver credible, authoritative and independent advice, however, poor public sector responses impact parliamentary debate, as well as my office’s efficiency.

**The PBO team**

I am extremely pleased with the strong positive organisational culture created by my team that responsibly balances client, organisational and individual needs, respects people and their contribution, and promotes information sharing and collaboration. I am proud of how we have worked together, what we have achieved and the value we provide.

In accordance with the **Parliamentary Budget Officer Act 2017** (Vic), I am pleased to present the office’s inaugural annual report for the year ended 30 June 2019.

Anthony Close
Parliamentary Budget Officer
31 October 2019
Summary of 2018-19

**Inputs**
- **Our people**: 15.2 full time equivalents
- **Members of Parliament**: 234 requests received
- **Public sector information**: 335 requests issued
- **Our funding**: $4.041 million

**Outcomes**
- 95 per cent client satisfaction
- 86 Hansard mentions

**Key Outputs**
- **2018 election commitment tracker**: 1,668 election commitments identified. Tracker published on pbo.vic.gov.au
- **Election policy costings**: 215 costings for parliamentary leaders. 829 costings for post-election reporting.
- **Pre and post-election reports**: 3 pre-election reports. 3 post-election reports. 1 report of PBO operations.
- **Policy costings**: 68 for members of parliament.
- **Advice**: 10 for members of parliament.
- **Public awareness**: Independent budget snapshot and economic and fiscal indicators.
- **Community**: 756 responses published. 36 media articles.
About the office

The Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) is a new addition to the Victorian parliamentary landscape, established as an independent office of the Parliament of Victoria by the Parliamentary Budget Officer Act 2017 (Vic) (the Act).

Members of parliament can request that we prepare independent policy costings or advice on fiscal, economic or financial matters. Our team of economists, accountants and public policy specialists seek to fully understand members’ requests before preparing our responses.

The Act empowers us to access public sector information, supporting our responses to be authoritative and credible.

Our policy costings and advice are used as inputs to policy development and public debate in parliament and the community. We inform policy choices by providing members with information about the potential impact of their proposed policies and by publishing information on our website.

‘When I think of all the services around parliament, this is sort of the brightest light that has just kind of jumped out recently.’

Source: 2018-19 independent survey of PBO client satisfaction

Our vision
Informing policy choices.

Our purpose
To provide trusted fiscal, economic, and financial advice.

Our objectives
To provide members of parliament with ongoing, authoritative, independent and credible advice.
To deliver our advice in a manner that is timely, relevant and readily understandable.
To inform policy development and public debate in parliament and the community.
## Year in review

### What we produced

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Products</th>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Related to the 2018 general election</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election policy costings for parliamentary leaders</td>
<td>• 125 costing requests</td>
<td>• 215 costings prepared with 61 published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 1 request withdrawn</td>
<td>• 7 statements of insufficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pre-election budget update</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-election reports for parliamentary leaders</td>
<td>• 3 report requests</td>
<td>• 3 reports prepared with 1 published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018 election commitment tracker</td>
<td>• 1 668 election commitments through media monitoring</td>
<td>Tracker published and updated regularly prior to the election</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election policy costings from publicly announced election commitments</td>
<td>• 2018 election commitment tracker</td>
<td>• 829 costings prepared with 692 published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Half year budget update</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-election reports of parliamentary leaders</td>
<td>• 692 election policy costings</td>
<td>• 3 reports prepared and published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report of operations</td>
<td>• Operations from 1 May 2018 to 31 January 2019</td>
<td>• 1 report prepared and published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• OECD independent legislative framework review</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outside of the 2018 general election</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy costings for members of parliament</td>
<td>• 86 costing requests with 18 in progress at 30 June 2019</td>
<td>• 68 costings prepared with 1 published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice for members of parliament</td>
<td>• 20 advice requests with 9 in progress at 30 June 2019</td>
<td>• 10 advice prepared with 2 published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 1 statement of insufficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational plan</td>
<td>• PBO strategic plan</td>
<td>Plan for 2018-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• PBO protocols</td>
<td>Plan for 2019-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent budget snapshot</td>
<td>• State budget or budget update</td>
<td>• 3 prepared and published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic and fiscal indicators</td>
<td>• Key economic and fiscal data</td>
<td>• 5 prepared and published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summary for 2018-19</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 1 668 election commitments tracked</td>
<td>• 1 122 policy costings and advice with 756 published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 234 requests received with 27 in progress at 30 June 2019</td>
<td>• 8 statements of insufficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 6 pre and post-election reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 1 report of operations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Who we produced for

Our key clients are parliamentary leaders of registered political parties, members of parliament and the Victorian community.

Related to the 2018 general election

Victorian community

Most of what we produced related to the 2018 general election and was published on our website for the community.

From May to November 2018, we tracked publicly announced election commitments made by parliamentary leaders and published them in an election commitment tracker, with searchable content. We tracked them to enable us to independently cost publicly announced election policies. Each policy costing we prepare estimates the impact of an election policy on the state budget. After the 2018 general election, we aggregated the impact of publicly announced election policies to show how the policies of the two largest political parties were expected to impact the state budget. To further aid public awareness, we also prepared a comparative report.

We publicly released the tracker, post-election reports and election policy costings to support transparency and provide an independent reference for the community.

We also prepared a report of operations related to the election period for review by the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and the wider community.

Parliamentary leaders

We supported parliamentary leaders by preparing election policy costings at their request. Parliamentary leaders could also request pre-election reports and select which of their election policies to include. Pre-election reports provided parliamentary leaders with the expected impact of the selected election policies to the state budget.

We prepared election policy costings and pre-election reports confidentially to parliamentary leaders. At their request, we made them publicly available on our website, otherwise they remained confidential.

Outside of the 2018 general election

Members of parliament

After the 2018 general election, we contacted members of parliament to raise awareness of the services we provide—policy costings and advice of a fiscal, economic or financial nature. We also continued to receive requests from parliamentary leaders who used our services during the election period.

Figure 1 – Member requests by political party outside of the election period

We engaged individually with members from six different political parties. We experienced growing demand for our services, particularly for advice, which was only made available to members after the election period.

‘Their work has an absolutely public interest role and is vital for someone like me.’

Source: 2018-19 independent survey of PBO client satisfaction
Victorian community

Where a member of parliament chose to publicly release our advice or policy costing, we published it on our website for the community.

We prepared our policy costings against the latest state budget or budget update. Consequently, we review each state budget release to understand what has changed, what remains the same, and the assumptions and forecasts used. To support the community, we make our independent budget analysis publicly available on our website.

Our advice is prepared in the context of the Victorian economy, so we also review changes in key economic and fiscal data. We make these indicators publicly available.

Use of our services

During 2018-19, 90 per cent of requests were for policy costings. About one third of these related to other policy costing requests, demonstrating that members are using our services to develop and refine their policies.

Our advisory services commenced after our election period commitments completed in January 2019. About 20 per cent of requests outside the 2018 general election have been for advice. These requests can be wide-ranging in nature and include advice about the impact of bills to be debated in parliament.

More than half of our clients requested both policy costings and advice with some using these services in an integrated way—first requesting advice and following up with requests for related policy costings.

‘Such a study adds depth to debate that is not available through seeking action or responses from relevant ministers.’

Source: 2018-19 independent survey of PBO client satisfaction
Requests for public sector information

In 2018-19, we issued 335 requests. Figure 2 shows the timeliness and completeness of public sector responses.

**Figure 2 – Public sector responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeliness of responses</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-time response</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late response</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Completeness of responses</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complete response</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial response</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No information</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Timeliness**

The Act requires the public sector to respond within three days of receiving a request, unless a standing arrangement allows this to vary. When public sector responses are not within legislative timeframes, the Act is breached.

We first raised this issue in our report of operations. At that time, we reported that 44 per cent of requests were responded to in-time. Public sector performance has not improved outside of the election period.

In 2018-19, public sector responses were late or not received for 57 per cent of our requests. Figure 3 shows further details. Of our requests, 142 were responded to in-time, 134 were late, 51 had no response, and we withdrew eight.

Collectively, the number of ‘workdays late’ from late responses was 877, with 79 per cent received within two weeks of their due date and 21 per cent received between two to eight weeks late. We expend additional effort to follow up untimely responses.

Untimely responses also negatively impact the goal to ‘level the playing field’ and reduces the sophistication of parliamentary debate.

**Completeness**

‘Completeness’ measures whether all request elements have been included in a public sector entity’s response and is reduced when:

- the entity provides a partial or no response—responding to some of our numbered questions in a request or not responding at all
- the entity declines to comply, consistent with the Act—considering compliance would not be practicable, be unlawful, could prejudice national security or would require the disclosure of confidential commercial information
- the entity declines to comply, not consistent with the Act
- we request information not held.

We recorded ten responses declining to provide confidential commercial information.

**Our response**

In our report of operations, we recommended legislative change to improve the timeliness and completeness of responses.

We also continued to seek additional standing arrangements with public sector body heads under section 25 of the Act. Standing arrangements enable us to use liaison officers to better target our requests and minimise administrative burden for all parties. Without a standing arrangement, the Officer is required to make the request directly to the public sector body head under section 26. Our three existing standing arrangements have proven effective in removing our requests for information not held by these entities.

To provide timely and credible responses to our clients, we also developed our own independent costing models and identified alternative credible sources of information. These actions helped us to achieve a high response rate, despite this strategic issue.

‘There would be times where we could see getting something from them sooner, rather than later, would be more useful to us.’

*Source: 2018-19 independent survey of PBO client satisfaction*
Figure 3 – Timeliness and completeness of public sector responses for 2018-19
Our performance

We performed favourably against our measures set out in the 2018-19 Budget Paper No. 3 Service Delivery.

We achieved operational readiness nine months ahead of target and, by implementing strategies to manage information supply issues, we responded to 96 per cent of policy costing requests by their due dates. Our clients have been highly satisfied with our service and we achieved these outcomes in a peak year within budget. Figure 4 shows our performance for each measure for 2018-19 against targets.

Figure 4 – Performance measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance measures</th>
<th>2018-19 actual</th>
<th>2018-19 target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Requests (number)</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>Not set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary stakeholder satisfaction (per cent)</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requests responded by due date (per cent)</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational framework established (date)</td>
<td>30 June 2018</td>
<td>31 March 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total cost ($ million)</td>
<td>4.041</td>
<td>4.070</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: We had 1 request in progress at 30 June 2018 which we have included in the requests for 2018-19 as it had not previously been reported.

Requests

In 2018-19, we received 234 requests from:

- parliamentary leaders—125 election policy costings and 3 pre-election reports
- members of parliament—86 policy costings and 20 for advice.

Parliamentary stakeholder satisfaction

We invited all members we responded to in 2018-19 to participate in an independent satisfaction survey. Members scored and commented on areas aligned with our legislative objectives.

Our clients responded positively, scoring their level of satisfaction at 95 per cent.

Figure 5 – Client satisfaction results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction with advice</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent (per cent)</td>
<td>97.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritative (per cent)</td>
<td>91.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credible (per cent)</td>
<td>93.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction with service</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Timely (yes or no)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant (per cent)</td>
<td>96.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understandable (per cent)</td>
<td>98.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Requests responded by due date

‘Requests responded by due date’ measures the percentage of requests that we completed without issuing a statement of insufficiency. Where a member requests a non-negotiable due date and we cannot meet that date, we issue a statement of insufficiency with reasons.

Of the 234 requests we received, one was withdrawn and 27 were in progress as at 30 June 2019. This means we completed 206 requests—198 independent policy costings and advice and eight statements of insufficiency.

Operational framework established

We achieved operational readiness by 30 June 2018, when we accepted our first request for an election policy costing. Operational readiness included the:

- recruitment of staff
- design of the office’s key products
- design of protocols, processes and supporting tools
- implementation of systems and technology
- establishment of secure facilities.
Our employees

All employees elected to participate in the *Victorian Public Sector People Matter Survey 2019*—an independent organisational survey run by the Victorian Public Sector Commission.

This result reflects the commitment of every person in the office to create and operate in a high performing team.

**Figure 6 – Employee measures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People scorecard</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellbeing</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Engagement**

Employee engagement relates to the extent that employees are enthusiastic and energetic about their work, proactive in undertaking tasks and motivated to help their organisation meet its objectives.

Our overall employee engagement score was 80 per cent.

**Satisfaction**

Employee satisfaction relates to the level of contentment with their job, work and life balance and professional development.

Our overall employee satisfaction score was 84 per cent.

**Wellbeing**

Wellbeing relates to the comfort, health and satisfaction across physical, mental, emotional and social levels.

Our overall employee satisfaction score was 82 per cent.

‘They’re independent, they’re credible and they’re highly professional.’

*Source: 2018-19 independent survey of PBO client satisfaction*
Our organisation

Financial information

We are funded by parliamentary appropriation to deliver our services.

For 2018-19, the Treasurer approved funding of $4.070 million—$3.300 million fixed annual funding plus $0.770 million as a one-off adjustment. This adjustment was equivalent to unspent establishment funds from 2017-18, due to the appointment of the Officer in April 2018.

We spent $4.041 million—0.7 per cent within our approved budget. Access to one-off funding was critical to enable us to meet peak workload for the 2018 general election and complete the office establishment.

Figure 7 – Appropriation and expenditure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financials ($’000)</th>
<th>2018-19</th>
<th>2017-18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appropriation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriation for establishment (one-off)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriation for operations</td>
<td>3 300</td>
<td>3 300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer’s advance</td>
<td>770</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (budget)</strong></td>
<td>4 070</td>
<td>4 400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expenditure</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee expenses</td>
<td>2 566</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondment, contract, and consultancy costs</td>
<td>801</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-staff related costs</td>
<td>674</td>
<td>455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (actual)</strong></td>
<td>4 041</td>
<td>566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unused appropriation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per cent</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>87.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3 834</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Resourcing

Our costs increase each year due to mandatory increases in staff salaries and other costs. As a result of fixed funding, our service capacity to members will reduce year on year.

In response, we adjusted our resourcing strategy from building permanent capability to using a greater number of secondments and fixed term contracts.

In the short term, this provides us with the capabilities we need, while allowing us to manage within our approved budget.

In the medium term, we anticipate that fixed funding will impact client and staff satisfaction. We also anticipate that it will prevent us from fully complying with legislative reporting requirements for the 2022 general election.

Governance

Independent officer

The Parliamentary Budget Officer is an independent officer of the Parliament of Victoria who is not subject to the direction or control of any person in respect to the performance or exercise of the duties, functions, or powers of office.

The Officer is supported by directors who provide strategic and operational leadership, governance, risk management, and other advice to the Officer on significant matters.

Parliamentary committee

The Public Accounts and Estimates Committee:

- reviews operational and resourcing arrangements, including draft budgets
- consults with the Officer on the operational plan for the financial year
- reviews reports of operations and annual reports
- reports to both houses of parliament on matters connected with the operational and resourcing arrangements for the Officer that requires their attention.
The Officer informs the committee of significant matters that impact or may impact services or performance. During 2018-19, the Officer met three times with the committee:

- 23 July 2018, to provide an overview of the office, introduce committee members and PBO directors, and consult with the committee on the PBO Operational Plan for 2018-19.
- 25 March 2019, to provide an overview of the office—being the first committee meeting of the 59th parliament—and present the Report of PBO operations for the 2018 Victorian general election.
- 27 June 2019, to consult with the committee on the PBO Operational Plan for 2019-20.

Audit and risk management

The office is included within the scope of the Audit Committee for the Parliament of Victoria.

Due to the critical risk associated with client confidentiality, during 2018-19, we engaged external cybersecurity specialists to perform penetration testing of our information technology environment.

Our security solution was assessed as effective.

For risk mitigation purposes, we will continue this form of testing periodically.

Legislative compliance

Our annual report is prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Act and considers Department of Treasury and Finance’s model report of operations, associated Standing Directions and Financial Reporting Directions.

Figure 8 acquires the compliance requirements of the Act.

**Figure 8 – Annual report compliance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legislative reporting requirement</th>
<th>Reference within the Act</th>
<th>Disclosure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Record each occasion that a public sector body head declines to comply with a request under s26.</td>
<td>s28(2)(a)</td>
<td>Requests for public sector information (page 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specify the number of policy costings the Officer stopped preparing under s45(5) in the financial year.</td>
<td>s28(2)(b)</td>
<td>Year in review (page 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include each statement publicly released in accordance with a request under s46(2) in the financial year.</td>
<td>s28(2)(c)</td>
<td>The Officer did not receive any requests to do so during 2018-19.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘They're doing a great job. It was certainly a very tricky time to come into being and I think that they handled it very well.’

Source: 2018-19 independent survey of PBO client satisfaction