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Mr Jeff Collins MLA
Chair
Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory
GPO Box 3721
DARWIN NT 0801

Dear Mr Collins

RE: INQUIRY INTO OPENING PARLIAMENT TO THE PEOPLE

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission for the Inquiry into Opening Parliament to the People.

The Northern Territory (NT) Library currently operates a Parliamentary Library Service at Parliament House, to support Members of the Legislative Assembly, their staff and parliamentary staff in their official duties. This work includes answering inquiries and sourcing documents, providing alert services and training staff in the use of online information resources. The services provided by the Parliamentary Library Service are defined by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the (former) Department of Arts and Museums and the Legislative Assembly.

All Australian parliaments provide a similar library service to members and staff. In all jurisdictions except the NT, the Australian Capital Territory and Western Australia these services also extend to the provision of research papers, particularly relating to Bills coming before parliament. These papers generally set out the background to the Bill and summarise key research and data. They are prepared by research specialists employed within the parliamentary library service.

In some cases (Commonwealth, New South Wales and Victoria) these research papers are made publicly available online. Providing such access to these papers improves public knowledge of the legislative agenda, and fosters a deeper understanding of the issues that the Parliament is considering.

An opportunity exists to create a research service within the NT Library's Parliamentary Library Service in line with many other jurisdictions. The size and scope of this research service could be addressed through a revised MOU between the Legislative Assembly and the Department of Tourism and Culture. Funding for salaries would be required, and a new space within the NT Library would need to be redeveloped to support an expanded service.

The Parliamentary Library Service is delivered by the NT Library alongside its major strategic priorities of collecting, preserving and promoting the Territory's documentary heritage and history, and acting as a central library for the provision of digital infrastructure and support services across the Territory library sector. The NT Library further supports the agenda of opening Parliament to the people by attracting visitors to Parliament House for library services, events and exhibitions, and operating an education program to attract school groups to the library.

If you would like further information regarding this submission, please contact Mr Hugo Leschen, Executive Director, Arts and Museums on 8924 4142.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alastair Shields', with a stylized flourish at the end.

ALASTAIR SHIELDS

28 November 2016