

## Job cuts affect our democratic process

Budget cuts across the Public Sector are having a devastating impact on the services available to the NSW public. The impacts are so numerous that it is impossible to summarise them in this bulletin. Instead, this bulletin highlights one important consequence of the damage being done: a loss of independent oversight of our democratic institutions.

Right now a Legislative Council inquiry is investigating the budget process for the Parliament of NSW, and independent agencies. In particular, the Terms of Reference covers:

- (1) Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC)
- (2) Law Enforcement Conduct Commission (LECC)
- (3) Audit Office of NSW
- (4) NSW Electoral Commission
- (5) NSW Ombudsman, and
- (6) Parliament of New South Wales (Legislative Council and the Department of Parliamentary Services).

Each of these institutions play a vital role in maintaining the integrity of the NSW democratic system. Together they address corruption and make decision-makers accountable to the community. They make sure the actions performed by those in power are ethical and strive to maintain the integrity of the government.

Despite their intended role to holding those in power to account, each have been attacked relentlessly over the years. Each have had their budgets cut over the years, and each are now stretched to breaking point to perform their roles.

In recent years, these institutions have gone through restructures and lost significant numbers of loyal and skilled staff. The staff that remain strive to perform their essential oversight duties, but continue to have their efforts thwarted by ongoing and increasing cuts.

Already within the NSW Parliament, Hansard reporting has been threatened by a cut in resources, potentially resulting in the official record of debate being delayed for days or even weeks. Although introduced as a week-long 'trial', the fact that it was introduced at all highlights the unwillingness of the current government to properly fund services vital to the democratic process in NSW.

While Hansard reporters are represented by the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, cuts to one area of Parliament inevitably affect other areas, where PSA members work. One example is the Parliamentary Library, where staff already decimated by cuts face pressure to provide more and more information to parliamentarians with tight deadlines. Should the Hansard 'trial' be made permanent and transcripts take weeks to complete, the Parliamentary Library will be overwhelmed by requests for media and news clips of parliamentary proceedings.

The Government claims these cuts drive 'efficiency'; yet how is dumping one team's workload onto another overworked team efficient?

It is merely an attempt by government to downsize the public sector, with those who remain forced to do more and more work to keep their heads above the waterline.

However, these cuts are not only evidence of a downward spiral for your fellow union members – they threaten the integrity of NSW democracy.

Cut Hansard and you cut access to what is going on in Parliament. You are cutting into the democratic process. Cut resources to the integrity agencies and you cut integrity.

This is not a partisan view – it is one shared by the President of the Legislative Council, and Member of the Liberal Party, John Ajaka. Recently in Budget



## Job cuts affect our democratic process

Estimates President Ajaka had this to say about budget cuts to the NSW Parliament:

*My view is that there is not only no fat left, I believe that we have not only hit the bone but I am being asked to trim the bone. I have been asked to find ways of trimming the bone. ... Unless this Parliament is given its complete independence ... we are dealing with something that has occurred with all of my predecessors and will continue to occur when I am gone with whoever succeeds me.*

The PSA/CPSU NSW hopes that the inquiry concludes that these oversight institutions must have the necessary funding to perform their duties effectively, whether that be stamping out corruption, ensuring that agencies are running programs and services efficiently and legally, investigating community complaints, or holding the government to account through the parliamentary process.

### What can you do?

You can write to your own Member of Parliament and express your views about the importance of oversight and of open and transparent government. You can also encourage your colleagues to join your union and support us as we advocate and fight for a better state; with sufficient resources to meet the needs of the public and sufficient oversight to do it with integrity.

Know a colleague that's not a member? Ask them to join today at [www.psa.asn.au](http://www.psa.asn.au) or [www.cpsunsw.org.au](http://www.cpsunsw.org.au).

