



PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICE

NSW Parliament • Parliament House, Macquarie Street Sydney 2000

Parliamentary Budget Office

Operational Plan 2022-23

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1. Background and requirements of the Act

The Parliamentary Budget Officer

The Parliamentary Budget Officer is appointed according to the *Parliamentary Budget Officer Act 2010* (the Act). The current Parliamentary Budget Officer, Professor Stephen Bartos, was appointed to the role for the period from 1 September 2022 to 30 June 2023.

The functions of the Parliamentary Budget Officer are to prepare and publish election policy costings at the request of parliamentary leaders in the period before a State general election.

The operational plan

The Act, in section 14, requires the Parliamentary Budget Officer to prepare an operational plan that includes: the objectives of the Officer in exercising his or her functions; a broad outline of strategies to achieve those objectives; and a schedule of activities that the Officer proposes to undertake.

The operational plan must be prepared as soon as practicable after the appointment of the Parliamentary Budget Officer and no later than one month after that appointment. The Officer is to provide a draft of the plan to the Presiding Officers of the Parliament for their approval. Once approved by the Presiding Officers, the operational plan is tabled in both Houses of Parliament.

Context – accountability and transparency

The NSW Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) was established in 2010. It is an important independent assurance mechanism for the costs of the various policies proposed by the major parties in advance of NSW general elections. The work of the PBO helps voters become better informed and enhances the accountability of the major political parties for the costs of their policies.

When established in 2010 a key aim of the PBO was to ensure there would be a high quality and independent election costing process in place, which was beyond any criticism concerning impartiality or independence. The costing of election policies by the PBO seeks to ensure that the electorate has accurate, timely and independent information on the cost of election commitments prior to voting.

Amendments in 2013 changed the original 2010 Act in several important ways¹, but maintained the underlying intent of ensuring that NSW has an independent source of information on the costs of election policies.

Further amendments in 2018 revised response times for heads of government agencies from 10 days

¹ The key amendments to the Act included: restricting the term of office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer to the period between 1 September of the year before a general state election and a date no more than three months after the election; and omitting functions of the Officer related to the preparation of non-election time policy costings and the provision of analysis, advice and briefings of a technical nature on financial, fiscal and economic matters.

to 6 days after the commencement of the caretaker period, updated the financial measures to be reported on in budget impact statements and incorporated other operational improvements.

The PBO continues to be independent and impartial in its work. Transparency is a key element of PBO operations and one of the ways it demonstrates its impartiality. All its key documents – including costings of publicly announced policies, budget impact statements, guidelines and this operational plan – are made public.

2. Objectives

The Act requires this plan to include the objectives proposed by the Officer in exercising his or her functions. As a general principle of good management, objectives should set specific, measurable goals against which the Parliamentary Budget Officer and the Office can be held to account.

With this in mind, and against the background of the requirements of the Act, the objective of the Parliamentary Budget Office is:

To provide thorough, independent, transparent and reliable information on the costs of election policies proposed by the Government and Opposition in advance of the NSW general election.

In order to achieve this high-level objective, the PBO has a number of associated objectives:

- quickly and accurately complete election policy costing requests from parliamentary leaders
- publish election policy costings and budget impact statements as speedily as possible within the timeframes required by the Act
- maintain confidentiality of information and documents in relation to election policy costings.

The following sections of the operational plan set out the strategies and activities to be undertaken to achieve these objectives.

3. Strategies

This section of the plan provides a broad outline of the strategies proposed by the Parliamentary Budget Officer to achieve the objectives. It covers strategies for:

- the preparation of costings
- reporting and publication (not only of costings but also of other reports)
- managing relationships with important stakeholders including the parliamentary leaders and their representatives, the Public Accounts Committee, the parliamentary departments, and other government departments
- confidentiality
- media, and
- resource management.

3.1 Costings

One of the most important roles of the PBO is to provide estimates of the costs of proposed or announced policies.

Who can submit policies?

Policies can be submitted for costing only by the parliamentary leaders, defined in the Act as the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition. Leaders of minor parties or independent members of Parliament cannot submit policies for costing.

Under the PBO Act Section 18 (6): ‘...a policy is taken to be announced or proposed by a parliamentary leader if it is announced or proposed by a member of Parliament on behalf of the leader of the party concerned’.

The leaders may nominate a person to exercise his or her functions (s.27). The nominee must be advised in writing to the Parliamentary Budget Officer. The Parliamentary Budget Officer interprets this in a practical fashion, suggesting to the leaders that to ensure smooth flow of documentation and minimise the risks of miscommunication a small number of people should be nominated, and a central contact person be designated as the main contact to be copied in to all messages.

What will the base against which costs will be estimated?

The Act specifies that leaders are to have costed all policies “that are likely to impact on the current and relevant forward budget estimates” (s.18 (1A)). The PBO will base its work on the latest published forward estimates. This means whichever is the latest of the estimates published in i) the June 2022 NSW budget; ii) the half-yearly budget update; or iii) the pre-election budget update released by the Secretary of the Treasury. The costing will indicate what estimates update is being used as the basis for the costing.

It may happen that if a costing is prepared based on an earlier set of published forward estimates and a later update (e.g. the half-year or pre-election update) changes that baseline, the costs of the policy concerned will also change – for example, due to other spending decisions or because assumptions about economic parameters have changed. In those cases, the PBO will revise the

costing and advise the relevant parliamentary leader of the revised costs as soon as possible. After each forward estimates update the PBO will assess the impact of that update on costings in consultation with NSW Treasury.

There may in rare cases be a situation where a government has taken a decision that changes the forward estimates, that decision has been publicly announced, the relevant estimates update processed by the NSW Treasury, authority exists for that update to be made public, but it has not for timing reasons been included in the half-yearly or pre-election update. In those cases, the PBO costing will publish the relevant forward estimate on which the costing is based.

In some cases, there is a partial provision for a new policy contained in the forward estimates. A PBO costing will indicate what any announcement in that policy area means for the forward estimates – that is, the marginal variation to the forward estimates arising from the policy, not the total costs of the policy as a whole. For example, if a proposed policy is to fully fund a project with a total cost over the period of the forward estimates of \$100m, and there is already a provision in the forward estimates for preliminary work to the amount of \$20m, the costing will specify the impact of the policy at \$80m, not \$100m.

Costings will only estimate the direct impact of a policy, not any further effects on the NSW economy or government revenues. These “second round” effects cannot be estimated precisely; they are likely to arise from any policy, and are often unpredictable:

The impact of a policy is like a stone thrown into a pond. There is an initial direct impact: the splash, but the resulting ripples will cause less predictable consequences as they spread out. In much the same way, the initial direct impact of a policy can set up a chain reaction of secondary and subsequent impacts that may enforce, distort or lessen the original effect of the policy change.

World Bank – Poverty and Social Impact Analysis Sourcebook at www.worldbank.org

This approach is in line with the accepted practice of election policy costings prepared by treasuries in other states and the Commonwealth PBO.

The PBO will endeavour to use the same assumptions and costing methodologies as the NSW Treasury, to ensure consistency and reliability. If there do happen to be any instances where there is a divergence between the PBO and the Treasury on a methodological question related to a costing, the reasons for that divergence will be disclosed in the published costing report.

The PBO will apply the same parameters for economic growth, inflation and other key economic indicators as those used by Treasury in the latest forward estimates update.

Asset sales

NSW practice is that proceeds from major commercial transactions such as selling an entity or part thereof, are not included in the forward estimates until after the sale. The PBO will apply the same practice to costings. Where new spending linked to projected asset sales is proposed, and included in a policy submitted for costing, the PBO will provide a costing of that policy with an information note in the costing indicating how that new spending is proposed to be funded.

What years will be covered by policy costings?

The PBO is required in its costings to show the impact on the current year’s State budget – that is, 2022-23 and on the forward estimates for the period to which the pre-election half-yearly budget

review and the pre-election budget update statement relate (s.23 (2C)). This means costings and the budget impact statements will show the impact on the budget of each of the following years:

2022-23, 2023-24, 2024-25 and 2025-26.

It is rare, but nevertheless possible, that policies may be announced to take effect following the election but before the end of the current financial year and not in any subsequent year. These will have an impact only on the current year (2022-23), which will be shown in the costings.

Impacts outside the forward years

Often a policy will have an impact on later years outside the forward estimates. For many policies the impact on later years will be simply a continuation of the spending or revenue patterns, adjusted for changes in the NSW economy, into later years. The costing information will indicate where this is the case.

Where however the pattern of expenses or revenue will be very different in later years (for example, where a start date late in the forward estimates period is proposed) a costing that includes only the forward estimates may give a misleading picture of the policy's impact on NSW finances. Where this is the case, the PBO will aim to provide, for information, an indicative estimate(s) showing later years' impacts. This will be dependent on the assumptions used for the costing and the availability of data. This will be provided in the form of a note to the costing, not as part of the formal published costing.

The PBO notes that agencies are routinely required to provide a 10 year profiles where relevant for budget proposals. This is particularly important where the profile varies year on year. Where relevant the PBO will request this information from agencies to assist with preparing the costings.

Guidelines

The PBO will issue guidelines to the leaders - and publish those guidelines on the PBO website – specifying how costing requests are to be submitted. A draft of the guidelines is attached at Appendix 1.

An important aspect of the guidelines is that assumptions required to cost the policy should be spelt out in the request. The cost of a policy will often be dependent on assumed responses to the policy (for example, levels of take up of a spending program, compliance with revenue measures).

The basic principle that the PBO will be applying is that the information should be sufficient to provide the reader with an indication of what the drivers are of the costs of a policy. Almost any conceivable major policy, other than the very simplest of spending proposals, will potentially have a differing impact on the forward budget estimates depending on the assumptions behind it. The important thing is that such assumptions are shown in the costing (whereas other kinds of assumptions, for example about social or community impacts that do not affect costs, are not needed).

The PBO will examine assumptions for reasonableness. If the assumption is clearly unrealistic the PBO will seek to clarify it with the parliamentary leader or nominee concerned. However, the PBO will not express any view on the merits of election policies. The role of the PBO is not to develop the policy but to cost it.

Timing

The turnaround time on costings requests will vary depending on the quality of the supporting information submitted with the request and the subject matter. The PBO will endeavour to cost policies as quickly as possible, and will liaise with the leaders or their nominees on timetables in cases where delays are experienced due to external factors (for example, unavailability of key personnel in NSW departments whose advice is needed before a policy can be costed).

The target timetable for completion of a costing for a straightforward policy (for example, a spending proposal with a clearly defined target group and timetable) which does not require information to be sought from elsewhere in the NSW government is 3 working days.

More complex policies will require additional time. These will often require the PBO to contact other agencies for information. For these kinds of costings, the PBO will, in consultation with the agency concerned, endeavour within 24 hours to provide the nominee of the leader concerned an indicative estimate of how much time will be required to complete the costing.

Under the PBO Act, s. 16(2) the head of a Government agency must respond to a request for information within 10 business days if the request is made before the start of the caretaker period, within 6 business days if the request is made after commencement of that period. These are statutory limits, not deadlines.

Where information can be provided in a shorter timeframe, especially in relation to relatively straightforward requests, agencies should aim for a faster turnaround than the limits set out in s.16.

Conversely, some information requests can be highly complex and require additional time – for example, to undertake modelling or additional data collection. Under s.16(2)c of the PBO Act the head of the agency and the Parliamentary Budget Officer can agree on another period for responding to a request. This agreement should be negotiated early in the consideration of the information request, not left to when the statutory time limit is about to be breached.

The PBO Act sets out statutory deadlines for submission and publication of costings. Key among them are:

- On 10th March 2023, fifteen days before the election, the PBO provides each parliamentary leader with a list of the budget impact of that leader's proposed policies
 - In practice, this means policies need to be submitted to the PBO for costing well before this date, so they can be costed and included in the list
 - If policies are complex and/or require considerable information gathering before they can be analysed, they desirably should be provided to the PBO by, at latest, Friday 3rd March. The PBO will endeavour to complete all costings as quickly as possible – noting that reliable costing is a priority -prior to the 10 March deadline.
- On 16th March, nine days before the election, each parliamentary leader provides the PBO with their final list of costed policies
 - This allows the leaders to trim their list of policies, removing unwanted policies or duplication (for example where several options for the same policy have been costed) and retaining those they want made public.
- On 20th March 2023, five days before the election, the PBO issues a final budget impact statement showing all the costed policies and a summary of their net total financial impact

If policies are submitted after the publication of the final budget impact statement, and those policies can be costed quickly and accurately, the PBO will endeavour to cost them and issue an update or supplementary statement to the Budget Impact Statements.

Where a policy is submitted close to the election date with insufficient time to complete a reliable costing, the PBO will advise the leaders that the policy cannot be costed.

3.2 Reporting

The reporting provisions for the PBO are outlined in the Act. In addition to this operational plan, which is tabled by the Presiding Officers (s.14(6)), the reporting requirements are to:

- publish election policy costings (s.22)
- publish budget impact statements (s.23) and
- prepare a post-election report for the Public Accounts Committee (s.15(3)).

The approach the PBO intends to take in relation to each of these requirements is set out below. The common element is that all reports will be:

- published as quickly as possible in accordance with the requirements of the Act,
- written in plain English, and
- easily accessible online.

Costings

As required by the Act, election policy costings will be published when the relevant parliamentary leader notifies the PBO that the policy has been publicly announced. The costings will be published according to a standard format, set out at Appendix 2 – noting that the format may vary in some details if the PBO considers this is needed to explain particular costings or provide additional supporting information. As per section 22(2) of the Act, the PBO is required to publish both the election costing request and the election policy costing.

Running total

A running total of the costs of completed policy costings will be supplied to the relevant parliamentary leader. This will be provided at the end of each month before 31 January, and the end of every two weeks in the period between 1 February and the NSW election.

Budget Impact Statements

Budget impact statements will be published according to the timeframes set out in the Act. Namely, a budget impact statement will be prepared for each parliamentary leader and published on the fifth last day before the election.

The budget impact statement will show the financial impact of all of the published and costed policies of a parliamentary leader on the State budget for the current year and over the forward estimates period. This will include the impact on the general government sector net operating result, capital expenditure, net lending/borrowing and net financial liabilities, as well as the impact on total state sector net financial liabilities. The budget impact statements will provide separate

tables showing the total of costings for new spending, the total for proposed savings, and a summary table showing the net budget impact of the two combined.

The budget impact statements will also show the impact of proposed policies on the public non-financial corporations and the public financial corporations sectors – assuming policies affecting those sectors have been submitted for costing. These two sectors include public sector entities of a more commercial or financial nature and fall outside the budget. They are nevertheless important to the state of public sector finances in NSW. Together, the General Government sector, Public Non-Financial Corporations and Public Financial Corporations sector make up the Total State Sector.

Post-election report

The Parliamentary Budget Officer will prepare a post-election report for the Public Accounts Committee following the 2023 election. The report will include details of the activities of the PBO during the pre-election period, along with recommendations about the future operational arrangements of the PBO.

Reporting formats – online only

Reports and costings that are published by the PBO will be published on the PBO's website. They will not be circulated in hard copy or on other portable media.

In the interests of transparency, the PBO will publish this operational plan, once approved by the Presiding Officers, and its post-election report, once provided to the Public Accounts Committee.

Operational reports

In addition to the reporting requirements set out in the Act, the PBO will from time to time also prepare operational reports for the Presiding Officers. Such reports will relate only to operational matters – such as resourcing, staffing, and organisational issues – that may have an impact on the Presiding Officers' role in managing the affairs of the Parliament. Operational reports will not include any information about costing requests or activities related to the election policy costing function of the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

3.3 Confidentiality

Maintaining the confidentiality of election policy costings prepared by the PBO, prior to their public announcement, is of vital importance to the operations of the PBO, particularly in establishing the trust of parliamentary leaders who request those costings. Just as importantly, maintaining confidentiality is vital to maintaining public and politicians' trust in the public service of NSW. The ethical framework established by the *Government Sector Employment Act 2013*, details core values of integrity, trust, service, and accountability; while important always, they require special attention in the lead up to a State election. It is also important at all times to ensure government information which has not been released to the public for legitimate reasons is not inadvertently released

Two sections of the Act include confidentiality provisions relating to election policy costings. Section 16 of the Act relates to requests for information that the PBO may make to the heads of

Government agencies and requires that the head of an agency must not disclose information provided by the PBO, except to other staff of the agency.

The PBO will reinforce the importance of confidentiality when requesting information from other agencies, and suggest that the head of the relevant agency ensure limited distribution of the request and draw other staff members' attention to the need for confidentiality. The PBO will also reinforce the message that under no circumstances should agency staff share with their minister's office details of a policy proposed by the Leader of the Opposition, or for that matter whether there exists a PBO request for information that might relate to an Opposition policy. The identity of the party proposing policies to which a request for information relates will not be disclosed to an agency.

Section 17 of the Act relates to information prepared by or provided to the PBO for election policy costings and requires that the Parliamentary Budget Officer and staff of the PBO must not disclose such information to anyone except the relevant parliamentary leader or other staff of the PBO. All PBO staff will be reminded of the importance of confidentiality on a regular basis, and PBO office procedures will reinforce the confidentiality and security of costing information (see below).

Protocols and systems to address confidentiality

The PBO will establish protocols and systems to ensure that the confidentiality requirements of the Act are met. This will include the development of protocols for fielding and responding to confidential enquiries, including logging and tracking enquiries. The PBO will also define and assign levels of authority within PBO for responding to enquiries, ranging from general enquiries to more complex, sensitive or confidential issues.

The secure management of information and records within the PBO will be maintained through the utilisation of HPE Content Manager (an electronic document and records management system) with appropriate security restrictions in place. Physical documents and files will be protected through a secure office environment.

All staff of the PBO, including staff seconded from other Government agencies, will be required to sign the PBO staff code of conduct, which includes specific reference to the confidentiality provisions of the Act. A copy of the staff code of conduct can be found at Appendix 3.

The PBO will also establish protocols for requests of information from the heads of Government agencies, highlighting the relevant confidentiality provisions set out in the Act and seeking to ensure that relevant staff of an agency will maintain the confidentiality of PBO requests for information.

3.4 Develop open and productive relationships

Liaison with parliamentary leaders

The Parliamentary Budget Officer has contacted the Premier and Leader of the Opposition to introduce the work of the PBO, confirm protocols for interaction, and seek written notice of a nominee to exercise the functions of the parliamentary leader that are set out in the Act. As the election date approaches the PBO expects most (probably all) of the interaction to be via the nominee(s) of the leaders.

The guiding principle of interaction with the leaders and their nominees is that the PBO will be even handed, offering the same levels of access and information to both parties. The extent to which they choose to use the PBO for costings and the timeframes in which they do so is a matter for each to decide.

Liaison with Government agencies

The PBO will work closely with Treasury on costings, using common data and methodologies.

The Act specifies that the PBO can at any time request information from the heads of Government agencies (s.16 (1)) to assist with preparation of a costing. The PBO notes that the NSW public service has established a coordination arrangement for responses to information requests, with a contact officer nominated for each public service “cluster” and the formation of a Costings Working Group comprising those officers which will meet regularly prior to the election. The Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) has provided the PBO with a list of Secretary nominated executives in each cluster.

Cluster executive contacts will play a key role in ensuring efficient and effective processes for handling information requests, assisting with costings, and maintaining strict confidentiality within clusters.

Under s.16 (2) of the PBO Act the head of the agency must respond to information requests from the PBO within—

- (a) 10 business days, if the request is made before the commencement of the caretaker period, or
- (b) 6 business days, if the request is made on or after that commencement, or
- (c) any other period that is agreed between the head of the agency and the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

Past experience suggests that the parliamentary leaders’ expectations for turnaround times for costings in the six to eight weeks prior to the election are even faster than the 6 business days specified in the Act. The PBO will discuss the costing timetable for requests submitted in the immediate pre-election period with the contact officer in each agency from which information is sought, and where possible agree a shorter turnaround time.

An agency will be asked to respond to the PBO within 2 business days of a request if the agency plans to provide a “no response” or “more information is needed” response to the information request.

Under s.16 (3A) of the PBO Act the PBO may provide copies of information requests, and the responses, to staff of the Department of Premier and Cabinet. The PBO will follow this practice in 2022-23.

The PBO notes that both the NSW Treasury and the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet play a more important role in policy coordination today than they have in previous election years. Especially where costing a policy requires inputs from multiple agencies, coordination of those inputs will be assisted by involvement of the two key central agencies. Treasury will also frequently hold information that is important for accurate and reliable costings. The PBO will therefore send DPC and Treasury a copy of information requests made to other agencies, except in cases where the

PBO is asked by the relevant parliamentary leader not to do so. Both departments have strengthened their procedures around confidentiality of information requests.

Those sent to Treasury will be marked either “for information” (where comment is optional) or “for action”, where the PBO expects advice from Treasury to assist with the costing, within the same timeframes as apply to any other agency involved in providing a response to the information request.

Relationship with Parliamentary departments

The PBO has already developed good working relationships with the other Parliamentary departments, and these are expected to continue. Basic operational needs, including accommodation, IT, communications, HR support and the like are being met by the Department of Parliamentary Services.

The PBO has also agreed a protocol with the NSW Parliamentary Research Service that in the unlikely, but possible, event that a member of the parliament who is a member of the government or opposition parties seeks to have a policy costed via that service, the member concerned will be advised to contact the PBO.

Accountability – Working with the PAC

Section 15 of the Act gives the Public Accounts Committee a key role in the oversight of the PBO. The PAC “may monitor and review the operations of the Parliamentary Budget Officer” (s.15(1)), and the PBO is required to provide a report to the PAC as soon as practicable after the election.

This operational plan will be provided to the PAC as soon as practicable after it is approved by the Presiding Officers.

3.5 Media Strategy

As noted in this operational plan, a key aim of the PBO is to inform the public about the costs and budgetary implications of election policies of the two major political parties. The media is likely to play a role in disseminating information developed by the PBO, through reporting on the election policy costings and budget impact statements that are published by the PBO.

The PBO’s media policy set out below, and the Parliament’s media policies, will guide the interactions of the Parliamentary Budget Officer and PBO staff in their interactions with media, and provide the media with an appreciation to the type of information and communications that they can expect from the PBO.

Media statements by the Parliamentary Budget Officer

As a general principle the PBO will not issue media releases or make comments to the media other than via the publication of policy costings, budget impact statements, corrections and other reporting required under the Act. If necessary, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, Professor Stephen Bartos, will be the media spokesperson for the PBO in relation to these.

The PBO will publish election policy costings and budget impact statements on its website which will be the primary source of information about the PBO for both the media and public.

The PBO may issue a media release advising of the publication of budget impact statements. It will not issue media releases for each costing that is published on the PBO's website.

The PBO will not comment on policy issues or engage in other political commentary. However, as per the provisions of the Act, the Parliamentary Budget Officer retains the right to issue a public statement if he believes that an election policy costing provided by the PBO has been publicly misrepresented.

Media enquiries

Media enquiries should be directed to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, in the first instance. However, in the interests of transparency and ensuring quick turnaround, staff of the PBO will be able to respond to factual enquiries from the media (for example, in relation to PBO processes and timetable) based on publicly available information. Responses to such enquiries might involve directing the media to the relevant section on the PBO website.

PBO staff will ensure that interactions with the media are appropriate, professional, accurate, timely and authoritative.

Media access

Physical access by media representatives to the PBO office will not be possible, due to the layout of the space and the need for confidentiality of material under consideration by the PBO.

3.6 Circumstances under which the PBO will make public comments about costings that have been publicly misrepresented

Under s. 22(3) of the PBO Act "If the Parliamentary Budget Officer considers that an election policy costing provided by the Officer has been publicly misrepresented the Officer may issue a public statement to correct the misrepresentation". Instances of misrepresentation might include public statements by any person, whether a parliamentary leader, parliamentarian, public servant, or media commentator. To be considered a public statement it would need to be released into the public domain: for example, a statement made to media whether as a media release or as a response to a question, a post on social media, publication on a website.

The kind of misrepresentation which the PBO will feel obliged to correct might include:

- A factual misstatement (e.g. "the PBO says this policy costs \$20m" when in fact the PBO costing indicated the correct figure was \$50m)
- A statement which misrepresents a policy in a misleading way by misquoting a single year or selected years (e.g. "the PBO costing shows this policy costs \$10m over four years" when the correct figure is actually \$10m in each year, so \$40m over four years). Note that if the statement is accurate but a simplification (so for the previous example, "the PBO costed this policy at \$10m") there is no misrepresentation.
- Attribution of an opinion or value judgement to the PBO (eg "the PBO thinks this is a good policy/bad policy"). Note that the parties can make their own value judgements, as long as these are not attributed to the PBO (e.g. "we think this policy is good value for NSW, based on a PBO costing that indicates it costs \$40m" would be fine; a statement that "the PBO thinks this is good value" would be a misrepresentation)

- A statement suggesting a policy has been costed when it has not, or conversely, a statement suggesting a policy was not costed by the PBO when it in fact was.

This list is intended to be indicative, not exhaustive; there could potentially be instances of misrepresentation we have not anticipated, which will be handled under the provisions of the Act should they arise.

Where a misrepresentation occurs due to error, a speedy correction of that mistake will generally be the best option for informing NSW voters. In each case of possible misrepresentation the PBO will draw the misrepresentation to the attention of the parliamentary leader and nominee concerned (or in the case of a misrepresentation made by a non-parliamentarian, that person) to provide the persons involved an opportunity to correct the record. If a correction is made within 48 hours (or within another timeframe agreed with the PBO) and there is no longer a misrepresentation, the PBO will not issue a public statement.

3.7 Manage resources effectively

Setting up the PBO work space

The Office will be established from 1 September 2022 in premises leased by the Parliament at 60 Martin Place, Sydney.

Key expenses in establishing and operating the PBO will include:

- Office start-up and ongoing running costs, including recruitment, furniture and technology
- Staffing costs, including for seconded staff and (if necessary) consultancy services
- PBO travel and subsistence provided for under *Parliamentary Budget Officer Act 2010*.

Allocation of resources

The funds allocated to the PBO will be managed effectively through various means, including:

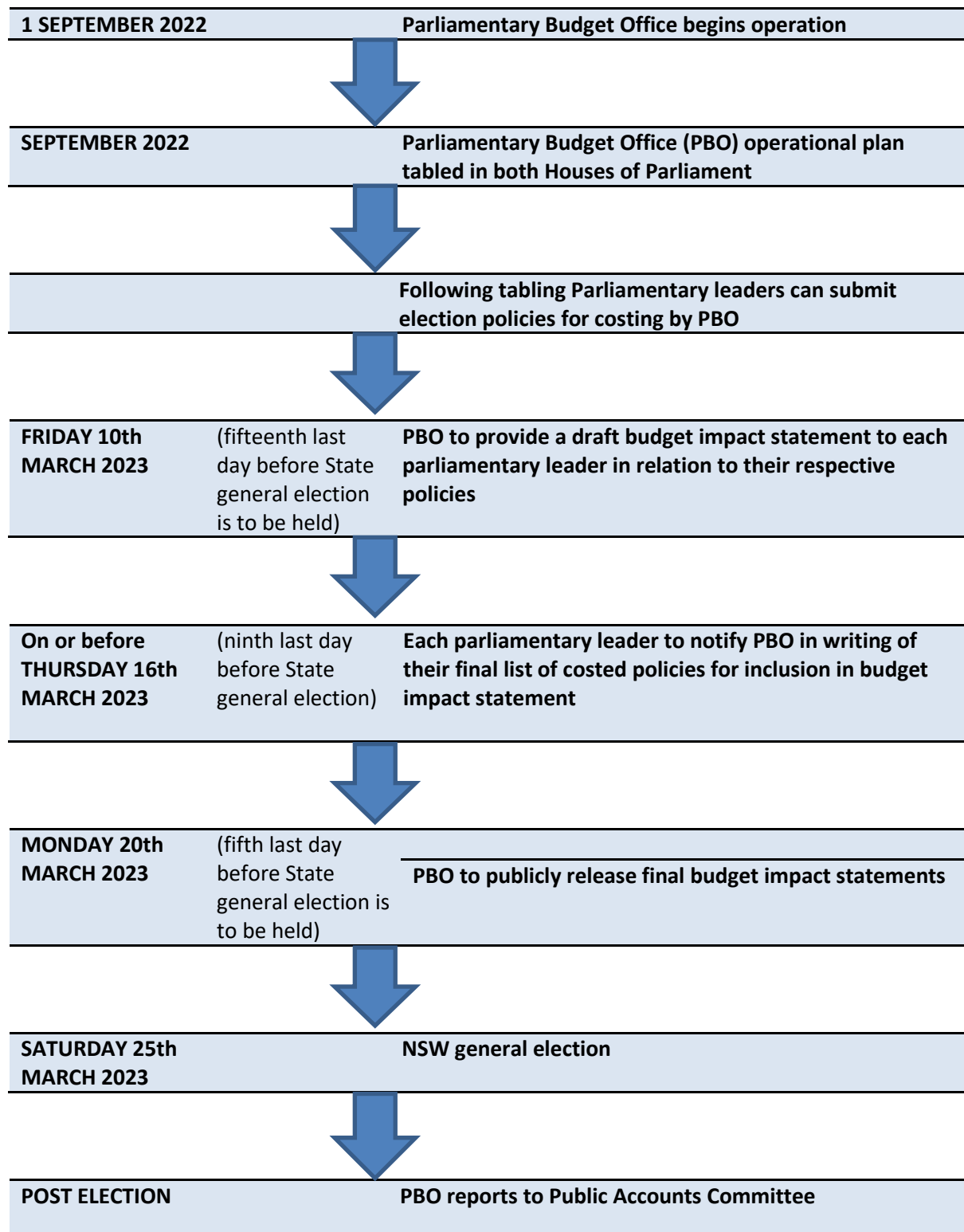
- Developing a PBO budget with planned expenditure allocations
- Developing budgetary monitoring and monthly reporting mechanisms
- Developing protocols for expenditure authorisation, including a formal delegations process approved by the Presiding Officers
- Controlled budget spending
- Maintaining a small core staff to minimise staffing overheads
- Factoring and maintaining budgetary capacity to meet expected peak staffing budget allocations in month/s prior to the State general election
- Providing for staged engagement of specialist staff to meet growing and/or peak workloads of PBO
- Harnessing assistance of in-house expertise where appropriate from House Departments or Parliamentary Services for office establishment, staffing, recruitment and technology requirements
- Minimising travel costs by using most economical options

- Minimising printing costs by publishing documents only on the PBO website

Human resources/staffing

- The PBO will maintain a small core staff for the duration to assist its consistent operation
- PBO operational needs will be met by engaging staff with key competencies through secondments from other government agencies or consultancies as required
- DPC will assist in promoting PBO secondment opportunities across the NSW public sector
- Recruitment of staff will be led by the PBO supported by Human Services Branch, Department of Parliamentary Services

4. Timeline with key dates



Appendix 1 – Guidelines for the Preparation of Election Costing Requests

These guidelines are designed to assist those preparing election costing requests to facilitate the processes set down in Part 4 of the *Parliamentary Budget Officer Act 2010* (the Act).

Who may make an election costing request?

Election costing requests may be made by a parliamentary leader.

A parliamentary leader is defined as either the Premier or the Leader of the Opposition. This function of the parliamentary leader may be exercised by a person nominated by the leader. Notice of the person nominated must be given in writing to the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

What can be costed?

Parliamentary leaders may request costings for policies that are proposed or publicly announced for implementation after the next election. Leaders may only make requests relating to their own party's policies. This is set out in the PBO Act s.18 (3) – “a parliamentary leader may only make an election costing request in relation to a policy publicly announced or proposed by that leader.” Costing requests that relate to policies proposed by another leader or party will not be acted on.

In a situation where a leader proposes to “match” or duplicate a policy proposed by the other party, the PBO will take a cautious approach and only cost the matching policy if the intention to match has been announced publicly.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer will only prepare costings of policies for which a request has been received in writing from a parliamentary leader, or their nominee. Statements or promises made by candidates for election or other members of parliament will not be costed, except if requested through their parliamentary leader.

How are requests to be made?

Requests should be made using the attached Election Costing Request Form and emailed to BudgetOffice@parliament.nsw.gov.au. Alternatively, hard copies of requests may be mailed to: The Parliamentary Budget Officer, Parliament House, Macquarie Street, Sydney NSW 2000. Requests should include contact details for follow up questions.

The costing request form is for guidance only and is intended to facilitate requests for costing election policies. Additional information may be separately attached.

When can requests be made?

Election costing requests may be made any time after the Parliamentary Budget Officer's operational plan has been tabled in Parliament.

Costing requests are to be made in sufficient time before the election for the Parliamentary Budget Officer to prepare election policy costings for all of a parliamentary leader's election policies.

The later a request is made, the higher the risk that a costing will not be provided. On 10 March 2023 the Parliamentary Budget Officer is to provide a draft budget impact statement to each parliamentary leader; requests made too close to that date may not be able to be costed or included in that statement.

If requests cannot be met for reasons of timeliness (or for other reasons) the Parliamentary Budget Officer is to advise the parliamentary leader of the reason or reasons for not meeting that request.

Methodology for costings

The baseline for costings will be the latest published forward estimates, and the PBO will use the same economic assumptions as the NSW Treasury in preparing costings. Second round effects (flow on of policies through the economy) will not be costed, and generally costings will assume no changes in NSW costs of borrowing.

The PBO will obtain information from other NSW government agencies as necessary to complete a reliable costing. The more complete a set of assumptions that can be provided by a leader or nominee, the easier the task of gathering further information will be.

Withdrawal of costing requests

Parliamentary leaders can withdraw an election costing request, by giving notice in writing to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, any time before the costing is completed and provided to the leader.

Obligations of parliamentary leaders

A parliamentary leader is to have costed all the policies of the leader's party that are proposed to be implemented if the party is elected and that are likely to impact on the forward budget estimates. The leader must advise the Parliamentary Budget Officer by 14 March 2023 that all such policies have been notified to the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

A parliamentary leader is required to notify the Parliamentary Budget Officer of the public announcement of an election policy that has been costed by the Officer.

When are costings published?

Election policy costings will be published by the Parliamentary Budget Officer after the Officer has received notification from the relevant parliamentary leader that the policy has been publicly announced. Costings will not be released unless, under section 22(2) of the Act, the leader notifies the Parliamentary Budget Officer that the relevant policy has been publicly announced.

Note: all published election costings will be aggregated into the budget impact statement; see the operational plan for further details.

Other supporting material

Parliamentary leaders are invited to include any relevant supporting material in the policy costing request (for example, prior costing work). The PBO will at its discretion be able to take account of any such information to assist in the costing; noting that all costings will be undertaken from first principles in line with the methodologies outlined in the operational plan and these guidelines.

**Election Costing Request Form to be completed by nominees of the
parliamentary leaders and submitted to the PBO**

Details of request	
Party:	
Name of Policy:	
Date of request:	

Description of policy	
Summary of policy (please attach copies of relevant policy documents and include information on what the policy aims to achieve):	
Has the policy been publicly released yet?	

	2022/23 \$'000	2023/24 \$'000	2024/25 \$'000	2025/26 \$'000	Total \$'000
Impact on General Government Sector (GGS) net operating result ²					
Impact on GGS capital expenditure ³					
If different from above, impact on total State Sector net financial liabilities ⁴					

Note: Has the policy been costed by a third party?
If yes, can you provide a copy of this costing and its assumptions?

Key assumptions made in the policy	
Does the policy relate to a previous announcement? If yes, which announcement?	
What assumptions have been made in deriving the financial impacts in your estimated costing?	

² Negative for a saving that reduces expenditure

³ Negative for a reduction in capital expenditure.

⁴ Only required if proposal is outside GGS. Negative for a reduction in net financial liabilities.

(See checklist)	
Is there a range for the costing or any sensitivity analysis that you have undertaken?	
Are there associated savings, offsets or, in the case of a revenue proposal, offsetting expenses? If yes, please provide details.	

Administration of policy	
Intended date of implementation:	
Intended duration of policy:	
Who will administer the policy (e.g. Government entity, non-government organisation, etc.)?	
Are there any specific administrative arrangements for the policy that need to be taken into account (e.g. agreements between different levels of government)?	
Are there transitional arrangements associated with policy implementation?	

If the policy is mainly an expenditure⁵ commitment	
Demand driven or a capped amount:	
Eligibility criteria or thresholds:	

If the policy is mainly a revenue commitment	
Transaction based or capped:	
Thresholds and/or exemptions:	
Collection method:	
Additional expenditure associated with collection:	

If the policy is mainly a capital costs⁶ commitment	
Nature of Capital Spending	
Type of work, size and capacity:	
Proposed start and completion date of work:	

⁵ Expenditure is operating expenses, e.g. salaries, interest cost and grants. Expenditures are fully included in the impact on operating balance.

⁶ Capital costs differ from expenditure in that only depreciation will be included in the impact on operating balance. The capital cost of the asset to be acquired will however be included in the net financial liabilities statement.

Intended construction schedule/cashflow:	
Associated asset sell off (if any):	
Recurrent Impacts	
Offsetting expenditure savings:	
On-going maintenance, depreciation and operational expenses:	
Third party funding involvement:	
Delivery model ⁷	

Checklist for key assumptions (please be comprehensive and include all relevant assumptions).

Assumptions could include, but are not limited to, questions such as:

- What is the expected community impact?
- How many people will be affected by the policy?
- What is the likely take up or other behavioural response you expect?
- Is there a cap on total spending proposed, a funding formula, resource agreement or other mechanism of this nature associated with the policy?
- Will third parties have a role in funding or delivering the policy (e.g. Commonwealth Government)?
- Will funding/program cost require indexation?
 - If yes, do you have any assumptions about the index that should be applied?
- What assumptions have you made about costs of administering the policy?
- Will additional staff be needed in the agency responsible for the policy?
 - How many and at what approximate levels?
- Are there other resources required?
- Are you assuming administrative costs will be absorbed within the agency?

Irregular spending/saving patterns that will affect estimates outside the forward years

The impact of policies in years beyond the forward estimates (2026-27 and beyond) is often a continuation of trends over the forward years. This is not however always the case: for example, a major new capital project may have insignificant financial impact in the first four years during the planning and approval stage but large expenditures after five years. Conversely, a program that ends after four years, has a cost over the forward estimates but the financial impact falls to zero in later years. Where possible, the costing request should identify such policies.

Please note that:

- The costing will be on the basis of information provided in this costing request.

⁷ There is a range of possible delivery models, e.g. built, owned and operated by a NSW government agency; built and transferred to a private operator; privately built for public operation; privately built and operated with government assuming risk or providing a guarantee in relation to future income (often applicable to public/private partnership arrangements), and so on. The policy should provide assumptions about the proposed delivery model.

- The PBO is not bound to accept the assumptions provided by the requester. If there is a material difference in the assumptions used by the PBO, the PBO will consult with the requester in advance of the costing being completed.
- Where the details of the policy costing request differ from the announced policy, the costing will be on the basis of the information provided in the costing request.
- These guidelines are intended to facilitate requests for costing election policies. Persons preparing such requests who wish further assistance are invited to contact the staff of the Parliamentary Budget Office.

Glossary

The Election Costing Request Form uses various terms and expression which have specific meanings. An explanation of technical terms can be found in the Glossary in the NSW Treasury publication [How to Read the Budget Papers 2022-23](#).

Appendix 2 – Election Policy Costing

Referred By:
Referred Date:

Proposal No:
Released Date:

Proposal Title:

Proposal Description:

Cluster and Agency:

General Government Sector Impacts

	2022-23 \$'000	2023-24 \$'000	2024-25 \$'000	2025-2026 \$'000	4 Year Total \$'000
Expenses					
Depreciation					
Less: Agency offsets					
Agency revenue					
Net Operating Result:					

Capital expenditure					
Capital offsets ⁸					
Net Capital Expenditure:					

Net Lending/Borrowing:				
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Net Financial Liabilities:				
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Total State Sector Impacts

Net Financial Liabilities:				
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Notes and costing assumptions used:

⁸ For offsets arising from reprioritisation of budget funding from related existing capital projects (please include details if possible of name of project and amount of funding already approved in the State budget)

Appendix 3 – Staff code of conduct

NEW SOUTH WALES PARLIAMENT

STAFF OF THE PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICE CODE OF CONDUCT

EMPLOYEE DECLARATION

I have received and read the Parliamentary Staff Code of Conduct, February 2013 which applies to my employment with the Parliamentary Budget Office. I agree to abide by the Code. I also understand and agree that I am engaged as a member of staff of the Parliamentary Budget Officer (either directly, or as a contractor) and as such I am aware of my obligations under the *Parliamentary Budget Officer Act 2010* (including, but not limited to section 17 in relation to confidentiality of information or documents relating to election policy costings).

Signed

Print Name

Date

Please return this page to your manager or Human Services, so that it can be placed on your Personal file.