



AFP National Guideline for Execution of Search Warrants where Parliamentary Privilege may be involved

1. Disclosure and compliance

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Compliance

This instrument is part of the AFP's professional standards framework. The [AFP Commissioner's Order on Professional Standards \(CO2\)](#) outlines the expectations for appointees to adhere to the requirements of the framework. Inappropriate departures from the provisions of this instrument may constitute a breach of AFP professional standards and be dealt with under Part V of the [Australian Federal Police Act 1979](#) (Cth).

2. Preamble

This guideline sets out procedures to be followed where the Australian Federal Police (the AFP) propose to execute a search warrant on premises occupied or used by a member of Federal Parliament (a Member'). The guideline applies to any premises used or occupied by a Member, including the Parliament House office of a Member, the electorate office of a Member and the residence of a member.

The guideline is designed to ensure that search warrants are executed without improperly interfering with the functioning of Parliament and that Members and their staff are given a proper opportunity to raise claims for parliamentary privilege or public interest immunity in relation to documents or other things that may be on the search premises.

3. Legal background

A search warrant, if otherwise valid, can be executed over premises occupied or used by a Member. Evidential material cannot be placed beyond the reach of the AFP simply because it is held by a Member or is on premises used or occupied by a Member.

However, it can be a contempt of Parliament for a person to improperly interfere with the free performance by a Member of the Member's duties as a Member. The Houses of Parliament have the power to imprison or fine people who commit contempt of Parliament.

Some of the principles of parliamentary privilege are set out in the Parliamentary Privileges Act 1987. They are designed to protect proceedings in Parliament from being questioned in the courts but they may also have the effect that documents and other things which attract parliamentary privilege cannot be seized under a search warrant.

Parliamentary privilege applies to any document or other thing which falls within the concept of "proceedings in parliament". That phrase is defined in the Parliamentary Privileges Act to mean words spoken and acts done in the course of, or for purposes of or incidental to, the transacting of the business of a House or of a committee. It includes evidence given before a committee, documents presented to a House or a committee, documents prepared for the purposes of the business of a House or committee and documents prepared incidentally to that business. It also includes documents prepared by a House or committee. The courts have held that a document sent to a Senator, which the Senator then determined to use in a House, also fell within the concept of proceedings in Parliament.

It is not always easy to determine whether a particular document falls within the concept of "proceedings in parliament". In some cases the question will turn on what has been done with a document, or what a Member intends to do with it, rather than what is contained in the document or where it was found.

It is also possible that a document held by a Member will attract public interest immunity even if it is not covered by parliamentary privilege. The High Court has held that a document which attracts public interest immunity cannot be seized under a search warrant (*Jacobsen v Rogers* (1995)127ALR159).

Public interest immunity can apply to any document if the contents of the document are such that the public interest in keeping the contents secret outweighs the public interest in investigating and prosecuting offences against the criminal law. Among other things, public interest immunity can apply to documents if disclosure could damage national security, defence, international relations or relations with the States, or if the document contains details of deliberations or decisions of the Cabinet or Executive Council, or if disclosure could prejudice the proper functioning of the government of the Commonwealth or a State.

Public interest immunity can arise in any situation, but it is more likely to arise in relation to documents held by a Minister than by a Member who is not a Minister.

Further information in relation to the legal principles which apply in these cases can be found in the DPP Search Warrants Manual. That document is not a public document but has been provided to the AFP by the DPP and is available to AFP officers on the AFP Intranet.

4. Purpose of the guideline

This guideline is designed to ensure that AFP officers execute search warrants in a way which does not amount to a contempt of Parliament and which gives a proper opportunity for claims for parliamentary privilege or public interest immunity to be raised and resolved.

5. Application of the guideline

5.1 The guideline applies, subject to any overriding law or legal requirement in a particular case, to any premises used or occupied by a Member including:

- the Parliament House office of a Member
- the electorate office of a Member; and
- any other premises used by a Member for private or official purposes on which there is reason to suspect that material covered by parliamentary privilege may be located.

5.2 The guideline should also be followed, as far as possible, if a search warrant is being executed over any other premises and the occupier claims that documents on the premises are covered by parliamentary privilege.

5.3 If a Member raises a claim for Legal Professional Privilege (sometimes called client legal privilege) in respect of a document, the executing officer should follow the normal procedure that applies in cases where a claim for Legal Professional Privilege is made in respect of a document that is on premises other than those of a lawyer, law society or like institution. The fact that Legal Professional Privilege has been claimed by a person who is a Member does not alter the normal rules that apply in such cases.

6. The Substantive Guideline

Procedure prior to obtaining a search warrant

6.1 An AFP officer who proposes to apply for a search warrant in respect of premises used or occupied by a Member should seek approval at a senior level within the AFP (the relevant National Manager if available, otherwise a Manager) before applying for the warrant.

6.2 If approval is given, the officer should consult the office of the appropriate DPP before applying for a search warrant. In cases involving alleged offences against Commonwealth law, the appropriate DPP is the Commonwealth DPP. In cases involving alleged offences against ACT law, the appropriate DPP is the ACT DPP. The appropriate DPP can provide assistance to draft the affidavit and warrant and can provide any legal advice required in relation to the execution of the warrant.

6.3 Care should be taken when drafting a search warrant to ensure that it does not cover a wider range of material than is necessary to advance the relevant investigation.

Procedure prior to executing a search warrant

6.4 If the premises that are to be searched are in Parliament House, the executing officer should contact the relevant Presiding Officer before executing the search warrant and notify that Officer of the proposed search. If a Presiding Officer is not available, the executing officer should notify the Clerk or Deputy Clerk or, where a Committee's documents may be involved, the Chair of that Committee.

6.5 The executing officer should also consider, unless it would affect the integrity of the investigation, whether it is feasible to contact the Member, or a senior member of his/her staff, prior to executing the warrant with a view to agreeing on a time for execution of the search warrant so as to minimise the potential interference with the performance of the Member's duties.

Executing the search warrant

6.6 If possible, the executing officer should comply with the following procedures, unless compliance would affect the integrity of the investigation:

- a. a search warrant should not be executed over premises in Parliament House on a parliamentary sitting day;
- b. a search warrant should be executed at a time when the Member, or a senior member of his/her staff, will be present; and
- c. the Member, or a member of his/her staff, should be given reasonable time to consult the relevant Presiding Officer, a lawyer or other person before the warrant is executed.

6.7 If the Member, or a senior member of his/her staff, is present when the search is conducted, the executing officer should ensure that the Member, or member of staff, has a reasonable opportunity to claim parliamentary privilege or public interest immunity in respect of any documents or other things that are on the search premises.

6.8 There is a public interest in maintaining the free flow of information between constituents and their Parliamentary representatives. Accordingly, even if there is no claim for privilege or immunity, the executing officer should take all reasonable steps to limit the amount of material that is examined in the course of the search.

6.9 As part of that process, the executing officer should consider inviting the Member, or a senior member of his/her staff, to identify where in the premises those documents which fall within the scope of the search warrant are located.

Procedure to be followed if privilege or immunity is claimed

6.10 If the Member, or a member of staff, claims parliamentary privilege or public interest immunity in respect of any documents or other things that are on the search premises the executing officer should ask the Member, or member of staff, to identify the basis for the claim. The executing officer should then follow the procedure in paragraph 5.11 unless the executing officer considers a claim to be arbitrary, vexatious or frivolous. In the latter circumstances, the procedure in paragraph 5.13 should be followed.

6.11 The executing officer should ask the Member, or member of staff, making the claim whether they are prepared to agree to the following procedure to ensure that the relevant documents are not examined until the claim has been resolved:

- The relevant document or documents should be placed in audit bags in accordance with the AFP national guideline on exhibits. A list of the documents should be prepared by the executing officer with assistance from the Member or member of staff;
- The Member, or member of staff, should be given an opportunity to take copies of any documents before they are secured. The copying should be done in the presence of the executing officer;
- The items so secured should be delivered into the safekeeping of a neutral third party, who may be the warrant issuing authority or an agreed third party;
- The Member has five working days (or other agreed period) from the delivery of the items to the third party to notify the executing officer either that the claim for parliamentary privilege or public interest immunity has been abandoned or to commence action to seek a ruling on whether the claim can be sustained. In this respect, it is a matter for the Member to determine whether he/she should seek that ruling from a Court or the relevant House;

- When a member notifies the executing officer that the member will seek a ruling on a claim of parliamentary privilege, the items are to remain in the possession of the neutral third party until the disposition of the items is determined in accordance with the ruling; and
- If the Member has not contacted the executing officer within five working days (or other agreed period), the executing officer and the third party will be entitled to assume that the claim for parliamentary privilege or public interest immunity has been abandoned and the third party will be entitled to deliver the items to the executing officer.

6.12 If the Member, or member of staff, is not prepared to agree to the procedure outlined above, or to some alternative procedure which is acceptable to the executing officer, the executing officer should proceed to execute the search warrant doing the best that can be done in the circumstances of the case to minimise the extent to which the members of the search team examine or seize documents which may attract parliamentary privilege or public interest immunity.

6.13 In some cases a Member, or member of staff, may make a claim which appears to be arbitrary, vexatious or frivolous, for example a claim that all the documents on the relevant premises attract parliamentary privilege or public interest immunity and that, therefore, the proposed search should not proceed in any form. If that occurs, the executing officer should consider whether there is a reasonable basis for that claim. If there is a reasonable basis for that claim, it may be necessary for a large number of documents to be placed in audit bags. However if the executing officer is satisfied, on reasonable grounds, that there is no proper basis for the claim he/she should inform the Member, or member of staff, that he/she intends to proceed to execute the search warrant unless the Member, or member of staff, is prepared to specify particular documents which attract parliamentary privilege or public interest immunity.

6.14 The AFP will notify the Attorney-General (in his/her capacity as First Law Officer) and the Minister responsible for the AFP (if different) in any case where a claim of parliamentary privilege has been made by or on behalf of a Member.

Obligations at the conclusion of a search

6.15 The executing officer should provide a receipt recording things seized under the search warrant (whether requested or not). If the Member does not hold copies of the things that have been seized, the receipt should contain sufficient particulars of the things to enable the Member to recall details of the things seized and obtain further advice.

6.16 The executing officer should inform the Member that the AFP will, to the extent possible, provide or facilitate access to the seized material where such access is necessary for the performance of the Member's duties. The AFP should provide or facilitate access on those terms. It may also provide or facilitate access on any other grounds permitted under applicable laws and guidelines.

6.17 The AFP will comply with any law including the requirements set out in the legislation under which the relevant search warrant was issued.