
The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Arrangements for second reading speeches

House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Procedure

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Contents

Membership of the Committee	v
Terms of reference	vii
List of recommendations	ix
Arrangements for second reading speeches.....	1
Introduction	1
Existing arrangements for second reading speeches	2
Essence of proposed change.....	3
Issues raised.....	3
Anticipated effect of change	4
⇒ Enlivening debate	4
⇒ Reading speeches	5
⇒ Conclusion on the likely impact of the proposal	5
Application of the proposal to Ministers and Shadow Ministers	6
⇒ Ministers.....	6
⇒ Shadow Ministers	8
⇒ Private Members' bills	8
⇒ Mechanism of opting out.....	9
The need for flexibility.....	10
Rules for questions and answers	11
Implications for the interventions trial	12
Uniform rules for the Chamber and Main Committee	13
Conclusion.....	13
Appendix A.....	15
Submissions.....	15
Participants at Round Table Meeting – 6 November 2003	15
Appendix B.....	16
The Speaker's opening statement at the Round Table Meeting 6 November 2003	16



Membership of the Committee

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Terms of reference

Terms of reference of the Committee

To inquire into and report on the practices and procedures of the House generally with a view to making recommendations for their improvement or change and for the development of new procedures

Terms of reference of the inquiry

To consider a proposal to introduce a question period at the end of second reading speeches.



List of recommendations

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that second reading speeches with a current maximum time of 20 minutes (other than the Minister's reply speech) should be limited to a maximum of 15 minutes speech time with a maximum of 5 minutes allowed for questions and answers on the material covered in the speech. This should be implemented on a trial basis from the first meeting of the House in 2004 until the end of the session.

Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that the second reading speeches of the responsible Minister, the relevant Shadow Minister (or the Leader of the Opposition) and the mover of (and where relevant, other speakers on) a Private Member's bill, should remain at 30 minutes and should not be followed by a question and answer period.

Recommendation 3

Members should have the right to opt out of answering questions on their second reading speeches, either by indicating at the beginning of the speech that he/she is not available for the question/answer period at the end of the speech, or by listening to a question before deciding whether to answer it.

Recommendation 4

The committee recommends that questions and answers should be brief and directly relevant to the second reading speech.

Arrangements for second reading speeches

Introduction

- 1.1 In 2002 the Speaker asked the Procedure Committee to consider a proposal for changing the arrangements for second reading speeches.¹ The proposal involved cutting the maximum time allowed from 20 minutes to 15 minutes and using the 5 minutes saved for questions to the Member speaking and his/her responses.
- 1.2 The object of the proposal is to enliven debate on legislation. In preparing their second reading speeches Members should be encouraged to become advocates for a particular position on the bill's policy. The combination of having a shorter time to communicate their views and the possibility of having to defend them during a question and answer period could be expected to return to the Chamber the sort of interactive, sometimes passionate debate that appears to be less common than in previous times.
- 1.3 Most Members who participated in a round table meeting to consider the Speaker's proposal were critical of the current standard of debate.
- 1.4 The effect of allowing a question period at the end of a speech could reasonably be expected to encourage back bench Members to take

¹ Because the committee was working on a number of other references the inquiry did not begin until June 2003.

seriously their obligation to hold the executive to account. A critical analysis of legislation would be encouraged if Members could be asked to defend their reasoning or conclusions.

- 1.5 It was suggested during the round table meeting that the possibility of being asked questions relating to a second reading speech might result in a smaller speaker list because only those who felt confident they understood the issues would want to participate.
- 1.6 If the proposed arrangements do indeed invigorate debate, more Members might remain in the Chamber to listen to their colleagues' speeches as well as to ask questions. In turn, this would enhance the public's perception of the significance of parliamentary proceedings. It would go some way towards addressing what one Member called "the burning problem of an empty Chamber and a sterile debate".
- 1.7 While some Members placed the greater importance on encouraging real exchanges of opinion and others focussed on improving the public's respect for the House, all recognised that these two objects are related. As Mr Quick noted:
- This place should be the principal debating house in the nation. To go in there and see only one or two members means we are selling ourselves short. ... We can set a wonderful example here, especially when our schoolchildren come along and see how the House operates.
- 1.8 The Committee wrote to leaders, whips and independent Members asking for their views on the proposal and foreshadowing a round table meeting to discuss it. While the number of written submissions was small, support for the round table meeting was encouraging. The list of submissions and participants in the round table meeting are in Appendix A.
- 1.9 Hansard prepared a transcript of the round table meeting which has been used in the preparation of this report. Parts of the Speaker's opening statement at the round table meeting are reproduced with his permission in Appendix B. Where other participants have been quoted it is with their express permission.

Existing arrangements for second reading speeches

- 1.10 Standing order 91 provides that the mover of a government bill has a maximum of 30 minutes for his/her second reading speech. The Leader of the Opposition or one Member deputed by the Leader also has a maximum of 30 minutes.²

² No maximum time is specified for the mover and lead opposition speaker on the second reading of the Main Appropriation Bill for the year. In relation to Private Members' bills standing order 91 provides for

- 1.11 The maximum time available under standing order 91 for all other speakers on the second reading is 20 minutes. In general Members from both sides come into the Chamber just in time to give their speeches. They speak for up to 20 minutes unless (uncommonly) the whips have asked Members to speak for a shorter period.³ The Member is then most likely to leave the Chamber. Sometimes a Member will arrive 10 minutes or so before the previous speaker is scheduled to finish.

Essence of proposed change

- 1.12 Under the proposal, standing order 91 would be changed so that where the maximum is currently 20 minutes, this would be shortened to 15 minutes. The 5 minutes thus saved would be available for questions and answers relevant to the speech. The rules applying to the question and answer period, together with other issues relevant to the application of the change were canvassed during the round table meeting on the proposal.

Issues raised

- 1.13 The following issues need to be addressed before the arrangements for second reading speeches can be amended:
- would the proposed change have the desired effect of enlivening the debate?
 - would any new arrangements apply to Ministers, Shadow Ministers and Private Members moving a second reading of a bill?
 - should the new arrangements be obligatory or optional?
 - how flexible should the arrangements be – particularly in relation to informal arrangements to speak for less than the maximum time allowable?
 - what rules should be applied to questions and answers?
 - what are the implications for the current trial of interventions in the Main Committee? and
 - should uniform rules apply in the Chamber and Main Committee?

a maximum of 30 minutes for the mover and either one or two others depending in whether the mover is a Government or non-government member.

³ The maximum time allowable for a second reading speech is shown on the Chamber clocks even though Members may have been asked by the whips to speak for a shorter time.

1.14 Each of these issues is examined below.

Anticipated effect of change

⇒ Enlivening debate

- 1.15 Most participants in the round table meeting approved the Speaker's suggested change to second reading speech arrangements and expected it to be successful in facilitating a more interactive debating Chamber. Mr Abbott for example, suggested that the proposal
- will force people to assimilate their arguments and to defend them in a way that they do not under the existing procedures.
- 1.16 While some focussed on encouraging lively debate as a value in itself others focussed on improving the public's perception of proceedings.
- 1.17 Two problems were raised at the round table in relation to the expected impact of the proposal. One participant noted that the effect might go beyond that desired and that the proposed change might create "some room for mischief" – i.e. it might encourage the wrong sort of interaction. In response it was pointed out that unruly interjections are more likely to be caused by frustration and if Members are allowed, indeed encouraged, to participate this could have the effect of decreasing unruly behaviour. Further, misuse of the procedure would be prevented by a vigilant Chair, who is ultimately responsible for ensuring order in the Chamber.
- 1.18 The second issue raised went to the reasons for the absence of Members in the Chamber when they are not actually speaking. It was pointed out that Members already have to deal with a number of competing demands on their time and simply do not have time to sit through other Members' speeches in order to ask questions. Committee work is particularly demanding of a Members' time while the House is sitting and the operations of the Main Committee in particular often require Members to be absent from the Chamber. In addition to expecting Members to spend more time in the Chamber, the proposal would require Members to spend more time preparing their speeches and mastering the material.
- 1.19 The question of whether Members would spend more time in the Chamber if speeches were shorter and they were allowed to participate can only be answered by a trial of the proposal. If speeches were limited to 15 minutes it is arguably more likely that a Member might attend to hear one or two speeches by colleagues. It is not envisaged that Members would attend for a whole second reading debate. The majority of those who were less than optimistic about the impact of the change, nevertheless thought the proposal worth trying.

⇒ **Reading speeches**

1.20 The topic of reading speeches is related to the overall aim of encouraging a more lively debating style in the Chamber. Several participants at the round table meeting thought that the combination of a shorter speech time and the need for concentration in case a question should be asked might encourage less reliance on a written speech. In this context it is worth noting that the standing order prohibiting reading speeches was deleted in 1965. One of the reasons given for omitting the standing order was that it was reasonable to allow reading “whenever there is reason for precision of statement such as on the second reading of a bill, particularly those of a complex or technical nature, or in ministerial or other statements”.⁴ While it is unlikely that the ban on reading speeches would be re-introduced and in any event the issue goes beyond the immediate topic of second reading speeches, the committee notes that the practice of reading speeches is much wider than a Minister’s second reading speech.

⇒ **Conclusion on the likely impact of the proposal**

1.21 It is not possible to predict the impact of the proposed change but it is possible to assess the value of the proposal’s objectives. The committee considers that the objective of encouraging a more interactive debating style is consistent with the constitutional role of House, to debate legislation before voting on it. Every attempt to facilitate real debate should be encouraged by all Members and recognised in the standing orders. If more relevant proceedings mean that the House is more meaningful to the public, this is an additional bonus.

1.22 In weighing up the claimed benefits and possible undesirable side effects of the proposed change, the committee concludes that a trial of changed arrangements is the only way to test either.

⁴ Quoted in *House of Representatives Practice*, p. 479, relating to the 1964 Standing Orders Committee recommendation to omit the standing order preventing a Member from reading “his” speech. The other reason given for omitting the rule was difficulty in implementing it.

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that second reading speeches with a current maximum time of 20 minutes (other than the Minister's reply speech) should be limited to a maximum of 15 minutes speech time with a maximum of 5 minutes allowed for questions and answers on the material covered in the speech. This should be implemented on a trial basis from the first meeting of the House in 2004 until the end of the session.

Application of the proposal to Ministers and Shadow Ministers

- 1.23 In proposing the new arrangements for second reading speeches the Speaker did not intend that Ministers and Shadows be included. Alternative views were put during the round table meeting relating to the fact that Ministers rarely used the maximum time allowed and that the desired result of getting more Members into the Chamber and enlivening debate would, in all likelihood, be facilitated by allowing questions to Ministers.
- 1.24 It was pointed out that there might be legitimate administrative questions to put to a Minister including when regulations will be available. One Member noted that the Minister is the one person who could be expected to provide expert answers to questions on a second reading speech.
- 1.25 While these views certainly had merit, the committee agrees with the majority of participants that Ministers and Shadow Ministers should be excluded from the question and answer trial. The relevant issues are examined below. By extension, the movers of Private Members' bills should also be excluded from the question and answer period.

⇒ Ministers

- 1.26 In relation to the Minister's second reading speech, its exclusion from a question and answer period rests on four main factors:
- the need for the Minister's second reading speech to be authoritative and able to be relied on by a court as a statement of the policy behind a bill;
 - the fact that the Minister already answers questions relating to his/her second reading speech during the speech in reply;
 - the fact that the Minister is already accountable to the House in a variety of ways; and
 - the standing orders provide for a delay between the Minister's second reading speech and further activity on the bill.

- 1.27 In relation to the first point, the status of any question and answer period involving the Minister would be problematic. The Minister's speech is the main exposition of the policy underlying the bill and has legal significance in relation to possible future court action relating to the legislation once it is passed.⁵ In this context, the full 30 minutes allowed might be needed to explain the bill even though this rarely occurs. In addition, it would be undesirable that a Minister could be required to answer a question, without notice, arising from this speech when the answer might be regarded as authoritative in terms of legal interpretation. This is particularly relevant to a very technical bill. In the unlikely event that the answer to a question at the end of a second reading speech conflicted with information in the speech, this would pose a problem for a court.
- 1.28 In relation to the second point above, current arrangements already provide for a Minister to answer questions put by other Members during the second reading stage of the bill. During the Minister's speech in reply at the end of the debate, he or she typically comments on other Members' speeches, including answering questions they may have raised.
- 1.29 In responding to questions the Minister may be advised by the departmental officers who are familiar with the bill and who have usually been present during the whole second reading debate. He or she is able to give considered responses which are likely to be of more assistance to the House than answers to questions at the end of the second reading speech. For this reason, the Minister should be allowed the full 20 minutes for his/her speech in reply. Members having questions relating to the Minister's second reading speech can put them during that Member's speech on the second reading.
- 1.30 Excluding the Minister's speech in reply from the question and answer period is also consistent with ensuring that everything the Minister says during the second reading stage of the bill is considered, authoritative, and subject to input from advisers if required.
- 1.31 In relation to the third point above, insofar as the proposal is aimed at encouraging Members to be ready to explain their position on a bill, Ministers are already accountable to the House through Question Time (though not in relation to a bill still before the House) and a variety of other mechanisms including Matters of Public Importance (but again, not in relation to legislation currently before the House). The Speaker told the round table meeting that he intended his proposal to enliven backbench participation. Ministers answer specific questions on the detail of a bill

⁵ *Acts Interpretation Act 1901*, s.15AA. The Minister's second reading speech is specified in the list of materials which may be used in the interpretation of an Act (*Ibid.*, s.15AB[2]).

during consideration in detail, in addition to answering questions on the policy of a bill through the speech in reply.

- 1.32 In relation to the fourth dot point above the Clerk of the House pointed out that the way the standing orders are framed means that the House is unaware of a proposal until the minister presents it. Then the standing orders require a delay. The debate must be adjourned and the proposal sits on the table so Members have a chance to study it before the second reading debate is resumed.

⇒ **Shadow Ministers**

- 1.33 While not having the same legal interpretive significance, the second reading speech by the Leader of the Opposition or his/her nominee (usually the relevant Shadow Minister) encompasses the official Opposition position on the bill (including when the bill is not opposed). It is an important aspect of House proceedings that the Opposition should have the same opportunity as the Government to explain its position in relation to a bill. He or she should have the same maximum time available as the Minister. The committee agrees with the majority of the participants at the round table meeting that the arrangements for the Shadow Minister's speech should remain as they are.

⇒ **Private Members' bills**

- 1.34 Very few Private Members' bills go through a full second reading stage in the House but it is necessary to make provision for such bills for the sake of completeness. The committee considers that where the current standing orders allow a second reading speech maximum time of 30 minutes, the time should remain at 30 minutes and there should be no question and answer period in relation to such speeches.

Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that the second reading speeches of the responsible Minister, the relevant Shadow Minister (or the Leader of the Opposition) and the mover of (and where relevant, other speakers on) a Private Member's bill, should remain at 30 minutes and should not be followed by a question and answer period.

Opting out – a flexible approach

- 1.35 There was considerable discussion at the round table conference about whether the question and answer period proposed at the end of second reading speeches should be optional. Those who strongly supported the proposed change and were optimistic about its potential for re-

invigorating House debates, were reluctant to see any watering down of the arrangements.

- 1.36 The other side of this view was also put – the concern that the proposal would not be given a fair chance if unnecessary difficulties were introduced. The possibility of allowing Members to opt out for an introductory period to give them time to get comfortable with the question and answer concept, with the possibility of removing the opting out provisions at a later date was supported by several Members.
- 1.37 A third view was that the procedure should always remain optional. Other pressures might encourage Members to participate in the question and answer period but the standing orders should not mandate the practice.
- 1.38 For new Members particularly, speaking during a second reading debate causes some anxiety and such Members work hard to ensure their written speech is the best they can do. The challenge is then to deliver the speech well with the only risk being interjecting Members (usually) from the other side – a problem which can be met by simply ignoring the interjection. New Members in particular might find it difficult to deal with questions which were more in the nature of quizzing the Member to see if they “know their stuff”.
- 1.39 The committee considers that the proposed new arrangements are more likely to be well tested if all Members are able to opt out of the question and answer period. This should not mean that they have the full 20 minutes available for their second reading speeches. All second reading speeches which have a current maximum time of 20 minutes should have a new maximum time of 15 minutes.
- 1.40 The committee considered whether a Member opting out of the question period should have 20 minutes available for his or her speech but concluded that this would not facilitate a fair test of the new arrangements. If the question/answer proposal is to be given a reasonable trial, it should offer Members an additional period in which to explain their views in response to questions. This additional period should not be available to Members who choose not to answer questions.

⇒ **Mechanism of opting out**

- 1.41 This could be effected by the Member announcing at the start of the speech that he/she would not be taking questions at the end. Alternatively, a Member could wait until he/she heard the question before deciding whether to answer it.

- 1.42 The pros and cons of these options are best left to the Member involved. In relation to the objectives of the proposal, an announcement by the Member at the beginning of his/her speech that no questions would be answered is unlikely to encourage other Members to stay in the Chamber to listen to the speech. There would be some pressure on Members not to refuse questions at least until he or she heard the question. If the question seemed not to be in the spirit of the proposal that would be time enough for the Member to refuse to answer it.

Recommendation 3

Members should have the right to opt out of answering questions on their second reading speeches, either by indicating at the beginning of the speech that he/she is not available for the question/answer period at the end of the speech, or by listening to a question before deciding whether to answer it.

- 1.43 The question of whether the opting out provisions should be for an introductory period only (see paragraph 1.36) need not be addressed at this stage. The arrangements themselves are proposed on a trial basis for the remainder of this parliamentary session in 2004.

The need for flexibility

- 1.44 Second reading debates are quite often subject to private arrangements regarding maximum times which are outside the procedural arrangements. Typically, this arises when the Government wishes to get a bill up to the Senate in a particular time frame which cannot be met because of the large number of speakers wanting to speak on the bill. The whips then request Members (on both sides) to shorten their speeches – often to 10 or 15 minutes.
- 1.45 These informal arrangements pose a particular problem for the introduction of the question and answer period. The committee recognises that it is inappropriate to shorten an already shortened speech to allow 5 minutes of questions and answers. It was suggested that the new procedure (question and answer period) should be suspended at such times.
- 1.46 The committee fully supports this approach and notes that the whips would need to remind Members that when informal arrangements are made regarding maximum times, consequential informal arrangements to suspend the allocation of 5 minutes for questions and answers would also need to be made.

- 1.47 As these arrangements are, in effect, parallel procedural agreements which co-exist with but do not effect the standing orders, the committee will not make a formal recommendation on the subject. The timing clock in the Chamber would be set for 15 minutes for the speech in accordance with the standing orders.
- 1.48 The committee notes that such informal agreements are not always honoured. They are the responsibility of the whips and the Members themselves and are not enforced by the Speaker. Accordingly if, despite informal arrangements, a Member asked the Member speaking a question on the speech, the clock would be set for 5 minutes as provided by the standing orders. It would be open to the Member questioned to decline to answer that question or any other questions which might be put. The Chair could then call on the next speaker and the timing clock would be re-set to 15 minutes.

Rules for questions and answers

- 1.49 The Speaker's proposal regarding the question and answer arrangements included firm guidelines aimed at encouraging vigorous debate.
- 1.50 He proposed that Members would indicate their intention to ask a question by rising in their places. The questions would be allocated by the Chair from side to side, beginning with a question from the opposite side of the House. If no one from the other side rose then a question from the same side could be asked.
- 1.51 If each question were no longer than 30 seconds and each answer no more than 90 seconds this would allow three questions. If the questions and answers were very brief there might be more. The important principle is that questions and answers should be brief, directly relevant to the second reading speech and take a maximum of 5 minutes in total (to be indicated by the timing clock in the Chamber).
- 1.52 It is difficult to envisage a rule which would ensure the questions and answers were in the style of debate (rather than say, personal attack or quizzing) but if the brevity and relevance rules are followed, the desired result should also follow. As always, the responsibility for ensuring good order and the dignity of the House would rest with the Chair.
- 1.53 It was pointed out that there would be some room for the Chair to be flexible. If a Member needed a couple of seconds to finish an answer the Chair might allow this, just as Chairs sometimes allow a Member to finish a sentence during other business before the House.

Recommendation 4:

The committee recommends that questions and answers should be brief and directly relevant to the second reading speech.

Implications for the interventions trial

- 1.54 The parallels with the question and answer period for second reading speeches and the current trial of interventions in the Main Committee are obvious. Interventions in the Main Committee were introduced in order to make debate in that place more interactive.
- 1.55 The standing order relating to interventions is:
Interventions in the Main Committee
84A During consideration of any order of the day in the Main Committee a Member may rise and, if given the call, ask the Chair whether the Member speaking is willing to give way. The Member speaking will either indicate his or her:
 (a) refusal and continue speaking, or
 (b) acceptance and allow the other Member to ask a short question immediately relevant to the Member's speech –
Provided that, if, in the opinion of the Chair, it is an abuse of the orders or forms of the House, the intervention may be denied or curtailed.
- 1.56 The issue of possible confusion with the existing interventions trial was discussed at the round table meeting. Sessional order 84A applies in the Main Committee only. It applies to all orders of the day (not just second reading debates) and the clock is not stopped while the question is asked and the answer given. The procedure is on trial for the remainder of the session.⁶
- 1.57 In the committee's view the trial of interventions is successful and there seems no persuasive reason to bring it to an end in order to have a trial of the second reading proposal run in isolation. Members are well able to distinguish between the two and those who are confused can be reminded by the Chair.
- 1.58 As the second reading proposal would, if accepted by the House, apply to (current) 20 minute second reading speeches, whether in the House or Main Committee, this would allow both interventions and the new proposal to apply in the Main Committee at the same time.
- 1.59 It is not proposed to change the standing order relating to interventions at this stage but the committee points out that it would be unwise for a Member to allow an intervention during a 15 minute second reading speech when other Members will have a chance to ask questions at the end of the speech.

⁶ The original trial was until the end of 2002 but has subsequently been extended to the end of the session.

Uniform rules for the Chamber and Main Committee

- 1.60 The question period arrangements for second reading speeches would apply to both the House and Main Committee. However, it might be that when both Main Committee interventions and second reading question periods are reviewed in the next Parliament, one procedure is considered to be superior and it might be adopted for both Chambers.
- 1.61 The committee does not consider that there is great value in having absolutely uniform procedures for the House and Main Committee as their roles and styles are different.
- 1.62 This is not a matter that needs to be determined in the context of proposed arrangements for questions and answers on second reading speeches. The important issue is that in this context the arrangements should apply to both the House and Main Committee.

Conclusion

- 1.63 The committee is grateful to the Speaker, Leader of the House, Leader of Opposition Business, the Chief Whips and others who participated in a rewarding and productive discussion aimed at improving the procedures of the House.
- 1.64 It commends the new procedures to the House and hopes they can be introduced from February 2004 to allow as long a trial as possible in the remaining period of this Parliament.

MARGARET MAY MP

Chair

27 November 2003

Appendix A

Submissions

1. Mr Organ
2. Mr Jenkins
3. Mr Latham

Participants at Round Table Meeting – 6 November 2003

Abbott, the Hon. Tony, Leader of the House

Andren, Mr Peter, Member for Calare

Andrew, the Hon. Neil, Speaker of the House of Representatives

Bishop, the Hon. Bronwyn, Procedure Committee

Causley, the Hon. Ian, Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives

Crosio, the Hon. Janice, Chief Opposition Whip

Ferguson, Mr Martin, Procedure Committee

Gash, Mrs Joanna, Government Whip

Haase, Mr Barry, Procedure Committee

Harris, Mr Ian, Clerk of the House of Representatives

Jenkins, Mr Harry, Second Deputy Speaker

King, Mr Peter, Procedure Committee

Latham, Mr Mark, Manager of Opposition Business

Lloyd, Mr Jim, Chief Government Whip

May, Mrs Margaret, Chair of Procedure Committee

Price, the Hon. Roger, Deputy Chair of Procedure Committee

Quick, Mr Harry, Opposition Whip

Vamvakinou, Ms Maria, Procedure Committee

Appendix B

The Speaker's opening statement at the Round Table Meeting 6 November 2003

The SPEAKER—...

One of the things that has concerned me is not new and is not even related to my role as Speaker; it is something I have been concerned about almost as long as I have been in the parliament. I recall in the old house the then member for Farrer, Mr Wal Fife, raising his concern about attendance in the Chamber. My view is that attendance in the Chamber has only tended to contract, and it is dreadful for public perception for people to come in and see a relatively empty Chamber, but even worse for them to witness people reading speeches almost by rote and then leaving. What I think our Chamber most lacks is a sense of debate and a compulsion to be advocates which should be gripping us all but does not appear in the Chamber, and consequently the people of Australia become increasingly exasperated about the way the Chamber goes about its business.

In an effort to encourage people to be advocates for a particular cause, I have asked the committee to consider what is the Canadian style of debate where the speeches on the second reading, in order not to take more time, would be reduced to 15 minutes—my own observation is that you can say all you need to say in 15 minutes—and then five minutes that was allocated to the speech on the second reading would be available for people to ask questions of the person who has just spoken. My proposal is that obviously questions would not be simply from the opposition to a government member or from the government to an opposition member but would be allocated side to side. We need to remember that, particularly from the Speaker's perception, you have the executive and the back bench and everyone on the back bench has an obligation to hold the executive to account.

I am conscious of a concern—I think an entirely justifiable and understandable one—that ministers are already obliged to account for legislation by way of question time. While my original proposal did not go to this detail, I do not believe that ministers or shadow ministers should have the 30 minutes allocated to them for second reading speeches reduced, nor do I think they should be exposed to a question time. But I think that all backbenchers should be obliged to come in prepared to sell what they are saying not simply by reading a speech and walking out of the Chamber but by then being prepared to face questioning on that speech. The intent is not to get more detail about the legislation; the minister has already

laid out the detail in the second reading speech. The intent is to enliven debate. One of the things that concerns me is that the only time when there is a real sense of calling to account in the Chamber is in question time, so question time has become the time that all of Australia watches, when the Chamber should be about debate as a regular occurrence. Debate would be enhanced dramatically if people were discouraged from reading speeches—there was once a standing order that did that—by the obligation to be prepared to defend whatever they have said spontaneously at the end of that speech in being questioned by their colleagues about the consistency of what they were saying.

Finally, would this in any way interfere with the Main Committee's concept of intervention, which I think is very commendable? It does not particularly trouble me if the House of Representatives and the Main Committee have a slightly different format. Equally, it would not concern me if one format proved to be superior to the other. Clearly I do not think that this should be seen as something that is superior to interventions, but I think it would be an idea if we tried to make the Chamber more interactive. Personally, I think the best place for debate in this building right now is the Main Committee; sadly, I have to concede, that is followed by the Senate Chamber, which is slightly more intimate—in terms of atmosphere, I mean—

...

and, finally, debate in the House of Representatives Chamber. I want that order to be reversed and I can only see that being achieved if we get into a real sense of debate. What is lacking right now is a real sense of debate at the very time that there should be debate—on speeches on the second reading of bills. That is my proposal. I would like the committee to consider it.