

Preface

This 4th edition of *House of Representatives Practice*, first published in 1981 with J. A. Pettifer as editor, has been produced as one of the major tasks of the principal department which supports the House in its Centenary year of 2001. In 1901 the 75 Members of the first House of Representatives assembled in the premises of the Legislative Assembly of Victoria and the record shows how proud they were to be Members of the first Parliament. Last month the House, with the Senate, returned to Melbourne for special sittings to commemorate the opening of the first Parliament and the first meetings of the Houses. Understandably, Members expressed their pride in participating in these events.

This edition of *House of Representatives Practice* describes and explains the body of law and practice now applicable to the House and its committees. This practice is largely the product of the work of Speakers and Members who have served the House in the 39 Parliaments since Federation.

The publication of the first edition was the most significant work of scholarship in the history of the Department. Members since then, and many other interested people, have owed debts of gratitude to the first editor, Mr J. K. Pettifer CBE, for his wisdom and experience, to Assistant Editor Mr A. R. Browning for his learning and scholarship, to Assistant Editor the late Mr J. K. Porter for his drive, commitment and industry, and to those who supported them. The three subsequent editions have seen the great foundation set in the first edition refined and developed to reflect evolving practice.

This edition reflects the developments of the last four years. During this time the Main Committee (which the Standing Committee on Procedure has recommended renaming the Second Chamber to describe the function it performs) has become a significant and accepted feature of the House, and its role has been broadened and important rulings and decisions have been made. A notable theme during this period has been the need for the House and its committees to facilitate community involvement. This has seen, for example, changes in the arrangements for petitions and in committee practice. Other changes have sought to facilitate the use of technology, for example in the electronic lodgment of notices and questions and the use of video conferencing by committees.

This edition is more than an update of the third edition. The text has been considerably rewritten in places, with a view to improving readability. The chapter on 'Parliamentary committees' in particular has been extensively reorganised and redrafted.

The most immediately noticeable differences, however, are the retitling of some chapters and the rearrangements of subject matter. The first two chapters of the previous editions, covering the Parliament generally and the role of the House, have been combined. The former very long chapter on 'Legislation' has been divided into three, to give separate chapters on 'Financial legislation' and 'Senate amendments and requests'. Coverage of matters of public importance is now included with private Members' business in the renamed chapter 'Non-government business'. Petitions are now covered

in the chapter on 'Papers and documents', and broadcasting and televising in the renamed chapter 'Parliament House and access to proceedings'.

The copy of the *House of Representatives Standing and Sessional Orders*, included as an attachment in previous editions, has been omitted. The standing orders may be amended significantly between editions of *House of Representatives Practice* and updated reprints of the *Standing and Sessional Orders* are readily available (including in electronic form via the internet).

The cut-off date for the text of this edition was the end of May 2001. It thus covers the first 100 years of procedural developments in the House of Representatives. Annual statistics in tables and appendixes are complete to the end of 2000.

I gratefully acknowledge the permission of the trustees of the May Memorial Fund and of Butterworths to use extracts from *May's Parliamentary Practice*, and the assistance provided by officers of the Australian Electoral Commission who reviewed the chapter on 'Elections and the electoral system'.

I thank my fellow editors, Mr B. C. Wright and Mr P. E. Fowler. Mr Fowler has brought his substantial skills to bear on the project and has had primary carriage of it—this edition is a tribute to his success. We have been supported generously by staff of the Chamber Research Office and the Department more broadly—the work can be regarded as a product of the whole Department.

However, I believe that the greatest recognition is due to the current and former Speakers and other Members of the House, for it is the procedure that they as Members have developed which constitutes the practice of the House of Representatives. Recognition is also due to parliamentary staff and other staff involved in the parliamentary process.

Albert Einstein is attributed as having said that a hundred times a day he reminded himself that his life depended on the labours of other people, living and dead. He had to exert himself in order to return the same quantum of what he had received and was still receiving. Nowhere are these sentiments truer than in parliamentary service. We have the privilege of serving a living, developing institution in the Australian House of Representatives, and I gratefully acknowledge those who have served before me as Clerk of the House.

I can say with confidence that the future will hold as great a challenge as has the past, and we in the parliamentary service look forward to responding to those challenges.

Ian Harris
June 2001