
The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Consideration in detail of the main appropriation bill

House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Procedure

February 2016
Canberra

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Contents

Foreword	v
Membership of the Committee	vii
Terms of reference	ix
List of recommendations	xi
1 Introduction	1
Structure of report	3
2 Consideration in detail	5
Roles in the debate	7
Conduct of debate	10
Question and answer format	10
Allocation of the call	11
3 Improving the conduct of the debate	15
Adequacy of the Standing Orders	16
Allocation of the call	16
Question and answer form of debate	17
Proposed sessional orders	18
Time limits	20
Appendix A – Proposed announcement to the House	23
Appendix B – Proposed sessional orders	25



Foreword

The consideration in detail debate on the main appropriation bill is a unique opportunity for the House to examine ministers in detail on the Government's expenditure proposals. However, for several years Members have expressed concern about the effectiveness of the debate in allowing them to adequately fulfil their scrutiny role. The greatest dissatisfaction arises around the allocation of the call and the length of speeches and the resultant effect of long speeches on the flow of the debate.

This report examines the history and evolution of this particular consideration in detail debate and how Members' concerns have arisen over time. It considers these issues and evaluates current practice and the various proposed remedies alongside the principles of good parliamentary practice that should apply to a debate of this nature and purpose.

The report also considers the influence that the Members with a key role in the proceedings have over the nature and conduct of the debate and how this has contributed to the current dissatisfaction. Recognising that Members with a role in the proceedings ultimately have the most influence over the conduct of the debate, the report offers guidance to Members in these roles on the approaches that have been more effective and satisfactory. The Committee has also recommended sessional orders which clarify the rules applying to the consideration in detail of the main appropriation bill and apply a shorter time limit to Member's speeches to promote a more interactive, free-flowing debate.

If the Committee's proposed sessional orders and speech time limit are adopted the Committee has suggested that the Speaker make a statement to the House, to be repeated by the Deputy Speaker in the Federation Chamber prior to the commencement of the detail stage debate. This should ensure as many Members as possible are aware of the sessional orders and what Members can do to achieve a more effective and satisfactory consideration in detail debate.

If the trial of these measures is successful they should be adopted as permanent measures for the 45th Parliament and the statements by the Speaker and Deputy Speaker prior to the commencement of the detail stage could be adopted as an annual practice prior to the commencement of the consideration in detail debate on the main appropriation bill.

Dr Andrew Southcott MP
Chair



Membership of the Committee

Chair	Andrew Southcott MP	
Deputy Chair	Michael Danby MP	
Members	Russell Broadbent MP	Scott Buchholz MP
	Ian Goodenough MP	Jill Hall MP
	Joanne Ryan MP	

Committee Secretariat

Secretary	James Rees
Inquiry Secretary	Siobhán Leyne
Research Officer	Naomi Swann
Administrative Officer	Penny Branson



Terms of reference

Inquire into and report on the consideration in detail of the main appropriation bill with reference to:

- the conduct of the debate, including the allocation of the call; and
- the adequacy of the Standing Orders in facilitating the debate.



List of recommendations

3 Improving the conduct of the debate

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that sessional orders 182A and 182B at Appendix B be adopted for the remainder of the 44th Parliament.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the House adopt a sessional order for the remainder of this Parliament to provide in respect of the consideration in detail stage of the main appropriation bill that each Member be permitted to speak for an unlimited number of 2 minute periods.

Appendix B – Proposed sessional orders

Procedures for Main Appropriation Bill

182A Second reading (Budget debate)

On the motion for the second reading of the Main Appropriation Bill, and Appropriation or Supply Bills for the ordinary annual services of government, public affairs may be debated, in accordance with *standing order 76(c) (exceptions to confining debate to the question)*.

182B Consideration in detail

During the consideration in detail stage of the Main Appropriation Bill, and Appropriation or Supply Bills for the ordinary annual services of government, the following rules apply:

- (a) The schedules of services for which an appropriation is to be made shall be considered before the clauses. Proposed expenditures in a schedule shall be considered in the order in which they appear unless the House otherwise orders, in accordance with *standing order 149 (order in considering bill)*.

(b) The question on each item of expenditure shall be –

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Members may ask Ministers for information about the expenditure being considered. Questions and debate must be relevant to the expenditure being considered, and may refer to departmental activity and government policy relating to the expenditure, and related expenditure in other appropriation bills.

