

1994 – 2014: establishment and evolution of the Federation Chamber

2.1 The Federation Chamber was proposed as a solution to the increasing pressure of legislative business in the House. Since Federation, a gradual increase in the number of bills before the House resulted in less time available for detailed consideration of each individual bill. In the first decade of Federation the House sat for 25 hours for each Act passed and by 1992 this figure had reduced to just 2 hours per Act.¹ The imposition, from 1986, of Senate deadlines for the receipt of bills from the House also added time pressure.²

2.2 In order to manage the legislative program, there were an increasing number of bills declared urgent, particularly in the period from 1986 (See Appendix A, Table A.3). Known as the ‘guillotine’ this procedure allows a Minister to declare a bill urgent and, if the declaration of urgency is agreed to, to then move a motion imposing a timetable on consideration of the bill.³ As a consequence, Members that might wish to contribute to debate on a bill may not have an opportunity to do so. The Procedure Committee (37th Parliament) noted:

The detailed consideration of legislation is one of the major casualties of the guillotine procedure. The amount of time available often means that government amendments are agreed to

1 Standing Committee on Procedure (37th Parliament), *About time: Bills, questions and working hours*, October 1993, p. 4.

2 *House of Representatives Practice*, 6th edn, 2012, p. 393.

3 Standing Order 82, 26 March 2015. In more recent parliaments, it has become common practice for a Minister to move a suspension of standing orders to limit debate on a bill or group of bills, rather than using the formal guillotine procedure provided by Standing Order 82.

without debate, even when there has not been time to move them formally, and opposition amendments cannot even be moved, let alone considered.⁴

- 2.3 In examining options to relieve the legislative pressure on the House, the Committee considered the use of legislation committees. The referral of bills to legislation committees for detailed consideration had been trialled in 1978 – 1980 as an alternative to the House undertaking a consideration in detail process. In 1986, the Procedure Committee (34th Parliament) recommended the use of legislation committees noting:

Given the large volume of legislation dealt with each year and its increasing complexity, there is a need for some legislation at least to be given detailed consideration in legislation committees. Advantages would be that bills may receive a more thorough examination, there would be better opportunities for Members to participate and they would have less formal and more efficient involvement in the legislative process. Also, there may be savings in the time of the House.⁵

- 2.4 However, in the 1993 *About Time* report the Procedure Committee rejected its predecessor's recommendation noting:

That in the period 1978-80 the use of the [legislation] committees does not seem to have saved the House time. The report stage in the House – normally a formality – took up considerable additional time, eliminating the time savings gained from removing the committee stage from the Chamber.⁶

- 2.5 In its *About Time* report, the Committee also noted the complexity of the 'committee of the whole' stage of bill consideration:

Current House of Representatives practice is that a bill almost always goes through its 'committee' stage (if it goes through at all) immediately following its second reading and is considered 'in committee' by the Members present in the Chamber who have just participated in the second reading debate. The Chair of the House moves to a different place, changing in title from Speaker to Chairman or Deputy Chairman. Following the consideration of

4 Standing Committee on Procedure (37th Parliament), *About time: Bills, questions and working hours*, October 1993, p. 4.

5 Standing Committee on Procedure (34th Parliament), *Second report: Days and hours of sitting and the effective use of the time of the House*, May 1986, p. 29.

6 Standing Committee on Procedure (37th Parliament), *About time: Bills, questions and working hours*, October 1993, p. 6.

amendments the Chair of the committee reports back to the Chair of the House (with the exception of the Speaker who only takes the Chair in the plenary, both of these positions are filled at different times by the same Members under different titles). The Members present then agree formally, as ‘the House’, to accept what they, seconds before, have agreed to as the committee of the whole.⁷

2.6 The abolition of the committee of the whole was one of the procedural changes flowing from the *About Time* report, and accompanied other changes to the legislative process, including the establishment of a subordinate chamber to be known as the ‘Main Committee’ to relieve pressure on the House and allow greater opportunity for contribution to debate.⁸

2.7 The recommendation for a second chamber was not unanimous, with a dissenting report raising concerns about the capacity of the proposal to be sufficiently responsive:

the suggested new procedure could be very inflexible by precluding the pursuit in committee of the whole in the House of Representatives Chamber of those matters that arise in debate in the Main Committee which may not have been anticipated. Matters cannot be addressed by moving additional amendments in the House.⁹

2.8 The proposal also had critics when the report was debated by the House:

With regard to these proposals, the idea of the main committee has some flaws. I can see a real danger in that committee becoming an alternative chamber in much the same way as the Senate and the House of Representatives debates become not just confusing but almost have a dialectical tension.

Putting that into the one House could be quite counterproductive. I am not, however, suggesting that it be ruled out of order as such. The methods that have been put before us in the report do not sufficiently prescribe the idea of the main committee. It would have to be much narrower, defined and prescribed when the committee reports back to the House for the idea to take a form

7 Standing Committee on Procedure (37th Parliament), *About time: Bills, questions and working hours*, October 1993, pp. 7-8.

8 *House of Representatives Practice*, 6th edn, 2012, p. 374.

9 Standing Committee on Procedure (37th Parliament), *About time: Bills, questions and working hours*, October 1993, pp. 5-6.

that would not just become a replica or a repeat performance of what occurs in the committee stages here.¹⁰

- 2.9 Notwithstanding the concerns expressed by some Members, there was also support for the proposed reform, with Members noting the need to lessen the physical burden of long sitting hours as well as to improve the quality of debate and demonstrate the times when the House acted in a collegiate manner.¹¹
- 2.10 The Leader of the House moved that the standing orders be amended to give effect to the Committee's recommendations on 10 February 1994. The House divided but the motion was carried and the Main Committee was established. On 2 June 1994 the first bills were referred to the Main Committee by the House.¹²

The first meeting

- 2.11 The Main Committee first met on 8 June 1994 and at the start of business, the Deputy Speaker remarked:

The physical arrangements for the Main Committee enable members of the public and others to be much closer to where consideration of legislation and other matters is taking place than is possible in the House of Representatives chamber. However, the area allotted to members in this room is clearly delineated, and the integrity of that area must be respected at all times.

The first meeting of the Main Committee heralds a new era in the deliberations of the parliament. There has been much discussion about and interest in the proposed operation of this Committee. I am sure that, with the cooperation of all members, the Main Committee will make the positive contribution to the workings of the House of Representatives envisaged by the Standing Committee on Procedure.¹³

- 2.12 The first speakers included the Minister for Finance (the Member for Swan) and the Manager of Opposition Business (the Member for Bennelong), both of whom welcomed the innovation. The Manager of Opposition Business noted:

10 Mr A. Morris MP, H.R. Deb. (21.12.1993) 4496.

11 H.R. Deb. (10.02.1994) 833-854.

12 VP No. 53, 10 February 1994, pp. 766-777, VP No. 75, 2 June 1994, p. 1047.

13 Mr H. Jenkins MP, Deputy Speaker, H.R. Deb. (08.06.1994) 1725.

If the Main Committee can add to the intelligent dispatch of business and, in this rather more intimate atmosphere, lift the quality of debate on some of the less contentious but nonetheless detailed pieces of legislation, the whole parliamentary system and the community will be the beneficiaries.¹⁴

2.13 Members also noted that the physical space would enhance debate:

The main reason for this committee is to deal with non-controversial legislation. I think the message is that it is often forgotten by many people out there in broader Australia – and it is an opportunity to say it this morning – that much of the legislation that actually goes through the parliament is non-controversial and goes through with the support of all members of the parliament. I believe that, as the debate goes on in this chamber, this is going to give us the opportunity to emphasise that more.¹⁵

2.14 With little further comment, the Federation Chamber proceeded with the work before it, being debate on two bills.

Immediate impact

2.15 The impact of the Federation Chamber was immediately felt through the reduction in the use of the guillotine from a record high of 132 bills guillotined in 1993 to only 14 in 1994. The number of bills being guillotined (or otherwise subjected to a limitation of time) has not since reached the record 100+ reached in 1988, 1991, 1992 and 1993.¹⁶

2.16 In late 1994, after nearly six months of successful operation, the Leader of the House noted:

Normally at this stage of the year – in fact, slightly earlier than this – I would be hunkered down with the Parliamentary Liaison Officer working out a guillotine and crunching legislation through the House in order to get it into the Senate.

There may be a requirement at the end of the day to guillotine some legislation. But the process which we have gone through in the past has been completely obviated. The reason for that is that something like 30-odd bills have gone through the Main Committee without the gag. Members have had the opportunity to fully discuss them, albeit that they are the sort of non-controversial

14 Mr J. Howard MP, Manager of Opposition Business, H.R. Deb. (08.06.1994) 1728.

15 Mr L. Scott MP, H.R. Deb. (08.06.1994) 1733.

16 *House of Representatives Practice*, 6th edn, 2012, p. 818.

things which would have appeared on the Notice Paper in a guillotine for a half an hour or an hour's discussion – and there would have been half an hour or an hour's discussion.

In the Main Committee, honourable members can bat through legislation at precisely the pace they think they ought to bat through it. When they have talked themselves out, that is the end of the matter. The effect of the Main Committee on the decency of procedures in the House has really been quite manifold.¹⁷

- 2.17 In 1995 the Procedure Committee reviewed the significant procedural reforms put in place as a result of its 1993 report. It noted 'the improvement in the amount of time available to debate business and the dramatic fall in the use of the guillotine' (see Appendix A, Table A.3).¹⁸
- 2.18 On the conduct of operations of the Federation Chamber it noted that there had been an overwhelmingly positive reception to the innovation by Members, including by those who had originally opposed the innovation. It stated:

Other comments have been made to the committee that there is a better interplay in debate and the more intimate environment encourages true debate and response to others' contributions. Signs of less formal and more responsive debate in the Main Committee are encouraging. It is to be hoped that this trend will continue and any sterility in the atmosphere will dissipate in time.¹⁹

A model for Westminster

- 2.19 The success of the Federation Chamber in managing the workload of the House was noticed by other legislatures experiencing similar challenges. The model was first looked at in 1998 by the House of Commons (United Kingdom) Select Committee on Modernisation but the establishment of a similar parallel chamber was considered a 'radical innovation' which the Select Committee was initially reluctant to advocate.
- 2.20 The Select Committee's reservations were not dissimilar to those expressed in the Australian House of Representatives prior to the introduction of the Federation Chamber: it was considered that a parallel

17 Mr K. Beazley MP, Leader of the House, H.R. Deb. (09.11.1994) 2949.

18 Standing Committee on Procedure (37th Parliament), *Time for review: Bills, questions and working hours*, June 1995, p. 4.

19 Standing Committee on Procedure (37th Parliament), *Time for review: Bills, questions and working hours*, June 1995, p. 13.

chamber may devalue the Chamber as the focus of the UK House's activities. The Select Committee was also concerned about the potential for Members being conflicted over which debate to attend.²⁰

- 2.21 Instead, the Select Committee presented detailed information on the Australian model and invited Members to submit their views on the concept of a parallel chamber and how it might be adapted to suit the House of Commons. The Select Committee indicated that it would consider feedback from Members before determining whether or not to undertake further work on how such a proposal might be implemented.²¹
- 2.22 In its subsequent report, the Committee recommended that the House of Commons adopt a sessional order which provided for the establishment of a parallel chamber. On 24 May 1999 the House of Commons agreed to the establishment of a parallel chamber and on 30 November 1999 Westminster Hall met for the first time.²²
- 2.23 Westminster Hall maintains a focus on private Members' business (referred to as backbench business) and committee reports, rather than legislation. An October 2014 report by the UK Procedure Committee described it as a valuable way for backbenchers to hold the executive to account.²³

Expanding role

- 2.24 As the role of the Federation Chamber became more firmly established, the range of work it undertook increased. By 1995 the business conducted by the Federation Chamber had expanded to include debate on motions to take note of papers and debate on committee and delegation reports. Whilst the Procedure Committee cautioned that the consideration of bills should always take priority, it also noted that moving this business from

20 Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons (1998-99), *First Report: The Legislative Process*, December 1998.

21 Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons (1998-99), *First Report: The Legislative Process*, December 1998.

22 Standing Committee on Procedure (39th Parliament), *The Second Chamber: Enhancing the Main Committee*, July 2000, p. 25.

23 House of Commons Procedure Committee, *Business in Westminster Hall: First report of session 2014-15*, 13 October 2014, accessed 9 April 2015, <parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/procedure-committee/news/business-in-wh-report-chairs-comments/>.

- the House had significantly relieved pressure on House time and was a welcome development.²⁴
- 2.25 The expansion of work centred on the desire of Members to have more opportunity to raise constituency matters. In 1997, the Procedure Committee noted that this had the potential to change the nature of the second chamber due to the possibility of controversial issues being raised. Nonetheless, the Committee recommended a further expansion of business be trialled to accommodate an adjournment debate and a period for Members' 90-second statements in the Federation Chamber.²⁵
- 2.26 On 4 December 1997 the House adopted sessional orders to allow for Members (excluding Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries) to make three minute constituency statements in the Federation Chamber on Thursday mornings and for an adjournment debate to take place at the conclusion of Thursday meetings. The Procedure Committee had favoured a period for Members' 90 second statements, but the House opted for the introduction of three minute constituency statements as an innovation to allow Members to make a more 'substantive, constructive contribution' than 90 second statements allow.²⁶ These sessional orders were adopted as standing orders on 30 June 1998.²⁷
- 2.27 Standing orders were amended in 1999 to allow Parliamentary Secretaries to make constituency statements in the Federation Chamber, and in 2008 to extend the opportunity to Ministers, recognising the limitation on these Members fulfilling their representative duties in the House.²⁸
- 2.28 In response to a 1999 Procedure Committee report on community involvement in the House, standing orders were amended to allow the presentation of petitions during constituency statements, recognising the desire of some to formalise this process.²⁹
- 2.29 Despite the initial caution expressed by the Procedure Committee about the potential for contention in the Federation Chamber with the expansion

24 Standing Committee on Procedure (37th Parliament), *Time for review: Bills, questions and working hours*, June 1995, p. 14.

25 Standing Committee on Procedure (39th Parliament), *Provision for Members to make short speeches in the Main Committee*, September 1997.

26 Mr P. Reith MP, Leader of the House, H.R. Deb. (04.12.1997) 12029.

27 VP No. 137, 4 December 1997, pp. 2642-2644; VP No. 173, 30 June 1998, pp. 3170-3171.

28 Mr P. Reith MP, Leader of the House, H.R. Deb. (31.03.1999) 4898, VP No. 34, 31 March 1999, p. 486; Mr A. Albanese MP, Leader of the House, H.R. Deb. (24.06.2008) 5790-5791, VP No. 32, 24 June 2008, p. 423.

29 Mr P. Reith MP, Leader of the House, H.R. Deb. (06.12.2000) 23539, VP No. 160, 6 December 2000, p. 1984.

of business considered, by the time of its 2000 review of operations the Procedure Committee (39th Parliament) noted:

While it is apparent that the Main Committee acts effectively as a parallel legislative stream, it is not at all apparent that its capacity to consider motions to take note of government papers and committee and delegation reports is being exploited to the extent it could be.³⁰

2.30 This review also examined areas for improvement. It found that:

- there was little public recognition of the role and operations of the second chamber, but this was in keeping with the lack of general awareness of parliamentary activities;
- there was merit in the argument to rename the chamber to the ‘Second Chamber’, echoing findings of the report *Time for Review*; and
- the Federation Chamber should be co-located with the main Chamber and immediately accessible to the public.³¹

2.31 In considering how to improve debate and recommending the trialling of the intervention procedure the Committee stated:

there is a belief that the Main Committee is an appropriate laboratory for experiments which, if successful, might be extended to the Chamber.³²

2.32 In his submission to this inquiry, the Clerk of the House noted the successful role played by the Federation Chamber in trialling both procedures and equipment:

- in August 2002 a sessional order was adopted by the House, with effect from 16 September 2002, that permitted interventions to be made during debate on any order of the day in the Main Committee. This provision was extended to the Chamber in 2013; and
- use of display screens to inform those present of the current item of business were first used in the Federation Chamber on a trial basis in 2012. Screens were subsequently introduced into the House in October 2014.³³

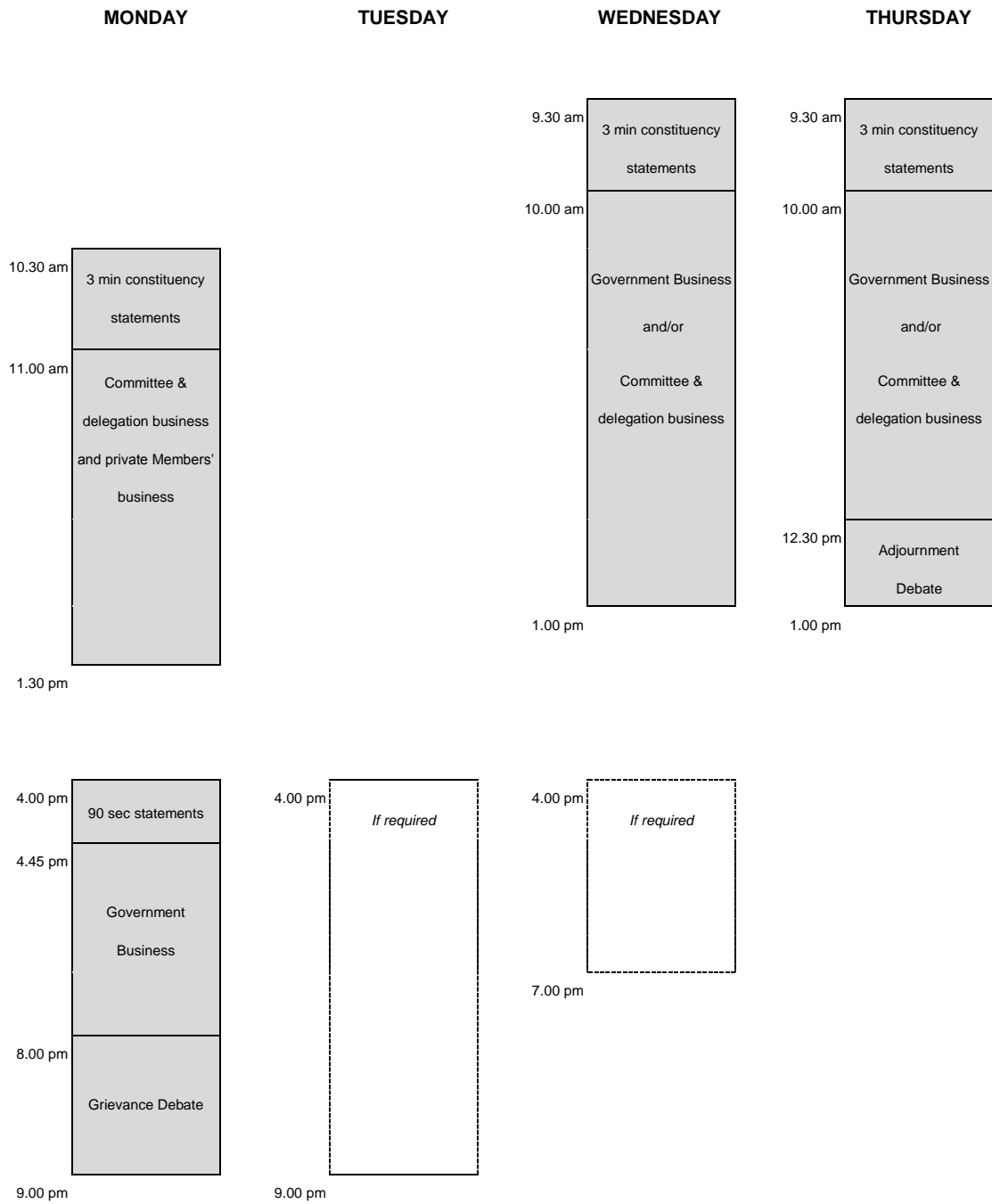
30 Standing Committee on Procedure (39th Parliament), *The Second Chamber: Enhancing the Main Committee*, July 2000, p. 24.

31 Standing Committee on Procedure (39th Parliament), *The Second Chamber: Enhancing the Main Committee*, July 2000, pp. 33-35.

32 Standing Committee on Procedure (39th Parliament), *The Second Chamber: Enhancing the Main Committee*, July 2000, p. 36.

33 D. Elder, Clerk of the House of Representatives, *Submission 2*, p. 8.

Figure 2.2 Federation Chamber order of business at 26 March 2015, Standing Order 192



2.33 The Clerk also noted that the Federation Chamber has proved to be a useful forum for new Members to participate in debate in a less intimidating venue. It is also a valuable training ground for 'new members

of the Speaker's panel to gain experience in the Chair' as well as for 'departmental staff who serve at the Table and as attendants.'³⁴

- 2.34 The role of the Federation Chamber has grown considerably in its first 20 years of operation – from being established to consider non-controversial legislation, it now allows time for the consideration of private Members' business and committee and delegation business, and is recognised as an appropriate place to test procedures prior to introduction to the House (see Figure 2.2).

Dissent and disorder

- 2.35 The Federation Chamber operates on the principle of consensus. The Deputy Speaker, one government Member and one non-government Member comprise the quorum.³⁵ This means that meetings can easily be brought to an end by either side withdrawing the presence of its Members.
- 2.36 There is no provision for divisions in the Federation Chamber and while questions are decided on the voices, if any Member dissents from the announced result, the question is unresolved and reported back to the House.³⁶
- 2.37 In the event of disorder, the standing orders allow for the Deputy Speaker to direct the Member or Members concerned to leave the room for a period of 15 minutes or may suspend or adjourn the sitting and report the disorder to the House.³⁷
- 2.38 Both procedures and the culture of the chamber have developed in such a way that disorder is rare; however, recent instances suggest that the current procedures of the Federation Chamber are suitable for managing disorder in a manner which asserts the authority of the House.³⁸

34 D. Elder, Clerk of the House of Representatives, *Submission 2*, p. 8. See also V. Riggio, Office Manager, Member for Forrest, *Submission 4*.

35 Standing Order 184, 26 March 2015.

36 Standing Order 188b, 26 March 2015.

37 Standing Order 187, 26 March 2015.

38 H.R. Deb. (31.10.1996) 6346; H.R. Deb. (08.02.2001) 24313; H.R. Deb. (20.03.2002) 1830. On 24 March 2015, the Member for Corangamite reported to the Speaker an incident of disorder occurring in the Federation Chamber concerning the Member for Bowman. Consequently, on 25 March 2015, the Speaker reported the incident to the House and the Member for Bowman was suspended for a period of 24 hours.

A new name

- 2.39 The name of the House's parallel chamber has been considered by the Procedure Committee on a number of occasions. Various alternatives to Main Committee have been considered including 'Main Committee (Legislation)'³⁹ and 'Second Chamber'.⁴⁰
- 2.40 On being established, the Main Committee was located in a refurbished committee room (2R3) some distance (a walk of several minutes) from the House of Representatives Chamber. This room naturally took on the name 'Main Committee Room' which caused a degree of confusion with the (already existing) main committee room being the shared facility of the same name located in the central part of the building. A Member noted:
- When I first went to find it, I learned the difference between the Main Committee and the main committee room – and trying to find out the difference was a lot of fun.⁴¹
- 2.41 In 2000 the Procedure Committee (39th Parliament) recommended that the 'Main Committee' be renamed the 'Second Chamber', noting that this term was in common usage amongst Members.⁴²
- 2.42 The recommendation was agreed in principle but the suggestion of 'Second Chamber' was not agreed due to the potential confusion with the Senate, sometimes referred to as the 'second chamber'.⁴³
- 2.43 In 2004 the Procedure Committee specifically inquired into renaming the Main Committee, stating that the name 'Main Committee' lessened the status of the institution as a parallel chamber and that it required a name that 'better reflects the status and function' of the chamber. The Committee recommended that it be renamed 'Federation Chamber of the House of Representatives' to be known as the 'Federation Chamber'.⁴⁴

39 Standing Committee on Procedure (37th Parliament), *About time: Bills, questions and working hours*, October 1993.

40 Standing Committee on Procedure (39th Parliament), *The Second Chamber: Enhancing the Main Committee*, July 2000.

41 Mrs J. Gash MP, H.R. Deb. (14.08.2000) 18820.

42 Standing Committee on Procedure (39th Parliament), *The Second Chamber: Enhancing the Main Committee*, July 2000, p. 34.

43 *Government response to the report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure: 'The Second chamber: Enhancing the work of the Main Committee*, June 2002, p. 1.

44 Standing Committee on Procedure (40th Parliament), *Renaming the Main Committee: Celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Main Committee*, June 2004, p. 5, 7.

- 2.44 Again, this recommendation was not immediately agreed due to concerns about the potential for confusion.⁴⁵
- 2.45 However, in 2012, the House amended standing orders to rename the Main Committee as the Federation Chamber. On introducing the change, the Leader of the House stated:
- This recognises the importance of the House's second chamber. ...
- It is pretty clear that there is some confusion, even among members of parliament occasionally, arising from the fact that the Main Committee does not meet in the room that is known as the main committee room. There is also confusion from time to time about the status of the Main Committee. It has been suggested to me, for example, when debating the referral of a bill to the Main Committee, that such a referral somehow gives the bill less status because the Main Committee is not seen as the equal chamber that it is. It is simply this chamber meeting in another place at the same time so as to improve the efficiency of the parliament.⁴⁶
- 2.46 The name took effect from 27 February 2012.

An appropriate venue

- 2.47 As described above, the venue used for the Federation Chamber is a refurbished committee room ('2R3'). The suitability of this venue has been the subject of considerable discussion by the Procedure Committee. The Committee has previously argued the need for a dedicated venue for the Federation Chamber, closer to the House Chamber to elevate the status of proceedings and to make them more accessible to the public.⁴⁷
- 2.48 Nonetheless, the Committee has also recognised the architectural and cost constraints on moving the venue. In light of these constraints, in 2004 the Committee stated:
- the current room (2R3) should be equipped and furnished to reflect the value that the Main Committee has come to assume. The room was refurbished in 1994 when the Main Committee commenced but its ambience remains that of an ordinary committee room. It is devoid of ornamentation and does not have the "feel" of a parallel debating chamber. Even the addition of

45 *Government response*, H.R. Deb. (09.12.2004) 93.

46 Mr A. Albanese MP, Leader of the House, H.R. Deb. (08.02.2012) 207.

47 Standing Committee on Procedure (39th Parliament), *The Second Chamber: Enhancing the Main Committee*, July 2000, p. 47; Standing Committee on Procedure (40th Parliament), *Renaming the Main Committee: Celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Main Committee*, June 2004, pp. 8-9.

appropriate pieces from the Parliament's art collection would improve the room and would not be an additional expense.⁴⁸

- 2.49 Improvements have been made to the Federation Chamber, beginning in 2014, its 20th anniversary year:

The occasion is being acknowledged with some physical enhancements to the Federation Chamber, commencing with the new screens which have been installed on the side walls, adjacent to the television lights. These screens display the current item of business and the question before the chair. The trial arrangement which was in place prior to this meeting was met with general approval from members, so this more formal installation of screens has now taken place.⁴⁹

...

I am pleased to report that several of these enhancements are now in place. In additions to the screens displaying captions about proceedings, there is improved signage at the main north-east chamber entrance, a redesigned desk for the Deputy Speaker and the clerks, a central table to accommodate chamber documents and purpose-built lecterns in the front row of members' seats – which I warmly encourage members to use. They have been designed so there are no chairs in front of them, enhancing the lecterns and giving the speaker's words to the chamber greater authority. A new coat of arms, enhanced lighting and some artwork are anticipated in the future.⁵⁰

- 2.50 The Committee again sought views on the location of the Federation Chamber during the current inquiry. There appeared to be a broad acknowledgment that the cost of a custom built location would be too prohibitive – and so the Federation Chamber should remain where it is. Some questions remain about the suitability of the venue and these will be canvassed in chapter 4.

48 Standing Committee on Procedure (40th Parliament), *Renaming the Main Committee: Celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Main Committee*, June 2004, p. 8.

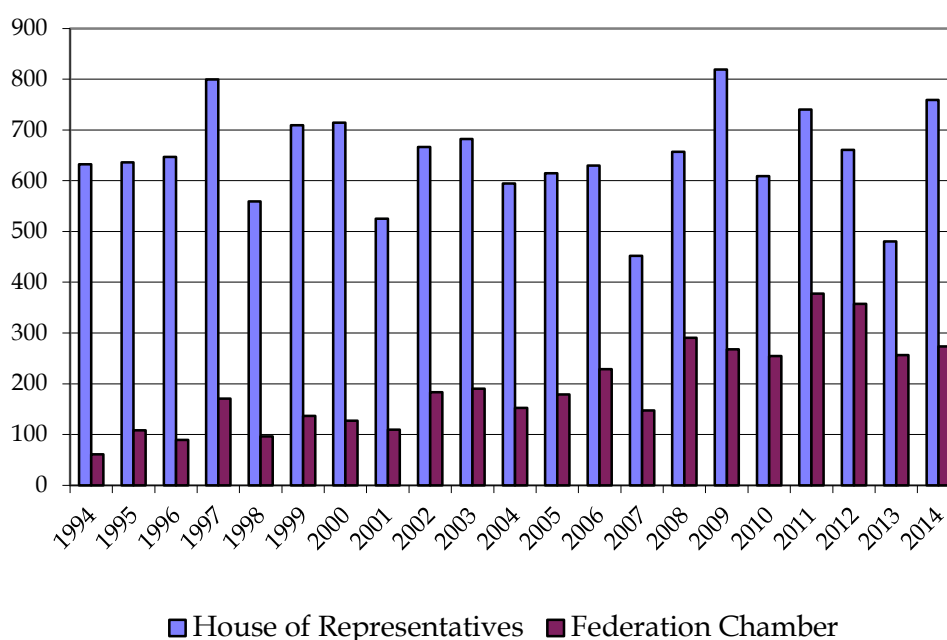
49 Mr B. Scott MP, Deputy Speaker, H.R. Deb. (22.09.2014) 10065.

50 Mr B. Scott MP, Deputy Speaker, H.R. Deb. (24.11.2014) 12923.

An unparalleled success

- 2.51 The evolution of the Federation Chamber can be said to demonstrate its success. It is safe to say that, on its 20th anniversary, the parallel chamber has earned its permanent place in the functioning of the House. It has met the aims first put forward by the Procedure Committee in its 1993 report and evolved with the needs of the House.
- 2.52 Appendix A lists the statistical data on the changing dynamics of the Federation Chamber. This data reveals that both the hours of meeting and the workload of the chamber have steadily increased since its inception.

Figure 2.3 Total hours of meeting in the House and Federation Chamber (including suspensions)



- 2.53 In 1995, its first full year of operation, the Federation Chamber provided an additional 94 hours debating time for the House of Representatives. In 2014, this figure reached 209 hours. Between 1995 and 2014, the Federation Chamber met for an average of 165 hours each year (excluding suspensions).
- 2.54 In the current parliament, a reduction in the number of government bills and committee reports referred to and debated in the Federation Chamber has led to concern that it is currently being underutilised. This inquiry therefore provides a timely opportunity to evaluate its role and future.

