

HOUSE REVIEW



Selected features of House of Representatives business

Sitting period 24 February – 5 March 2020 (no. 26)

The sitting fortnight featured statements by the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition on domestic and family violence; an extensive debate on Appropriation bills; and substantial use of quorum calls, closure motions and interventions.

Statements by indulgence

On the first sitting day of the fortnight, 24 February, the Prime Minister made a statement on indulgence concerning domestic and family violence. The Prime Minister referred to the murders of Hannah Clarke and her children, Laianah, Aaliyah and Trey, in Brisbane on 19 February and extended sympathies to the Clarke family. The Prime Minister remarked that: ‘There are never any excuses – there are none – for the evil that Hannah and her children experienced. With the states and territories, and together as a Parliament, we will continue to work together ... to translate these words ... into actions and changes that make a real difference for women and children.’ The Leader of the Opposition commented: ‘Government and Opposition can work together on this. All of us, as Members of Parliament, have a role to play. The memory of Hannah Clarke and her three beautiful children must galvanise us all into further action to eliminate violence against women and children.’ As a mark of respect, all Members present stood, in silence.

Ministerial statements

On 26 February the Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management made a ministerial statement, by leave, relating to disaster risk reduction and presented a copy of his statement. The Shadow Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development replied. At the conclusion of the statements the Minister moved that the House take note of the document and, by leave, moved that the matter be referred to the Federation Chamber, where it was further debated on 3 and 4 March.

On 25 and 26 February debate also continued in the Federation Chamber on a motion to take note of the *Closing the Gap — Report 2020*, which had been referred to the Federation Chamber following statements by the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition in the House on 12 February.

Legislation

In the first sitting week 11 bills were presented (including Government bills, private Members’ bills and bills from the Senate) and 5 bills were passed by the House. In the second week, 3 bills were presented and a further 3 passed.

Introductions

During the fortnight, 8 Government bills were presented. Subjects included family assistance for vulnerable and disadvantaged families, aged care and health insurance. In each case, the Opposition moved a second reading amendment and called for divisions at the question on the amendment on all but one bill.

In time set aside for private Members' business in the House on Mondays (27 February and 2 March) 6 bills were introduced. The bills were chosen by the Selection Committee which reported its determinations on the order of precedence and speaking times in reports presented to the House on 12 and 26 February respectively. The Selection Committee is required to give priority to private Members' bills over other notices and orders of the day. The bills introduced related to topics including the ACT Integrity Commission, carbon emissions accounting, climate change, and regional representation in the Senate. Following the sponsor's second reading speech on each bill, debate was adjourned and resumption of debate made an order of the day for the next sitting. Whether debate on a bill is resumed or not is a matter for the Selection Committee to determine.

Passing the House

Eight bills were passed by the House during the fortnight.

On 26 February debate resumed on the second reading of the Statute Update (Regulations References) Bill 2020 and on an Opposition amendment. The bill proposes to update references to outdated short titles of regulations. The amendment was lost on division, and the question on the second reading was then passed. Leave was not granted for the third reading to be moved immediately and the duty Minister then moved, pursuant to a contingent notice, to suspend standing orders to allow the motion for the third reading to be moved without delay. Following debate the Minister successfully moved closure of question. The original motion was then carried on division and the question on the third reading was carried on the voices. A message from the Senate, returning the bill without amendment by the Senate, was reported to the House on 27 February.

During the fortnight a cognate debate took place on the second reading of the Appropriation bills (No. 3 and No. 4) 2019-2020, which were introduced on 13 February. Appropriation Bill (No. 3) proposes the appropriation of additional money out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund (CRF) for the ordinary annual services of the Government, while Appropriation Bill (No. 4) proposes appropriations from the CRF for services that are not the ordinary annual services of the Government in addition to amounts appropriated through the *Appropriation Act (No. 2) 2019-2020* and the *Supply Act (No. 2) 2019-2020*.

An Opposition amendment was moved to Appropriation Bill (No. 3), not opposing the second reading but raising very wide-ranging matters. However, an amendment relating to public affairs generally, may be moved to the motion for the second reading of appropriation and supply bills, given the very broad scope of government expenditure. Debate on the second reading of appropriation bills is an exception to the usual rule of relevancy, and many Members (77 in total) took the opportunity to speak on various aspects of public affairs during the debate.

The House agreed to a cognate debate on the Appropriation bills; that is, debate on the first bill could also cover the second. At the conclusion of a cognate debate separate questions are put on each bill. The proposed amendment to Appropriation Bill (No. 3) was lost on division. The remaining questions on this bill and all questions on Appropriation Bill (No. 4) were passed on the voices.

Private Members' business

In addition to the bills noted above, during time for private Members' business Members moved motions relating to topics including ovarian cancer, small business and the defence industry, political protest in Chile, the Roads to Recovery program, gender equality, captioned telephone handsets, and home care packages. Debate on each item was adjourned and selection for any further debate is a matter for the Selection Committee.

Federation Chamber—disorder

During Members' constituency statements on 27 February closure motions were moved alternately by Opposition and Government Members. In each case the question was put and could not be resolved on the voices. There is no provision for divisions in the Federation Chamber, so the Deputy

Speaker declared the matters unresolved questions to be reported to the House. He reminded Members that such conduct was disorderly and that if it were to continue he would suspend proceedings. A further closure motion was moved and the Deputy Speaker suspended the meeting. When the meeting was resumed another closure was moved and the Chair adjourned the Federation Chamber early, pursuant to standing orders.

On 2 March the Speaker made a statement to the House confirming that in his and the Deputy Speaker's view, the repeated motions were an abuse of the forms of the House and were disorderly. Repeating observations that he made to the House on 5 December 2019 after similar conduct, the Speaker remarked that Members had deprived themselves of opportunities to speak and that the conduct reflects very poorly on the House. The Manager of Opposition Business spoke on the matter, on indulgence.

Disruption: quorum calls, interventions and closure motions

Use of quorum calls, interventions and closure motions in the House were significant features of disruption of proceedings during the fortnight.

Attention was drawn 'to the state of the House' (the term used to identify the want of a quorum) on 38 occasions: each time the Member speaking is interrupted and the bells are rung for four minutes or until a quorum (31 Members) is formed, at which point proceedings are resumed. The Member speaking loses the time taken for a quorum to form.

Following a call for quorum during the second reading debate on the Australian Education Amendment (Direct Measure of Income) Bill 2020 on 4 March, the Speaker reminded Members that Members may not leave the Chamber while the bells are ringing or until a quorum is present. He noted that for a Member to leave during the ringing of the bells is highly disorderly and, if it were to occur again, the Member would be named.

Closure motions on Members (that the Member be no longer heard) were moved on 37 occasions over the fortnight.

Members also sought the call to make interventions on 6 occasions. A Member seeking to make an intervention rises and, if given the call, asks the Speaker whether the Member speaking is willing to give way. The Member speaking may then accept and allow the other Member to ask a question or make a brief relevant response, or refuse and continue speaking.

On 26 February, during the second reading debate on the Appropriation bills, the Manager of Opposition Business sought to make an intervention during a Government Member's speech but was refused. The Manager of Opposition Business then moved closure on the Member which was lost on division. The Member had resumed speaking when the Manager of Opposition Business rose and moved that the debate be adjourned. A division having been called on the question, the Speaker took the Chair and ordered the division not be proceeded with, noting that the motion may only be moved between speakers. At the conclusion of the Member's speech, the Manager of Opposition Business again moved that the debate be adjourned. This was lost on division 65:73.

Interaction with the Senate

Message traffic during the first week of the sitting fortnight was largely concerned with the return of House bills without amendment and transmission of Senate bills for the concurrence of the House. With additional estimates hearings taking place there were no messages from the Senate in the second week.

On 26 February the Deputy Speaker reported a message transmitting a resolution of the Senate relating to Aged Care Assessment Teams. The terms of the resolution included a request for

concurrence of the House. The duty Minister moved that consideration of the message be made an order of the day for the next sitting (effectively, a postponement). An Opposition Member sought to move, as an amendment, that the message be considered immediately and the Minister moved a closure of the original question before the amendment was seconded, which was carried on division 73:70. The original motion was carried on division.

Motions to suspend standing orders

During the fortnight 6 motions to suspend standing orders were moved by Opposition Members after leave had been denied to move a substantive motion. The topics of the motions to suspend standing orders included Aged Care Assessment Teams, the Community Sport Infrastructure Program and the Urban Congestion Fund. In each case, closure motions were moved on the mover and seconder, and then closure of question was moved. The question on the original motion to suspend standing orders was lost in each case.

Committee and delegation reports

Fourteen committee and delegation reports were presented during the fortnight.

On 5 March the Chair of the House Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy presented a report on the Committee's inquiry into vegetation and land management policy relating to bushfires. He noted that, following the Government's appointment of a Royal Commission into the bushfires, the Committee had decided not to proceed further with its inquiry, for the avoidance of confusion and possible duplication of evidence. The Chair moved that the House take note of the report, debate was adjourned and the report was referred to the Federation Chamber.

On 24 February the House was informed by the Chief Government Whip that, following his election to office in the previous fortnight, the Deputy Speaker had been discharged as a member of certain committees. The Deputy Speaker, along with the Speaker and Second Deputy Speaker, may only be appointed to a committee if a standing order requires the appointment, or if the officeholder consents.

The House and Senate will meet next on 23 March 2020.

Further information on the work of the House

[Bills and legislation](#), bills, explanatory memoranda, amendments, speeches, and a tracking option

[Live Minutes](#), a real time summary of House decisions and proceedings. When used in conjunction with the [Daily Program](#), the Live Minutes are a simple way to track the House's work each day

[Votes and Proceedings](#), the official record of the proceedings of the House of Representatives

[House of Representatives Practice](#) 7th ed., 2018, the most authoritative guide to House procedure