Chapter 9. Questions seeking information

Chapter outline

This chapter provides for Members to ask questions:

- orally and without notice during Question Time, and
- placed on the Notice Paper.

Oral and written questions

97 Daily Question Time

(a) Question Time shall begin at 2 pm on each sitting day, at which time the Speaker shall interrupt any business before the House and call on questions without notice.

(b) The business interrupted shall be dealt with in the following manner:

(i) if a division is in progress at the time, the division shall be completed and the result announced; or

(ii) the Speaker shall set the time for resumption of debate.

98 Questions to Ministers

(a) A Member may ask a question in writing of a Minister (but not a Parliamentary Secretary*), to be placed on the Notice Paper for written reply.

(b) During Question Time, a Member may orally ask a question of a Minister (but not a Parliamentary Secretary*), without notice and for immediate response.

(c) A Minister can only be questioned on the following matters, for which he or she is responsible or officially connected:

(i) public affairs;

(ii) administration; or

(iii) proceedings pending in the House.

(d) Questioners must not ask Ministers:

(i) for an expression of opinion, including a legal opinion; or

* Including Assistant Ministers who are Parliamentary Secretaries.

(ii) to announce government policy, but may seek an explanation about the policy and its application, and may ask the Prime Minister whether a Minister's statement in the House represents government policy.

99 Questions to other Members

During Question Time, a Member may ask a question orally of another Member who is not a Minister (or Parliamentary Secretary*). Questions must relate to a bill, motion, or other business of the House or of a committee, for which the Member asked is responsible.

100 Rules for questions

The following general rules apply to all questions:

(a) Questions must not be debated.

(b) A question fully answered must not be asked again.

(c) For questions regarding persons:

(i) questions must not reflect on or be critical of the character or conduct of a Member, a Senator, the Queen, the Governor-General, a State Governor, or a member of the judiciary: their conduct may only be challenged on a substantive motion; and

(ii) questions critical of the character or conduct of other persons must be in writing.

(d) Questions must not contain:

(i) statements of facts or names of persons, unless they can be authenticated and are strictly necessary to make the question intelligible;

(ii) arguments;

(iii) inferences;

(iv) imputations;

(v) insults;

(vi) ironical expressions; or

(vii) hypothetical matter.

(e) Questions must not refer to debates in the current session, or to proceedings of a committee not reported to the House.

(f) The duration of each question asked by a government Member or an opposition Member is limited to 30 seconds. The duration of each question asked by a non-aligned Member is limited to 45 seconds.

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* Including Assistant Ministers who are Parliamentary Secretaries.

101 Speaker's discretion about questions

The Speaker may:

(a) direct a Member to change the language of a question asked during Question Time if the language is inappropriate or does not otherwise conform with the standing orders; and

(b) change the language of a question in writing if the language is inappropriate or does not otherwise conform with the standing orders.

102 Lodging questions in writing

(a) A Member lodging a question for the Notice Paper must deliver it in writing to the Clerk at the Table or to the Table Office.

(b) The question must be authorised by the Member.

(c) Questions for the next Notice Paper shall be lodged by the cut off time determined by the Speaker, otherwise they will be included in the Notice Paper for the following sitting.

103 Questions to Speaker

At the conclusion of Question Time, Members may ask questions orally of the Speaker about any matter of administration for which he or she is responsible.

Replies to questions

104 Answers

(a) An answer must be directly relevant to the question.

(b) A point of order regarding relevance may be taken only once in respect of each answer.

(c) The duration of each answer is limited to 3 minutes.

105 Replies to written questions

(a) A Minister's written reply to a question must be delivered to the Clerk. The Clerk shall provide a copy of the reply to the Member who asked the question, and the question and reply shall be published.

(b) If a reply has not been received 60 days after a question first appeared on the Notice Paper, the Member who asked the question may, at the conclusion of Question Time, ask the Speaker to write to the Minister concerned, seeking reasons for the delay in answering.