



DEPARTMENT of the
HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES

ISSUE 23 :: APRIL 2021

ALUMNI *Newsletter*



Clerk's Message

Dear Alumni

I have a story to share with alumni about an extraordinary year supporting the Parliament.

Those of you in Canberra might recall that 2020 started with fire and smoke. Many staff in the department had foregone the usual new year break to support the 28th annual Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum (APPF) with several hundred international visitors—the Parliament last hosted the event in January 2000. For a time, it looked like APPF 28 might be cancelled. Nevertheless, the meetings went ahead, although all but one of the outdoor activities were cancelled. The Speaker and visitors from 19 member parliaments considered the event a success, quite an achievement in the context of the nearby bushfires.

By February, we thought we had survived the worst threats for the year. But just as the smoke was dissipating, and we were putting away our masks, we were hearing reports of a coronavirus that was emerging on another continent. As you know, very soon COVID-19 was a significant concern in Australia, and around the world.

Early in the COVID-19 period, the House and committees met infrequently, although their work did not cease completely, and staff were

quite busy. Committee staff were able to carry out much of their work remotely and have increasingly been able to support committee meetings and hearings with participants from multiple locations around Australia, by tele and video conference.

We supported infrequent meetings of the House from March to August, and the sitting pattern changed three times in response to pandemic concerns. COVID restrictions and uncertainty made for constant innovations in procedures underpinning the work of the House. From March we, together with the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS) and Senate colleagues, were developing an official video facility to enable Members and Senators not physically present in the House and Senate chambers, and later the Federation Chamber, to participate remotely in certain proceedings. Our work meant that remote contributions were enabled from August and are continuing. Since August we have been supporting both chambers of the House for the usual number of hours.

The still new House Divisions e-Recording System has been streamlined to accommodate the large numbers of pairs of Members, which change potentially from division to division.

Since August too, I and other staff have been wearing masks in the chambers, based on advice from the Chief Medical Officer that masks should always be worn when appropriate distancing cannot be maintained. My little joke has been that the Clerks-at-the-Table



are now officially superheroes, as we wear both gowns and masks!

A defining feature of this period is that many departmental staff have been working remotely at various times. Although we were not as well equipped for large scale working from home initially, there have been quick responses and more suitable resources for remote working are on the way.

As you would know, because of the pandemic our department's performance this year has been on display for the Australian community in a highly visible way. As alumni you understand that our department's response has been critical to enabling the House to function as it must during an emergency—debating, making decisions and passing critical national legislation.

The department starts 2021 with optimism for what is to come, knowing we met the challenges of an extraordinary 2020.

I look forward to my next message being post pandemic! On behalf of the department, I wish you and your family a safe and healthy year.

Claressa Surtees
Clerk of the House



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Note from the Co-chairs

A belated Happy New Year to all alumni. Now we are through the trials of 2020, and as life slowly returns to some sort of normal, we expect that by later this year we will be able to catch up in person. Hopefully you are all well, and that the virus has not had too negative an effect on you and your family.

The last AGM was held in November 2019, and with the retirement of Carolyn from the co-chair role, Joanne has taken on the position. Mike has continued as co-chair, and both Jim Pender (newsletter) and Dean DaCosta (secretary) have also volunteered again. Our thanks to Carolyn for her work for the Alumni and thanks to all who support it. The annual Alumni get together was held on 21 February 2020, before things started to lock down, and was a very pleasant and enjoyable evening. It is always great to catch up with former colleagues and hear what they have been doing, and to also meet with current staff. No doubt they will have some tales to tell about sittings and COVID precautions when we next meet. Our thanks to the Clerk and departmental staff for their ongoing support for the Alumni and assistance in arranging this function.

Given the uncertain times we have been living in, there was no AGM held in 2020, much to the disappointment of many of you, we are sure. Similarly, we took the decision to hold off on Alumni activities until the roll-out of the vaccines. It is our hope that we will be able to hold both the AGM and the function later in 2021.

Until then, stay safe, look after yourselves, and we will be in touch when dates have been set.

Mike Salkeld and Joanne Towner
Co-chairs

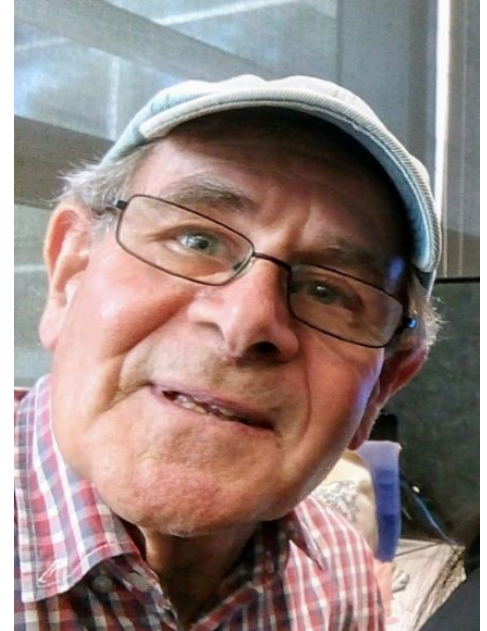
Where are they now?

We find some of our Alumni colleagues to see what they are up to.

FRED COOK

After graduating with a geology degree from the University of Melbourne in 1968, I kicked-off my professional career in January 1969 as an exploration geologist with BHP in Kalgoorlie exploring for nickel sulphides (at the height of “the nickel boom”!). However, six months later I was conscripted into the Australian Army (1969-1971). I duly caught the overnight train from Kalgoorlie with two other conscripts to report for induction in Perth. Two years later, spent initially as an officer cadet and ultimately as a second lieutenant in Intelligence Corps, I opted for discharge and returned to BHP to resume my career as an exploration geologist. For the next 20 years I was employed by BHP and other exploration companies targeting copper, gold, tin and coal deposits in eastern Australia and Papua New Guinea. Along the way a couple of us discovered the 200Mt Clermont thermal coal deposit. As well I picked up a Bachelor of Economics degree from the University of Queensland and a Masters degree in Mineral Economics from Macquarie University.

In 1990, my freshly minted Masters degree secured me a contract position with the Parliamentary Research Service as Mineral and Energy Adviser within the Science, Technology, Environment and Resources (STER) Section headed by Dr Rod Panter in the Parliamentary Library. What a thrill to be working in Australia’s new Parliament House. Over the next 17 years I aggregated some seven years of employment in Parliament House in five stints, four in the Parliamentary Research Service, 1990-1991, 1996-1997, 2001, 2005-2007 and three years in the House of Representatives Committees Office, 2002-2005. Intercalated within these periods at Parliament House I worked in the Commonwealth’s Energy Department in Barton as well as Principal Mineral Economist in the



Geological Survey of South Australia. Further, I represented New South Wales on the Council of the Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy for six years during the nineties.

In 2002 I secured a permanent position in the Department of the House of Representatives Committee Office as secretary to the Standing Committee on Industry and Resources inquiry into “impediments to increasing investment in minerals and petroleum exploration in Australia” – the Prosser inquiry. I had to learn the committee inquiry process fast! Thankfully I was coached by Bev Forbes, Margaret Atkins, James Catchpole, Bernie Wright, Jim Pender and Dr John Carter. As secretary for the Prosser Inquiry I enjoyed identifying likely resources industry “heavies” and relevant stakeholders from whom to solicit powerful submissions. Some needed to be cajoled to appear as witnesses at hearings; but once there they generally presented constructive evidence for the Committee’s deliberation. The report entitled *Exploring: Australia’s Future* was tabled in the House in the 40th Parliament.

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Research Officer Alex Stock is credited with inserting the colon in the title.

During the committee hearings in Kalgoorlie in 2003 one of the witnesses, sporting a long flowing white beard, sidled up after the hearings had adjourned and asked: "Did I remember him?" I had to admit, "No, I did not". With a grin he reminded me that his name was O'Donnell and that he was one of the three conscripts who had travelled with me on the overnight train from Kalgoorlie to Perth to report for Army induction in 1969! Respecting this Kalgoorlie origin, clearly I had no option but to ask Barry Haase then the Member for Kalgoorlie and a member of the Industry and Resources Committee, to present me with The Anniversary of National Service 1951-1972 Medal in 2003 at a small ceremony in Parliament House (APH), after a committee meeting (see photo). My Army adventure had kicked off in Kalgoorlie and concluded in APH, sort of!

I then was inquiry secretary for a number of Public Accounts Committee (JCPAA) inquiries; Ansett, Aged Care, Blood Serum. After the 2004 election I spent a brief period on the staff of the Science and Technology Committee. Until that is, out of the blue, I received a call from Dr June Verrier, Head of the Parliamentary Research Service offering me the position of Director of the Science, Technology, Environment and Resources Section (STER) in the Parliamentary Library. A return to resources research had some obvious resonance.

Once I had settled in as STER Director, June Verrier "encouraged" me to join the bass line of the then Parliament House Choir, the Capital Hill Singers. Also, around this time, Paul Shepherd, who had been a colleague in the JCPAA secretariat and a tenor in the choir, got me interested in Salsa dancing. I joined the Canberra-based Latin American music group Alma Latina which toured Cuba and Chile in 2005 and 2009 respectively. As well, the group featured for a number of years at the National Folk Festival. The group's repertoire was principally traditional Latino music, sung in Spanish. To be "authentic",



logically I had to take Spanish language lessons. Over the years since I have gained modest Spanish oral and written fluency. Notwithstanding the lessons, I realised that immersion is the best strategy to learn a foreign language and consequently I have taken holidays in Cuba, Chile and Spain many times since to catch up with friends I met in each country, and to practise my Spanish.

In September 2007 on the last sitting day of the 41st Australian Parliament I took a package from the Parliamentary Research Service and returned to my roots as an exploration geologist. During 2008 I explored the tundra in the Northwest Territories of Canada, for nickel sulphides within the Providence Greenstone Belt targeting an analogue of the Kambalda model, which I had worked on in Kalgoorlie in 1969 (aha, Kalgoorlie pops up again!)

In 2010 I joined Marengo Mining Limited in Papua New Guinea as Chief Geologist of the Yandera Copper/Molybdenum/Gold project, Madang Province. I spent the next four years running up and down the mountainous regions north of Mt Wilhelm (PNG's highest mountain at 4509m), supervising National geologists, drilling and sampling the roughly billion tonne low-grade Cu/Mo/Au deposit, and by immersion learning Tok Pisin. In 2014 Marengo Mining Limited

was acquired by Canadian interests, so my time in PNG closed and I retired from full-time employment.

Having spent significant periods working overseas prior to my Parliament House career, and since, I developed an interest in assisting foreign students (here and abroad) to write their essays and project reports in presentable English for their Bachelor degrees. This interest stems from preparing research papers and writing committee inquiry reports during my time in Parliament

Indeed, one of my formal duties with Marengo Mining in PNG was to mentor many University of PNG geology students who were rostered on a six-month industry placement during the third year of their four-year course. They were required to write periodic reports for assessment by their UPNG lecturers. I tutored them in report writing in English. I found these young men to be very committed to their science and their careers and I saw them as emergent leaders in PNG, with their future success dependent in part on having good written and spoken English.

As well as Cuba and Spain another favoured holiday destination is Thailand. My interest in Thailand stems from a Thai-based power generation

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project proposal I worked on in the 1990s. Through this interest in Thailand I have become a mentor to a number of Thai undergraduate students who, like the PNG students, are required to submit their term papers in English. Reciprocating, I even took a few Thai language lessons along the way. As well as mentoring Thai and PNG students I have also mentored Japanese, Nigerian and Cuban university students, by critically assisting all of them to present assessment-ready essays and project reports to their respective universities in presentable English.


I own an historic hobby car, a 1969 Renault 10 sedan, which I tinker with, polish and exhibit at vintage car shows around Canberra. On many occasions I have parked my Renault 10 next to Bernie Wright's historic Peugeot 404. My long-standing work with the Australian Electoral

Commission (since 1980) and the NSW Electoral Commission as a polling official at National and State elections keeps me alert to national and regional political dynamics.

On the family side, my four daughters are all married and living in Sydney. The grandchild tally currently stands at nine, six girls and three boys. I am amazed when one or other of them shows some interest in rocks, minerals and fossils. None has, as yet, shown any interest in politics.

Upon reflection, I consider that I was indeed fortunate, way back in 1990, to have been offered a modest starting contract in the Parliamentary Research Service. In effect, I had gotten my foot in the Parliament House door. This duly led to greater things in Parliament House over the next 17 years. My time as a staff member of the DHR Committee Office does not set any long

service records, but I am fortunate to have spent significant periods of my working career within two outstanding workplaces in the Australian Parliament. The variety of subjects that I was required to get my head around when working in these places, still amazes me. Researchers in the Parliamentary Library necessarily have to be completely non-partisan and maintain strict client confidentiality, particularly during periods when working with both sides simultaneously and presenting both sides of an argument. I found this work to be mentally stimulating.

I farewelled Canberra (my base for the last 30 years) and moved permanently to Sydney in December 2019 to be nearer the grandchildren. However, in the future, I look forward to enjoying an occasional return to Parliament House for the Alumni receptions, events and meetings. 

CLIFF LAWSON

I had a slightly unconventional entry to the House of Representatives Department in 1991.... but more of that later.

All of my career before that time had been in the Commonwealth public sector, having been recruited from Queensland in 1966. I still vividly remember my first reaction as the Fokker Friendship bounced its way towards Canberra and landed before I had seen more than paddocks and sheep! The next jolt was the flimsy terminal building, a low, flat affair (then) with wooden pillars and lots of linoleum. Things improved noticeably when the Comcar driver scooped me into a shiny black Humber complete with walnut picnic tables and red leather upholstery to waft me to Brassey House, then a high-tariff Commonwealth Hostel. I was vaguely planning to give the job 6 months from my start at the (then) Public Service Board in the 'Barton Woolsheds' but here I am still, many decades later.

Working in corporate development areas of several Commonwealth departments over the years, sprinkled with a short-term assignment with AusAid to PNG in 1979, I eventually seized the chance of a voluntary redundancy package from



the Civil Aviation Authority in 1991 and set sail for England on a small ship via the Panama Canal. On the night before my departure, I lodged a hand-written job application for an ASO5 position with the Department of the House of Representatives (DHR) and thought no more about it on the high seas.....

In the south of France some weeks later, I received a message from home that DHR wanted to interview me

by phone and needed contact details. I duly gave my aunt's number at her London flat in Elephant and Castle and advised an available time for interview. I vividly remember that early morning interview in my pyjamas overlooking the Elephant and Castle roundabout!

My first day at DHR was most interesting, as there was a steady stream of people passing Personnel to get a

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look at the unknown quantity who had been selected sight unseen via international telephone line! Right from the start, however, I found the relatively small department a welcoming and stimulating place to work. There were some humorous moments early on too, given what I eventually discovered was my more than passing resemblance at that time to Kerry O'Brien who was then in the Parliamentary Press Gallery. I was completely charmed by the waves and smiles directed at me by complete strangers on my way to Aussie's coffee shop during the first few weeks. It was only when he and I passed each other

on an escalator in the airport terminal sometime later in 1991 that we both laughed aloud at the resemblance!

After about 12 months in corporate support, I moved on temporary transfer to the Committee Office with the Joint Standing Committee on Migration in a deliberate change of direction. Subsequently, I moved on promotion to the Joint Standing Committee of Public Accounts and then eventually to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade as Secretary of the Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee. During my time I thoroughly enjoyed (most of the

time) the secretariat, research, public inquiry and report-writing demands of the work and, after 11 years in the Parliamentary service, I retired in January 2003. The photo shows my final day in the JSCFADT office.

In the 17 years since then, I have done some volunteer work with Migrant and Refugee Services ACT as tutor in ESL support, lots of international travel by sea, rail and air, as well as landscaping several homes in succession. I try to keep in touch with former colleagues by means of casual lunches or coffee mornings in between Alumni events. 🌿

Alumni on assignment

Parliamentary reform in the Malaysian House of Representatives Report from David Elder

ORIGIN OF MALAYSIAN ASSIGNMENT

It seems but only yesterday that I retired, but in fact it was August 2019. However, rather than retreat into full on retirement, an opportunity came up to do some work with the Malaysian Parliament, and more specifically, the Malaysian House of Representatives on parliamentary reform. In October 2019, I was engaged by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) on a project aimed at supporting a process of parliamentary reform that was underway in Malaysia (see below). More specifically the project was to strengthen parliamentary committees, support the review and revision of the standing orders, assist with the production of publications such as manuals and parliamentary practice books and coordinate the international assistance being provided to the Malaysian Parliament.

The assignment was over a six-month period and involved travelling to Kuala Lumpur for four stints of three weeks each over that period. As will be noted below, the project concluded in March 2020 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

and a change in the political situation in Malaysia which eventually resulted in the replacement of the Speaker.

BACKGROUND

As background to the reform process, the Malaysian Parliament has now been in existence for more than 60 years, having first met in September 1959. Late last year, the Parliament celebrated 60 years of a democratic Parliament. This is a very significant achievement and one worthy of the celebration that took place at Parliament House on 4 December 2019 and which I had the good fortune to attend as it coincided with one of my stints in Kuala Lumpur.

The Malaysian Parliament is bicameral and is a Westminster system with the lower House, the Dewan Rakyat (House of Representatives) being the House in which government is formed and the upper House, the Dewan Negara (Senate), being a House of review. Under the Constitution (Article 44) the primary role of Parliament is to be the "legislative authority of the Federation", thus embodying the supreme legislative role in Malaysia. However, as a Westminster system of government, it also is characterised by the notion of responsible government

that is the executive government is responsible and accountable to the Parliament. Thus, one of the other vital roles of the Malaysian Parliament, other than legislating, is to undertake effective scrutiny of government. This has been at the centre of the reform process in Malaysia. In this way, the Malaysian Parliament is very recognisable to us and has many similarities to the Australian Parliament. In fact, there is a lot of interest in Malaysia in the Australian experience.

Although the Malaysian Parliament has implemented reforms at various times over the course of its sixty-year history, it would be fair to say that the perception of the Parliament prior to 2018 was as a 'rubber stamp' of the actions of the Executive and lacking in those crucial roles of a Parliament of providing effective oversight and scrutiny of the Government. However, from July 2018 following the 14th Malaysian General Elections (GE 14) held in May 2018 the Malaysian Parliament, and particularly the House of Representatives under the leadership of its Speaker, Tan Sri Dato' Mohamad Ariff Md Yusof (Speaker Ariff), has been

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on a path of parliamentary reform.

The context of parliamentary reform is that, at the GE 14 in May 2018, there was a change of government for the first time in Malaysia's history with the coalition of parties forming Pakatan Harapan (PH) winning the election with an agenda for comprehensive governance reform embodied in a reform Manifesto. The incoming government, through its Manifesto, gave a commitment to parliamentary reform.

Among some of the specific undertakings were:

- to reintroduce a Parliamentary Service Act, with improvements in certain matters so that the Act is suitable for today's environment;
- the Speaker of the Dewan Rakyat and the President of the Dewan Negara will be members whose integrity and credibility are respected by their peers. The Speaker and the President must retire from partisan politics as soon as they accept their posts;
- to enable Parliament to play its proper role, sittings will take place at a minimum of 100 days per year;
- institutionalisation of a Select Committee system in the Dewan Rakyat and Dewan Negara, complete with suitable provisions and appropriate support staff to enable them to function effectively;
- the Chairman of the PAC will be reserved for an opposition member of parliament;
- every week, 30 minutes will be allocated for Prime Minister's Question Time in the Dewan Rakyat; and
- to ensure transparency and avoid abuse of power, on an annual basis, Members of Parliament would be required to declare their interests.

The detailed proposals in Promise 16 are an amalgam of specific ideas, broad statements of intent and matters that lie somewhere in between. Collectively they are consistent with restoring Parliament's role in providing a check and balance on the Executive by ensuring more rigorous accountability

through Question Time, in debates in the House, through scrutiny by committees and a more transparent and inclusive approach to the community.

As will be seen from the subsequent discussion, considerable progress was being made on the agenda that was set in the Manifesto before political change intervened.

REFORMS TO PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES

Undoubtedly the centrepiece of the parliamentary reforms in the House of Representatives has been the establishment of a number of select committees. This was one of the key commitments in the Manifesto and one of the primary ways in which the House of Representatives was able to increase its scrutiny of the Executive.

In August 2018 the House established the first six Special Select Committees in areas such as the Budget, Rights and Gender Equality and Major Public Appointments. This was followed in December 2019 with another four committees being established in areas such as International Relations and Trade and Elections.

The committees were established using existing standing orders of the House. Each committee has seven members with a government majority. While the use of the current standing orders to establish committees has some limitations, they enabled the House to proceed quickly with the establishment of a system of select committees as required by the Manifesto. The committees have the power to call on persons to appear before them, to receive documents and papers and to report their opinions and observations to the House.

In addition to the establishment of committees and the work they have done, one of the specific matters raised in the Manifesto was that the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) should be a member from the Opposition parties. This has been implemented and the current Chair is YB Dato' Dr. Noraini Ahmad. The PAC has been active for many years, but its activities have expanded

in the current Parliament. The PAC, together with the Select Committee on the Budget, has provided a significant level of scrutiny of the Government's Budget and budgetary processes.

Guides to the procedures and processes of committees have been developed for the Chairs and members of committees (based on similar guides which are available in the Australian House of Representatives) and standard operating procedures (SOPs) for committees have also been prepared. These guides and the SOPs provide the opportunity to standardise the approaches of committees around good practice and the standing orders of the House.

Among the plans to further improve and embed the committee system in the Malaysian House of Representatives that were in train when Speaker Ariff lost office were:

- to institutionalise the current Special Select Committees as a system of standing committees of the House. This would require a change to the standing orders of the House;
- to continue the development of the skills and capabilities of committee chairs and members to work effectively with their committees;
- to increase the staff available to support the work of committees, and to provide other resources to support committees; and
- to enhance the knowledge and skills of staff supporting committees.

THE INDEPENDENCE AND AUTONOMY OF PARLIAMENT

A number of the provisions of the Manifesto were designed to achieve greater independence and autonomy for Parliament. These included those relating to the independence and integrity of the Presiding Officers of the Parliament and restoring a Parliamentary Service Act to provide for greater administrative and financial autonomy for the parliamentary administration.

In relation to institutional autonomy, there was little doubt about the independence, credibility and integrity that Speaker Ariff brought to his role.

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An important element in the development of the institutional autonomy of the House is the documentation of its procedures and practices. A practical manual for Malaysian legislators, entitled 'Parliamentary Procedure: A Legislator's Guide for the Dewan Rakyat' was produced. The House, under the leadership of Speaker Ariff, also produced and published the first comprehensive text on the procedures and practices of the Dewan Rakyat, 'Law, Principles and Practice in the Dewan Rakyat (House of Representatives) of Malaysia'. The Malaysian House of Representatives has evolved its own procedure and practice, and it is important these be documented in a comprehensive way as an illustration of the Parliament's institutional autonomy.

In relation to administrative and financial autonomy, these are critical to the future of Malaysian parliamentary reform. The Manifesto reflects the importance of this when it refers to restoring a Parliamentary Service Act which had been in place, but was then abolished. The Act was redrafted with the resulting new bill involving the creation of an independent parliamentary service commission to oversee the administration of the Parliament in line with best practice. While it was expected that the bill would be introduced in the April 2020 sittings, the bill was overcome by the events of COVID-19 and the change in the political environment.

GREATER PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND TRANSPARENCY

Work was being undertaken to open the proceedings of select committees to the media and the public. Again this was overcome by the events of COVID-19 and the change in the political situation.

An important transparency initiative flowing from the Manifesto was to have Members declare their assets. By April 2020 approximately two thirds of Members had declared their assets to me as required by a resolution of the House.

QUESTION TIME

The provisions in the Manifesto relating



▲ David Elder shaking hands with the Speaker and the then Clerk of the House, Datuk Rosmee, is standing next to the Speaker.

to Question Time were not fully achieved. Nevertheless, my observations were that Question Time operated reasonably effectively as a mechanism for the Parliament to scrutinise the Government and hold it accountable. The implementation of time limits on both questions and answers (drawing directly on the Australian experience) has been very successful. It has enabled more questions to be asked each question period, with the number of questions able to be asked rising from an average of six to eight to a high of up to 15 questions. The use of supplementary questions is very successful enabling immediate follow-up to a Minister's response, hence increasing the accountability role. Allowing members from opposing parties to ask supplementary questions adds to the accountability role of Question Time. It is a lively and probing session.

The implementation of a Prime Minister's Question period was being considered, but not yet implemented.

MEETING DAYS AND THE HOUSE AS A FORUM FOR DEBATE

One of the undertakings in the Manifesto was for the parliament to sit for a minimum of 100 days a year. In the year 2019, the House of Representatives sat for 68 days.

Although this fell short of the proposed 100 days, my observation was that the House was operating with efficiency and effectiveness and additional sittings did not seem necessary.

The House also had seen an increasing number of urgent motions being debated using the procedure of the specific matter of public importance. This has even included a debate on a matter on the same day that notice was given (a debate on an environmental pollution issue).

It may not surprise those associated with parliaments to know that the conduct of some members during proceedings saw several incidents of unparliamentary behaviour. Speaker Ariff handled many of these periods very well. On one occasion at the end of the 2019 sittings, a member was referred to the Committee of Privileges for unparliamentary conduct providing a salutary reminder to members about the potentially serious consequences of poor behaviour.

ARRIVAL OF COVID-19 AND CHANGE IN POLITICAL SITUATION

As has been flagged, two events intervened to bring the reform process to a standstill, with future progress uncertain.

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The first, which we will all now be familiar, was the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. This affected the sittings of the House as it has affected the sittings of many Parliaments. For me personally, it meant that my final stint in Kuala Lumpur, due to have taken place in March 2020, did not go ahead. My work was completed virtually.

More significantly for the reform process, the Pakatan Harapan government lost office in March 2020

to be replaced by a coalition of parties which were formerly the governing parties in Malaysia. Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed was replaced by Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin. Speaker Ariff was defeated on a motion of no confidence on the floor of the House in July 2020 when the House resumed its sittings following the change of government. It was the first vote of no confidence in a Speaker in the history of the Malaysian House of Representatives.

Speaker Ariff was replaced by Speaker Azhar Azizan Harun.

Without the same commitment to parliamentary reform as the previous government, and without the particular commitment of Speaker Ariff, the situation in Malaysia remains uncertain. It would be unfortunate if the progress that has been made is not able to continue, but we will await developments over the coming months.



FURTHER INFORMATION

For any further information on alumni events or information please contact email - DHRalumnisec@gmail.com, Alumni.reps@aph.gov.au or go to the blogspot - <http://depthouseofrepsalumni.blogspot.com.au/>.