To Mr Ross Vasta MP
Chairman,
Procedure Committee.

Dear Ross,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission in relation to Question Time.

A number of points should be noted:

1. A reference to the U.K. Parliament on its website says that "**Question Time is an opportunity for MPs and Members of the House of Lords to question government ministers about matters for which they are responsible....**"

2. Various Parliaments in the Westminster system have different procedures for notice or lack of notice of questions; whether questions can be asked of any minister or particular ministers; whether and how many supplementary questions may be asked and whether by the same questioner or others; the length or time taken to ask or answer questions; the level of directness the answer must have to the particular question among others.

3. Referring to 1. above though the overriding purpose of " **Question Time is an opportunity for MPs and Members of the House of Lords to question government ministers about matters for which they are responsible....**"

4. For the purpose of this submission I will focus on the issue of questions without notice rather than upon questions in writing (formerly referred to as "questions upon notice") and questions in the House of Representatives.

5. There is a general perception in the Australian community that Question Time in the House of Representatives has become a **total sham** and merely an opportunity for the Government of the day of whatever persuasion to regurgitate political propaganda accompanied by a propensity to pour abuse upon the Opposition. **This is not a party political statement and occurs regardless of whom is in government and opposition.** To be frank it renders the original aim of Question Time utterly useless; destroys community respect for the Parliament and encourages the election to Parliament of some many would consider to be bizarre, loopy, single issue and definitely not mainstream.

6. Attempts have been made by various Speakers of all persuasions to return to the original purpose of Question Time which is for **private members to hold the government of the day to account** and these have been partly successful but much more needs to be done.

7. An independent Speaker in the traditional Westminster tradition, dependent on neither side and absolutely neutral is the ideal way to go. That way the Speaker could apply the Standing Orders firmly and fairly without fear or favour to all. By resigning from the Liberal National Party upon election as Speaker I sought to be such an independent Speaker and my understanding is that it was generally recognised I performed such a role well. Whether I was successful in this aim is however a matter for others to judge.

8. **When I was Speaker, times to ask and answer questions were both reduced, more supplementary questions were permitted and answers had to be directly relevant to the questions.** Much more remained to be done but unfortunately I ceased to be Speaker before this could be achieved.

9. Even if a Speaker does not elect to resign from his/her party, the Speaker should absent himself/herself from all deliberations of the Speaker's Parliamentary Party and from the Partyroom itself. I recognise that some Speakers have endeavoured to achieve this.

10.   Ideally I would like to see both Questions and Answers limited to 30 seconds each with the member asking the question or his/her nominated replacement given up to three to five supplementary questions of the same minister on the same relevant topic. This would permit a forensic pursuit of the truth of a particular matter relating to the Minister's responsibilities.

11.   It would be useful if Question Time was also extended in duration for a longer period.

I thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on this important matter relating to our Parliament. If I have further thoughts on a continuing consideration of the issues, I may contact you again even though I appreciate any supplementary submission may be submitted out of time.

Yours sincerely,
Peter Slipper