

Looking to the future

Still photography

Technology and still photography guidelines

- 3.1 Michael Bowers, the photographic editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and an experienced still photographer in the chamber for eleven years, has pointed out that aspects of the still photography guidelines have been overtaken by technology. In particular guideline (j) which reads

The use of flash or other sources of additional light and motor driven cameras is not permitted.

- 3.2 The reference to “motor driven cameras” is outdated and should be removed from the guidelines.

- 3.3 Guideline “l” addresses the authority for media activities in the chamber as follows:

Photographers shall observe the instructions of the Speaker or the Speaker’s delegate. The Speaker reserves the right to determine whether a photograph taken in accordance with these guidelines is in keeping with the dignity of the House. In regard to this condition, if a photographer is in doubt about a photograph taken in the chamber, the onus is on him/her to consult the Speaker’s office, through the Serjeant-at-Arms, before either publishing the photograph or giving a

copy of the photograph (developed or undeveloped) to any person.

- 3.4 In the interim report the previous committee considered the first part of this guideline to be unnecessary. The fact that the Speaker administers the relevant House resolutions and their expression in the consolidated guidelines is self-evident. The Speaker is always in control of the conduct of proceedings and events in the galleries. The latter part of the guideline relates to the days of film photography, as reflected in the phrase “developed or undeveloped”.
- 3.5 In the opinion of the current committee, while the language of the rule reflects outdated technology, the principle, that the onus is on the photographer to ensure images are consistent with the guidelines, has not changed because cameras are now digital. Both provisions express important principles which underpin all the guidelines. Consequently, the committee considers that the content of guideline “1” should be moved to the preamble.

Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that the Speaker amend the guidelines for still photography in the chamber as follows: modernise the language of the guidelines wherever necessary to accommodate the change from film to digital technology; and move the provisions of guideline (1) to the preamble.

Extended access for still photographers

- 3.6 The committee has some sympathy for proposals to facilitate access to still photographers. Although there have been problems with compliance with guidelines at question time, there is no reason to assume that these problems would increase if still photographers were able to get faster access to proceedings at other times.
- 3.7 The committee does not favour an “open slather” approach but some extension of the opportunities for still photographers to cover proceedings is consistent with trying to achieve a better balance between protecting the dignity of the House and opening up proceedings to the public.

- 3.8 In considering how access could be extended, the committee favours identifying particular times and encouraging still photographers to make better use of the opportunities to identify forthcoming “newsworthy” events.
- 3.9 In relation to identifying additional set times at which still photographers could access the galleries, in the interim report the committee considered that discussions of matters of public importance, divisions and adjournment debates would be appropriate additional opportunities.
- 3.10 After discussion with media representatives the current Procedure Committee has widened the period of automatic permission recommended in the interim report to cover ministerial statements. The trial has been expressed in sitting weeks rather than as calendar months.

Recommendation 3

The committee recommends that the Speaker revise guideline (c) of the rules for still photography in the chamber to extend automatic permission for still photographers to take photographs during ministerial statements, discussions of matters of public importance, divisions and adjournment debates for a trial period of 10 sitting weeks.

- 3.11 The committee is pleased to report that still photographers have noted a significant improvement in their relationship with attendants since the last discussion with the Procedure Committee.

Television coverage

Providing more choice

- 3.12 The television representatives at the Round Table Conference were keen to get more “newsworthy” television footage for use in news and current affairs programs. Suggestions for achieving this included getting access to footage from each of the eight cameras in the

chamber (instead of just the composite feed mixed from all the cameras).²⁰ Mr Bongiorno preferred the option of having cameras operated by the bureaus in the galleries. Mr Meakin supported this in principle but noted that the cost involved made getting more appropriate footage from the DPS camera operators a more attractive option.²¹

Access to more camera feeds

- 3.13 The technology currently available would, in theory, permit television bureaus to access the feeds from all eight cameras operated by the Broadcasting staff of DPS. However, it would involve providing new feed lines from the basement DPS studio to the press gallery. This would be expensive and would not provide television bureaus with any more control over the images they use in television broadcasts. Access to the images from all eight cameras would provide more choice of images but the additional images would not necessarily be what the bureaus could use.

The committee considers that providing television bureaus with access to more direct feeds produced by DPS camera operators is not a practical option at this stage.

Access to specially filmed excerpts—“iso feeds”

- 3.14 The Broadcast staff of DPS can provide specific footage of proceedings if requested in advance by television bureaus.²² If a television bureau is aware that a particular item of business is likely to be “news”, reporters can request Broadcast staff to take particular angles or members so long as it is permissible under the guidelines for camera operators. The specially filmed footage is known as an “iso” or “isolated” feed.
- 3.15 Iso feeds commonly result from an application to the Serjeant-at-Arms’ office for permission to take an extra television camera into the galleries. The Speaker would normally refuse permission but offer the iso feed option, arranged by the Serjeant’s office, to allow the television crew the footage they request. The usual way iso feeds are arranged has created the misconception that the Speaker’s permission

²⁰ *Transcript of Evidence of Round Table Conference*, p. 3.

²¹ *Transcript of Evidence of Round Table Conference*, p. 16.

²² *Transcript of Evidence of Round Table Conference*, p. 15.

is required for the footage. So long as the footage requested is consistent with the camera operator guidelines, members of the press gallery can make the request directly to the Broadcast unit of DPS.

- 3.16 As noted in 2.26 above, these guidelines are quite liberal, encompassing the member with the call, reaction shots of members mentioned in debate or the member who asked a question in question time. The guidelines also allow panning shots of members just listening to proceedings, whether or not they featured in those proceedings.
- 3.17 If the request is for additional footage at question time, there may be a resource issue for broadcasting staff. At question time there are five staff involved in creating the House Monitoring System feed – two camera operators (controlling eight cameras), a vision switch operator, a director and a technical director. Requiring these staff to produce a separate video imposes additional strains on them at a busy time. If the practice of supplying iso feeds became very common, DPS might need to consider whether the service should be on a user pays basis.²³
- 3.18 In the interim report the committee's view was that this option was likely to prove the most practical way of providing bureaus with more of the footage they are seeking when they are not satisfied with the images on the House Monitoring System feed. The current committee has repeated recommendation 4 of the interim report. However, the committee accepts that the implementation of this recommendation would be influenced by the outcome of its additional recommendation (5) relating to more permanent iso feeds.

Recommendation 4

The committee recommends that the Speaker write to the television bureaus represented in the press gallery to offer them the use of isolated feeds produced by DPS Broadcasting staff on request. The Speaker might consider that any additional resources required to provide this footage should be paid for by the bureau making the request.

²³ The DPS submission, p. 1, stated that "Any new service would have to be costed and additional funds obtained".

- 3.19 The current Procedure Committee decided to explore the iso feed concept and sought further information from Mr Neil Pickering (DPS Broadcasting Section).
- 3.20 Mr Pickering said that if the press gallery television reporters met with the DPS camera operators, solutions regarding a better feed (consistent with the guidelines) could be explored. One possibility suggested by Mr Pickering is the provision of two additional iso feeds from cameras 2 and 6 which generally focus on the two despatch box areas. Usually there are enough “tie” lines (feeds which can be recorded and later used for excerpts) to the press gallery to provide this additional feed but during Senate Estimates hearings there would not be sufficient capacity. At such busy times, choices would need to be made about which feeds had priority or additional tie lines would need to be installed. The existing Broadcasting staff would be able to provide these two additional feeds for the House of Representatives.
- 3.21 At the meeting on 16 June 2005, the press gallery reaction to Mr Pickering’s suggestion was that, while the composite feed is unsatisfactory because it does not guarantee an uninterrupted shot of the Member speaking, the availability of the two iso feeds would enable clean grabs to be taken to media requirements.
- 3.22 The committee proposes a trial of such new arrangements. After the trial period they should be evaluated to see whether they should continue or if any further action needs to be considered.

Recommendation 5

The committee recommends that the Press Gallery Committee consult with the Broadcasting Section of DPS in relation to improving the content of the existing feed for television excerpt purposes and to explore the possibility of additional feeds focusing on the speakers at the despatch boxes; and that the committee evaluate any such new arrangements after they have been in operation for six sitting weeks.

Allowing television bureaus to take their own camera footage

- 3.23 The committee gave careful consideration to the suggestion by Mr Bongiorno, with some support from other television managers, that the bureaus “pool” resources to use two independently operated

television cameras in the chamber galleries. All the television bureaus would then have access to the footage produced by the two camera operators.

- 3.24 The time this would be of most value to the bureaus would be question time so the practicality of introducing additional cameras at question time was investigated by the committee.
- 3.25 Two camera operators from the press gallery advised committee staff on what would be required. If the additional cameras were required to be in the area available to still photographers, the operators would require tripods to support the cameras. Also, the pictures would not be from the best angles. The tripods would be a safety hazard because the public use the corridors behind the galleries where the cameras would be placed. The committee did not consider this a practical suggestion.
- 3.26 During the visit by President Bush, DPS Broadcast staff used an additional camera in the southern gallery. This might be a solution to the practical problem of using independent cameras at question time. However, there are still practical difficulties and more work needs to be completed to arrive at a satisfactory proposal.
- 3.27 It would seem that any camera operators would need to be seated in the front row end seats (towards the centre of the chamber) of the north and south galleries. The operators would need to be installed before question time commenced and stay until after the majority of visitors left. There would also need to be guidelines to avoid disturbing visitors' access to the proceedings.
- 3.28 In the interim report the committee stated that it intended to pursue these matters to determine whether better access for additional cameras was possible.
- 3.29 The current Procedure Committee discussed this matter again with press gallery representatives, and also had further discussions on the issues involved with Speaker Hawker, the Clerk of the House and DPS broadcasting staff.
- 3.30 At the meeting on 16 June 2005 the Press Gallery Committee (PGC) maintained the press gallery's position that people should be able to see in the media what they could see if they were in the public galleries. The PGC stated that their preferred option continued to be the proposal for the media to have two pool television cameras. These cameras would operate either from the same positions available to still photographers, or failing that, from either end of the press

gallery. Technological advances would now allow the cameras to be mounted on monopods, which would occupy less space than those on tripods, discussed previously. The cameras would operate from a fixed position but could pan. The PGC believed that television and still photographers could co-operate.

- 3.31 Some members of the committee found the arguments put by the press gallery persuasive. However, the committee also noted the reservations expressed by Speaker Hawker and the Clerk of the House on this issue. After extensive consideration the committee does not propose at this stage to recommend the two pool camera option. In coming to this decision the committee was mindful of its further discussions with DPS staff in relation to the development of the iso feed option, and wishes to trial this alternative before any further consideration of pool cameras.

Other matters

- 3.32 The current Procedure Committee has made no changes of substance to the section of the interim report on these matters.

Accessing documents.

- 3.33 During the round table conference with media representatives Mr Grubel drew attention to some difficulties with accessing chamber documents. Table Office staff have discussed these matters with Mr Grubel and a satisfactory solution has been found to these issues.
- 3.34 A second submission from the Clerk of the House summarises the arrangements for accessing documents. It is in Appendix B.

Obtaining special permission for access outside the guidelines

- 3.35 For matters which the specific permission of the Speaker is required, it is not practical for members of the press gallery to apply to the Serjeant-at-Arms in the first instance. When access outside the usual guidelines is permitted it is necessary that the Speaker be aware that photographers have permission to be in the galleries. For these occasions the photographer requiring special permission should be able to contact the Speaker's office directly.

Access to Main Committee proceedings

- 3.36 Still photographers have been permitted to take photographs in the House of Representatives Main Committee (the House's second debating chamber, located in committee room 2R3) from the committee's establishment in 1994. Still photographers who are members of the press gallery are permitted to take photographs from either of the public galleries, with the prior approval of the Deputy Speaker, administered through the Serjeant-at-Arms' Office. The guidelines for still photography in the Chamber apply.
- 3.37 Committee members were surprised to learn that some members of the press gallery were unaware of the existence of the Main Committee or its location. The committee considers that the media coverage of Main Committee proceedings is less than adequate. Many important debates now occur in the Main Committee and the committee would like to see greater press coverage, including still photography.

Television coverage of parliamentary committee proceedings

- 3.38 One of the difficulties with television coverage of parliamentary committees is that there is only one committee room on the House of Representatives side with inbuilt cameras. The main committee room (the central large committee room) has cameras but this room is used almost exclusively by Senate estimates committees and rarely by House of Representatives committees.
- 3.39 The committee would like to see more committee rooms equipped with inbuilt cameras. The DPS submission notes that this would require substantial additional funding.²⁴ However, the boost additional camera facilities would provide for increasing community access to committee proceedings, is an important value and worth funding. It would be helpful if one additional committee room could be equipped in the short term. This would double the number of House of Representatives committees which can be televised.
- 3.40 The House resolution on televising of proceedings (16 October 1991) provides for individual committees to approve the filming of public hearings. This is unlikely to be a problem since the committee would

²⁴ DPS submission, p. 2. DPS suggests that House committees make more use of the main committee room and Senate committee rooms to increase television coverage.

need to make arrangements to hold its public hearings in a room with televising facilities.

- 3.41 Sky News is interested in providing more coverage of parliamentary committees and the committee strongly supports this approach.²⁵ Sky News has recommended an “opting out” rather than an “opting in” approach for committees in relation to televising their proceedings. Perhaps committees wanting to facilitate televising of their public hearings could resolve to permit televising – either through the House Monitoring System or by bureau television cameras for a set period.
- 3.42 In addition, most committees now use the e-mail alert system to advertise to the media and other interested persons of forthcoming public hearings. The media releases sent out on the e-mail alert system could be used to invite television coverage.

Recommendation 6

The committee recommends that the Department of Parliamentary Services install inbuilt cameras in additional House of Representatives committee rooms to allow increased television coverage of committee proceedings.

Still photography access to committee hearings

- 3.43 The above comment on televising committee hearings also applies to still photography of public hearings. Most committees welcome involving the community in their work and actively invite participation. The potential for the media to be a partner in this endeavour should be encouraged.
- 3.44 Again, committees wishing to facilitate still photography to their public hearings could pass resolutions covering a set period rather than just one hearing and alert the media to this availability through media releases and the e-mail alert system.

²⁵ Mr Frangopoulos suggested that Sky News would be willing to make arrangements for cameras where these were not provided. *Transcript of Evidence of Round Table Conference*, p. 4.

Conclusion

- 3.45 The current Procedure Committee agrees with its predecessor that the central issue of media coverage of House proceedings is getting the balance right between protecting the dignity of the House on the one hand and providing images which will capture the interest of viewers on the other. A dignified House does not necessarily provide riveting viewing but dull images will not inform the public because they will be ignored.
- 3.46 In reviewing the interim report the committee has been responsive to press gallery concerns and gone further to meet their needs. However, in a balance of gallery interests and House interests, the interests of the House must be central.

Margaret May MP

Chair