



Appendix C

TRANSCRIPT OF ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION; 15 JUNE 2004



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Proof Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE

Reference: Enhancing public knowledge of parliamentary proceedings

TUESDAY, 15 JUNE 2004

CANBERRA

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE

Members: Mrs May (*Chair*), Mr Price (*Deputy Chair*), Mrs Bronwyn Bishop, Mr Martin Ferguson, Mr Haase, Mr Peter King and Ms Vamvakinou

Members in attendance: Mrs Bronwyn Bishop, Mr Martin Ferguson, Mrs May, Mr Price and Ms Vamvakinou

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on all aspects of media coverage of the House (including proceedings in the House, the Main Committee and committees of the House) (adopted 4 March 2004).

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Committee met at 7.02 p.m.

BARRETT, Ms Val, Assistant Secretary, Client Services Group, Department of Parliamentary Services

BONGIORNO, Mr Paul Damian, Vice President, Press Gallery Committee

BOWERS, Mr Michael Peter, Managing Editor (Photographic), Herald Publications, Sydney Morning Herald

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TAYLOR, Mr Andrew, Chief Photographer Canberra Bureau, John Fairfax Publications

WEST, Mr Peter, Director, AUSPIC

CHAIR—I welcome all of you. Thank you for your time tonight. This is a roundtable discussion between the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure and representatives of the media. Tonight's discussion is to allow media representatives an opportunity to have their say on the committee's inquiry into enhancing public knowledge of parliamentary proceedings. The terms of reference of this inquiry are:

To inquire into and report on all aspects of media coverage of the House (including proceedings in the House, the Main Committee and committees of the House.

There are 14 or so participants in this discussion, not counting the committee members. The committee would like all of you to have a chance to give your views, so after I have finished speaking I will ask anyone who wants to do so to make a short statement outlining your views

on the adequacy of current media access. The discussion will then be open to all participants, including committee members, to elaborate on any of the issues that have been raised tonight.

Before we get to that, however, I would like to take a minute or two to make some observations on the current state of media coverage of the House. First, in relation to video coverage of chamber proceedings, parliamentary broadcasting staff operate eight cameras in the chamber. The resulting footage is edited to create a composite feed of the proceedings. The feed is provided free of charge to the media. There is no limit on how much of the footage is used by television channels, but extracts must be broadcast or rebroadcast in a manner which factually reports the proceedings. Extracts cannot be taken out of context or used for satirical or commercial purposes. Footage of proceedings in the Main Committee is provided on the same basis.

I believe there may be a view that the media would like to take their own footage of proceedings. If this is the case, I am sure that the committee would be interested in hearing why and how this would be accomplished. For example, would there be a camera team operating from the gallery? More importantly, how would this footage differ from that currently provided by the broadcasting staff of the Department of Parliamentary Services? Would it provide better access to the public to learn about what is happening in their parliament?

Second, video coverage of committee proceedings is currently by invitation of the committee. The main constraint is that there is only one committee room on the House of Representatives side equipped with video cameras which can relay footage to viewers in Parliament House or via TransACT or the Internet. The submission from Sky News suggests that committees adopt an opt-out approach—that is, that there should be a presumption that video footage of hearings be recorded unless the committee had good reason to request otherwise. The committee would be interested in hearing how this would contribute to better public access to committee hearings.

Finally, in relation to still photography, access is limited to question time or other significant occasions. Although being limited in time, still photographers have wider access to proceedings when they are in the chamber because they are not limited to photographing the member with the call. They are simply required to provide a caption which accurately records the context of the photograph, and they may not photograph protests or demonstrations. I understand that no comparable national parliament provides such free access to still photographers as the House of Representatives.

The UK House of Commons, the Canadian House of Commons and the US Congress all have much more limited access for still photography. I invite any still photographers here to tell the committee how more liberal guidelines or greater access to time in the chamber would provide better information to the public about proceedings. Would we see different photographs in the print media?

I would like to open it up now for each of you to make any comments that you deem necessary or you would like us to hear tonight. Can I ask that you address your comments through the chair and that you indicate to me that you want to make a comment. The committee members then may like to question you, depending on the time. Could I ask that you also keep your comments short, sharp and to the point.

Mr Farr—Chair, I might start off with the basic premise that the Press Gallery Committee has been operating on for the last five years for sure that I know of—and I do not think we have wavered from this—and that is the view that parliament is a public meeting, it is a meeting funded by taxpayers, it is the most important public meeting in Australia and taxpayers, through their newspapers, radio, TV services and the Internet increasingly, have a right to know what goes on at this public meeting in words and in images. There are issues, of course, to be attended to such as the dignity of proceedings, because it is a very important institution. Nobody wants it cheapened, because that dilutes its effectiveness for people who vote for the representatives to go there. But, in large part, the dignity of parliament is in the hands of the members and you should not be blaming photographers or journalists if the lack of dignity is exposed.

Essentially, our ambit claim is no rules or we set the rules. However, realistically, we know that there have to be compromises made and we will continue in this debate to make progress in getting our readers—that is, the voters—a more accurate and broader picture, both in images and in words, of what happens in their parliament.

Mr Bongiorno—I am from Network Ten. I have been present at negotiations since 1989. I am trying to get more access for television, especially into the chamber. I believe the House of Representatives should, within the rules of decorum, have no restrictions on television coverage of what happens within its confines while the parliament is in session. Television news crews should be allowed to enter or exit the galleries at will. Decorum means that television coverage of the debate should not be distracting or intrusive. This can be achieved by restricting crews to the galleries.

The rules covering what the Sound and Vision Office is permitted to send to TV bureaus should be broadened. Besides the current SAVO feed showing only the member with the call or the Speaker, bureaus should also be allowed to access other in-house camera angles. This is available to MPs and should be allowed to the accredited media. What rules do I suggest? This access should be allowed to all news crews with parliamentary press passes. Visiting crews would have to seek specific permission of the Speaker.

Mr Grubel—I have a couple of very minor things, from AAP's point of view, on the broader issue of better coverage of the House of Representatives. We try to make a commitment to cover debate and we try to have somebody sitting in the gallery to watch debate and to cover legislation as it goes through. We have a commitment to that. Some of the difficulties we face are minor things: for example, sometimes getting reports that are tabled and getting access to them from the Table Office or having disputes with them about when things can and cannot be made available. On behalf of AAP, I would like to suggest that, if something is tabled, we have a system where we can be guaranteed that we get a copy of that from the Table Office. There is a growing push to say that we can get stuff off the Internet now, but when you get a report off the Internet that is 100 or 200 pages long it is impossible to read and skim through and to find the relevant points. That has held us up sometimes in the day to day coverage.

Broadly, on the photos issue, in support of Malcolm and Paul's comments, the problem I see is that when there is a major debate or something happens quickly in parliament and we are trying to cover it the photographers need to make a phone call to get permission to take a photo of it from the gallery. We find that a restriction. Sometimes by the time we get permission it is too late. It may be a division and we might want a broad photo of a division on a controversial

bill, and that does not happen. At the moment we have access to question time and everything else is by permission.

We also had a problem a few weeks ago. There was a censure motion. Question time was interrupted with a censure motion against the Prime Minister. We could not photograph it because, technically, question time had finished and the security guards were saying no. It is against the guidelines to take a photo of the motion and to take a photo of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition having the most important debate of the day in the chamber. Question time may then resume an hour or so later, but it is a bit late by then. Sometimes the main event of the day in parliament can be a censure motion or a major debate on a matter of public importance and, by the time you organise permission to photograph it, you may have missed a speaker or two. I will leave it at that.

Mr Frangopoulos—Sky News supports the opening up of access to parliamentary proceedings. Particularly the committees are of great interest to us. We have made a major commitment to the coverage of parliament by the establishment of our parliamentary channel, which is part of our digital product available already in 250,000 homes and to be extended to regional, rural and remote parts of Australia later this year by the Austar television network. Our commitment to the coverage of parliament goes back to our inception in 1996. We have covered every question time in the House of Representatives since 1996.

We believe that the opening up of access is vital to the growth of an outlet such as the parliamentary channel. Because of the limitations which have already been discussed, with only one committee room being available in the House of Reps side, we would welcome the opportunity to be able to put in our own cameras and record, perhaps even broadcast live, into the parliamentary channel proceedings not normally covered by the DPS unit.

There are a number of other issues that are specific to Sky News. We come from a broader perspective, because we do not have camera crews operating in the House at the moment but that is something that may well change in the future. We currently rely on the resources of our two shareholders—Seven Network and Nine Network—and also DPS for coverage of footage from the House.

The primary issue is the lack of suitable press gallery facilities to new players in the media. Since we opened our bureau in the year 2000, we have been operating out of a glorified broom cupboard—I am sure many members have visited our broom cupboard studio—and we have expanded to a studio the size of two broom cupboards. It is an impediment to new players, such as ourselves, willing to invest in the coverage of federal parliamentary proceedings, in expanding and being able to offer a more comprehensive service. The grandfathering provisions that exist at the moment with the press gallery do work against us and players that will come down the track, particularly with the opening up of digital technology. There will be new opportunities certainly in the future.

The coverage of committees, as I said, is really important. I do feel very strongly that an opt-out provision should exist. Rather than the ability to cover a committee being at the invitation of a committee, it should be an automatic right. In fact, further to the comments already made by members of the media, it underscores the importance of being able to have open access to the national debate that occurs here in Canberra.

Another issue that is important, certainly in the development of our parliamentary channel, is a closer association and involvement with the Parliamentary Education Office. We believe there is a unique opportunity to encourage schools across Australia. We already provide our service to schools via Foxtel and Austar with specific programs—in one case free of charge to schools, to regional, rural and remote areas—and we believe that working more closely with the Parliamentary Education Office would be a resource, at no cost to the Commonwealth, in helping to broaden the understanding of the parliamentary process.

Mr Bowers—I spent 13 years as a photographer up here. My colleagues have pretty much covered my thoughts about opening up greater freedoms for still photographers, but I would like to address a couple of issues that I see. A difficult issue to deal with for photographers here on the ground seems to be a lack of briefing for some of the security people or an understanding of the rules. We run into this quite often. There is not a great depth of understanding about the rules, especially when there are big visits, state visits, when perhaps these people are doing jobs that are not necessarily their normal jobs. I do not know whether we can look at some form of education system when they are inducted whereby they are better briefed on the rules. I think it would stop a lot of grief.

There is also a lot of outdated language in the stills guidelines that has not kept abreast of the technology. It refers to things that have no relevance anymore—motor driven cameras have not been used in the gallery since 1996—and it is showing real age. If you want to take ownership of this and get with the technology, the guidelines need to embrace it and use the correct language that describes what can and cannot be used. We are on a crest of technology, and stills and moving pictures are going to gradually concertina, and we need to be at the front of that.

Mr Meakin—I have a bit of history in this, in that I wrote to Mr Neil Andrew in April asking for the guidelines to be broadened. If newspaper photographers have a problem, we in television have a bigger problem because we can only record, as you know, people who have the call. Exhibit A: two politicians here, Trish Draper and Mr Tollner, who did not have the call, ended up in print. I imagine we would have been thrown out of the House if we had taken that shot. I think a lot of the problem is that we have a system which is basically discreet censorship where politicians ride shotgun on their own dignity. I would like more freedom, certainly as much freedom as the stills photographers enjoy in parliament.

There have been a couple of occasions where we did have good shots, good coverage, thanks to a rogue American crew when George Bush was here and, on another occasion, because the DPS crews were not rostered on at night-time and the cameras were locked on wide shot, we got some quite engaging footage of Senator Bartlett. Apart from that, we miss out on a lot of the action when people do not have the call. Newsworthy events are not just contingent on who has the call. That is my brief statement.

Prof. McKinnon—Unlike the others, I have no history in the parliament of reporting, images or TV. But we were struck by two incidents in the last year, one where we crossed swords with the Senate and the Privileges Committee, who were threatening to jail journalists for publishing deliberately leaked material. We felt what was going on was out of date. The second was the incident on the floor of the House when there was an intruder. The rights of photographers were withdrawn and yet we still had the AAP photographs. So it appeared that there was some censorship of some photographers. This seemed to us to be dated ways of operating, so we sent letters to the Speaker and various other people.

Our view is that parliament will only work if the press reports it. It is the right of the public to know what is going on in the parliament; in fact, most parliamentarians in their career depend on good reporting of parliament and their activities as parliamentarians. Therefore, it is important that the public's right to know about this be confirmed at every opportunity and in every way.

From the point of view of images, I was struck, when reading them, by how negative they were, trying to put the onus on photographers all the time. In my view, this is the wrong onus or attitude that the parliament adopts. We acknowledge that there should be dignity and that reasonable limitations should be put, but generally the onus should be on getting the material out and photographs of significant events and significant figures in the debates. So the rules should be rewritten around an attitude of getting the news out and limitations should be as minor as possible. I will stop at that.

Mr Jones—I am presently with AUSPIC, the government agency photography service here in Parliament House and prior to that I was 14 years in the press gallery. I would like to back up several issues that Michael Bowers has raised. As a still photographer, the big impediment is the attendants. Their lack of knowledge verges on boofheadedness when they approach you. They do not know the rules or the guidelines. In a situation where we are trying to do our work, such as during the Mark Latham budget reply speech—a simple thing; here is the crowd getting up for a standing ovation—we were not allowed to move because attendants were in the way blocking our shots. It does not make any sense.

The guidelines seem to be—and I think this is where TV has a problem as well—that you don't want reaction shots. If you do not want reaction shots, then it is not a debate. Part of the thing in a debate is that someone says something and someone will react, whether that is a facial expression or in a speech itself. That is the nature of debate, I would have thought. I think that is what we all think on this side of the table. Those two issues are really the ones: the attendants, day to day, seem very ignorant of the rules, and there is no interplay as far as reaction shots. The reaction shots can very well tell the story far better than the person making the lead charge in the debate.

Mr West—I would like to endorse something that was mentioned before about having to ring the Serjeant-at-Arms' office to get approval every day or weekend to do question time. In the Senate at question time, you can just go in and out as you like. We still have to seek approval—we do as the official photographers—to go in outside of question time, but it is verbally given over the phone and quickly told to the attendants.

CHAIR—You still seek permission, though?

Mr West—Yes, outside of question time. In question time, we do not have to seek approval. That is for the press, too: they can go in. But each time we have to ring the Serjeant-at-Arms' office and put our names down for the week or the fortnight. For instance, if I just put down 'Peter West', and one of my colleagues wants to go in, that person will not be let in because it is actually AUSPIC. They will not let you in. Most of the guards would know who the press gallery photographers are and us; we should just be able to go in.

CHAIR—I think they should.

Ms Barrett—Madam Chair, I think you have summed up very well the services we do provide. In all of our TV coverage of the chambers, we do operate within the guidelines set for us by the House. We would very much need to continue to do that. It is essential that our coverage remains impartial rather than newsworthy. In relation to perhaps greater access to TV coverage of committees, we are certainly able to provide greater coverage. At the moment it is provided on request. It would then become a resourcing issue for us, as to how much we could cover within our funding. There may well be some practical implications of a proposal that might put TV crews, camera crews, on the floor of the House or in the galleries. There may be some technical impacts on the way we provide our coverage, but I would like to hand over to Neil Pickering, the Director of Broadcasting, to elaborate on those.

Mr Pickering—Broadcasting was formerly known as the Sound and Vision Office and, of course, our department changed names recently. It used to be DPRS. Most things have been covered, but I want to say that I think we still have one of the most advanced broadcasting systems in a legislative environment in this building. We have the advantage that the building was built specifically for television coverage, with camera alcoves in all the walls. We have eight cameras in each chamber. We can cover just about any angle from a technical sense. We can cover anything that happens on the chamber floor. What of course stops us are the rules that we work to, which are the broadcast guidelines.

To dispel a myth: all our cameras are controlled by a person. We do have a lot of automation built into our systems, but we are completely flexible about the shots we can get. But, again, we work to the guidelines. I believe we can provide better pictures, especially of the chamber, than other media can because of our camera location. The cameras are at the right height so that you can get the head-on shots rather than shots coming down from the galleries. We certainly would have trouble if there were other camera people on the floor of the chamber because they could get in the way of our shots.

That is mainly what I wanted to say. However I would like to comment on reaction shots which Michael Jones mentioned. In our guidelines, we can take reaction shots, and we do. As you probably know, we do an enhanced coverage for question time where we bring in a full crew and we do a lot of reaction shots and pans around the chamber and all that sort of stuff. We do reaction shots especially when someone is mentioned in a speech. If the camera guidelines were to change, obviously we would change the way we do things.

In conclusion, we can probably provide anything out of the chamber that the press gallery would want, if the rules permitted that. Certainly we have enough cameras in there to cover almost all angles. DPS Broadcasting has contributed a lot to opening up access to the chambers and there have been a lot of people that have recently started broadcasting, including Sky News with its parliament channel. Also, Broadcast Australia are doing trials of audio only broadcasts in Sydney off the digital datacasting service. They are broadcasting the two chambers and all of the televised committees, but audio only.

Other people that you would know about take our footage and rebroadcast it, such as ABC NewsRadio. We get a lot of viewers and listeners on the Internet; Sky News Active that I have mentioned; TransACT, who are the local broadband carrier in Canberra, take the two chambers plus a committee channel that they have started recently. More internal, I guess, is Inter – Government Communication Network (ICON), which is the government fibre network that goes around Canberra. They receive all our televised coverage of committees, plus chambers,

and that goes to all the Public Service departments around Canberra. ABC TV and Sky News obviously take question time on their main channel, and the other media outlets take news and current affairs.

Mr Meakin—I am interested, Madam Chair, in how impartiality and newsworthiness is somehow in conflict.

Ms Barrett—We operate within guidelines that dictate what we are allowed to shoot. We need to continue to operate within guidelines, rather than being requested to make decisions about what we think the public might be interested in as opposed to what the House has requested of us to do.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—My understanding has always been that committees meet in one of two capacities: it is either a private hearing or a public hearing. If it is a public hearing, the press are welcome.

Mr Bowers—You have to seek the permission of the chair when you come into these meetings. I have been refused a public meeting access because there have been people on the committee who have not wanted coverage for the media. It is not a fait accompli that you are given access to it.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—Let me tell you that we changed the standing order. I had a distinct problem with a particular member who did not want any media because it was an embarrassment for them.

Mr PRICE—Is that the incident you are referring to?

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—We changed the standing order. We put in a sessional order. The only way that press—or, indeed, anybody else—can be excluded is on a resolution of the committee. Under the old standing order, the interpretation was that if one member of the committee requested that there be no press or, indeed, anybody else, then the chair was obliged to rule that way. That was an absolute nonsense, and it was used in a particular way to try and prevent the hearing taking place. So we changed the standing order and it is now a sessional order. It operates that way. If a public meeting is a public meeting, you can come in.

Mr PRICE—Was it definitely a House committee?

Mr Bowers—My colleague tells me that the rules have changed. This was about three years ago, but it was definitely a House committee.

CHAIR—You were refused permission to sit in?

Mr Bowers—To take still photographs in there.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—In a public hearing?

Mr Bowers—Yes.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—There are three sorts of hearings. When you are conducting an inquiry, you have public hearings and in camera hearings. Obviously with in camera hearings you cannot come out, but you can have a public hearing where a committee may resolve, for a particular purpose, that it be cleared. That would be for the purposes of taking a particular piece of evidence that you wanted to take without it being in camera technically. Basically, if it is a public hearing, you are all invited and there are no restrictions. This is a very fine distinction. In accordance with the distinction between the parliament being in session and the old distinction we used to make where it resolved itself into committee. We now call it debate in detail or whatever it is. What do we call it?

CHAIR—Consideration in detail.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—So the chamber continues to be acting in its formal capacity and it does not any longer resolve into a committee when a rule is changed under the standing orders. There is another point I would like to make at this stage, and then we can hear what other people are going to say. Angelo, I think what Sky is doing is fantastic. One of the problems we have with just broadcasting question time is that people get a totally distorted view about parliament. Question time is aggressive; it is adversary; it is, ‘Let it rip.’ But if people think that is all we do, then they are getting a totally wrong impression of what it is.

Personally, I think the second chamber—which we have to call the federation chamber—is more interesting than the main chamber because we have changed the standing orders and that allows for more interactivity. There is debate and you can interrupt somebody in a speech and say, ‘Will you take this question?’ We do not have that in the other place yet, but it is quite interesting.

I had 167 schoolkids in here today. They have been into question time, and you try and explain to them about what the rest of the work involves. They thought it was exciting. They thought it was exciting that I had got up to speak and all that sort of stuff. I think it is good that they know something else.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—As Bronwyn has explained, the standing orders of the House are there to be used. The truth is that I do not think you have used them to your advantage, because you have not properly understood some of the history and the changes that have been made. They are there for you to open up and use to your best advantage.

In terms of television, the main committees of both houses that are perhaps the most important for you at the moment are Senate estimates, because that is where you have a real engagement in terms of accountability and things like that. Looking at TV footage of Senate estimates, it seems to be pretty reactive. Last week or the week before, Faulkner was grilling Hill on accountability of the Army—when they had knowledge of the prisoner problem in Iraq, et cetera. From what I could see on TV that night, that seemed to be a pretty good approach in the way you do your job. Do you see a difference in the way estimates potentially operate as against what would apply in the House? Regarding still photography, do you have a capacity to go into a Senate estimates and take appropriate photos or do you feel yourself being hindered by their proceedings?

Mr Bowers—You have to get permission from the committee to do it.

Mr Taylor—In Senate estimates, we can generally go in without any problem.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—You seem to have some pretty good photos of Senate estimates, including expressions on people's faces when they have someone coming at them and they have them on toast. I look at the TV footage of some of those Senate estimates, including the live footage in the House, because I tend to watch a fair bit of it. That seems to be a pretty good opportunity for you people to pick up what you need. Are there problems on that front, Paul, which could be adapted to your use for TV?

Mr Bongiorno—No, I do not think there are problems in the committees. The chairpeople do allow the television networks to bring their own cameras in for cutaways. We use the Sound and Vision—or the DPS as it is now called—head-on cameras. We supplement what DPS does. The real point of issue is the main chamber of the parliament and major events that happen in there: question time, visits of presidents and maybe major censure debates.

Mr PRICE—You suggested two rules, I think, Paul. One was decorum. What do you mean by 'decorum'?

Mr Bongiorno—Dignity, decorum. The television news crews are all accredited and identifiable and they work for identifiable employers. People from my network and I am sure from the other networks would be there to represent their employer well; in other words, they are there to do a job professionally and not to be disruptive. That is basically what I mean. The main event is not the television crew but what the television crew is there to report or to capture. That is what I mean.

Mr PRICE—For example, Malcolm's phone went off. If we were doing a TV thing of this and zeroed in on that, it would be pretty unrepresentative. I do not know that he meant to have his mobile on.

Mr Farr—No. But if it was established that Malcolm Farr was rude and ignorant, that might or might not be significant.

Mr PRICE—Is this a personal explanation, Malcolm?

Mr Farr—It is an apology.

Mr PRICE—Someone scratching their nose and all that sort of stuff, where does that—

Mr Bongiorno—The general guidelines on 'not for satire', et cetera, probably apply—although we could debate that all night. Even Peter Meakin's exhibit down there: the point is that got into a newspaper because the people in it were newsworthy at the time and the picture said something about the issue. That is the problem we have in the TV networks. We do not have that freedom to take that news judgment to the chamber basically.

CHAIR—What was the example?

Mr Meakin—David Tollner walking past.

Mr Bowers—That shot was within the guidelines. That does not breach any guidelines.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—I remember the photograph.

Mr Bongiorno—There are other examples. There was another example in the same week—the press shot of Chris Pyne showing support for Trish Draper. Television could not and did not get that shot.

Mr Bowers—A lot of parliamentarians have said to me over the years, ‘You just got more access so you can show us scratching our nose so it looks like we’re picking it.’ Can any of you tell me the last time you saw a photograph in a major metropolitan newspaper in Australia of a member of parliament scratching or picking their nose? I have not seen one in 18 years.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—I think that ‘scratching the nose’ is a euphemism. That stands for a lot of other things.

Mr Bowers—Sure.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—You would not want to be too literal in this business, would you? I would like to make another point about the standing orders. The standing orders are based on the Constitution, and the standing orders that bind us in the way we can behave are very dramatic. I am thinking this through. I am thinking about the degree of difficulty we would have where you could have strangers in the chamber behaving in a manner where they are not bound by the same rules and standing orders as we are. I do not think that would be acceptable.

Mr Farr—Chair, adding to the general view that the committee has had, we do essentially believe if you want to be on the floor of parliament, get elected.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—That is it.

Mr Farr—We do not seriously start thinking about having guys with video cameras on their shoulders walking around, or still photographers shooting up the nostrils of members. We do not seriously consider that.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—If the guidelines were made more flexible in a technical sense—which comes to the issue that Mike raised—you would see the still cameras and the TV cameras floating around the top floor of the gallery. That is where it would start and finish.

Mr Bongiorno—Yes.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—You were prevented from doing that on budget night. Are you required to just take photos virtually opposite the—

Mr Jones—In the last guidelines I received a couple of weeks ago there is no mention of where we are supposed to stand. In that sense, it is a bit of a moveable feast which we would like to keep. We do not want to get into the habit of calling out to a member of the public who has come up there, if they are seven feet tall, ‘Well, you’re going to have to move.’ If a better angle is there, then we are allowing that. But it came as a bit of a shock. The Mark Latham

budget address was not the only occasion. Certainly the President Bush visit was an absolute classic, compared to what happened with President Hu the following day.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—The answer to that question puts beyond any suggestion that you are going to be running around the chamber. It is flexibility on the top floor of the gallery when you require access for your own purposes—start and finish at the gallery.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—That or a fixed position. I take your point about a seven-foot person sitting in front of you. Can I ask you this question. We all know that Joe Public likes to see his face on television. Somebody mentioned the Mark Latham thing and how they all stood up and clapped. That was so staged, it was pathetic. That is not what I would call a genuine spontaneous reaction. They broke every standing order in the book, so why should he be rewarded?

Mr Jones—No. It was not as if we were photographing the people applauding. We were trying to photograph Mr Latham. We were shooting through the gallery with the people in front of us. When they stood up, our view was obstructed.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—They should have been thrown out, but they were not.

Mr Jones—Yes. We were not shooting the public gallery.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—Peter, I think it was you who made the point, wasn't it, about the people who stood up in the gallery and clapped?

Mr Jones—No, that was me.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—It was you?

Mr Jones—Yes.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—They broke every standing order and the chair—

Mr Jones—Perhaps the attendants should have attended to the people who were standing up.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—If you have cameras there, you are going to get banners—the lot.

Mr Grubel—The guidelines still say that we are not to photograph them.

Mr Bongiorno—They cannot bring banners in.

Mr Grubel—No.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—That does not stop them.

Mr Bongiorno—The attendants are there.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—Okay. So you have 100 people in the gallery who all have a banner. What are you going to do about it?

Mr Bongiorno—If it is happening in the gallery and we are there, we will film it.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—They are going to do it because you are there.

Mr Bongiorno—If that argument is taken to its extreme, you really would ban news coverage in Australia because you could blame virtually every event on the fact that the TV camera is there.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—Paul, you and I know that there is an unwritten rule in certain areas that you do not put certain things to air, exactly on the argument that I have just used. You know it and I know it.

Mr Farr—There is a problem with copycat stuff. One thing we do say, and we have said forever, is, ‘If someone jumps over the thing, all bets are off.’

CHAIR—You want the flexibility then.

Mr Farr—You can have a debate about shooting people in the gallery because that might encourage other people to hold up ‘Free the Scoresby Freeway’ or something like that. But if someone jumps over that wall, all bets are off. We are going to report it.

Mr Bongiorno—The problem for us is that as a TV network, we will not see it. We will not get it.

Mr Bowers—I think there is a genuine difference between a disturbance in the gallery—and I have personally witnessed 50 or 60 people in what I would call a disturbance; someone shouting out, someone holding up a flag of Tibet—and what Mal is saying where someone jumps over. That to me crosses the line. There is a story element to that, where the guy, if he had been armed, could have done some real damage. There is a distinct difference. We understand the sensitivities of not creating copycats, because we are the last ones that would want to see that happening all the time.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—If he got in there armed, there would be big trouble, wouldn’t there?

Mr Bowers—Yes.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—Because he would have had to go through the scanners to get there.

Mr Bowers—Sure.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—Somebody could sit in the gallery and chuck a hand grenade if they could get it through.

Mr Bowers—Sure. In the 13 years I covered it, there have been two occasions—that being one of them, and the time when some Indigenous people stood up. I noticed in the submission that I was sent, this explained that we perhaps had a part in encouraging that because the Aboriginal people said that they had indicated to us that they were going to do this and we were going to lose face. I would like the same stringent guidelines in this sort of reporting applied to this, because the lead has been well and truly buried here. In my opinion, those people did that because they were cajoled by a certain New South Wales senator who spent the entire question time out of his chamber in the public gallery trying to talk them out of it. To me, if a senator from New South Wales thinks it is important enough to take himself out of question time and try to talk these people out of it, again that was a newsworthy event and not just a small disturbance in the House.

CHAIR—Would any of you say that there were safety issues? You have talked about the big visits and having those guidelines or having the briefings. You are saying attendants are not briefed enough, particularly in view of those bigger visits. Would you see that there are safety issues involved there?

Mr Jones—There are certainly safety issues. In President Bush's visit, for instance, we were given a guideline as to where we could stand, how many people could be in certain positions, and freedom of movement. Therefore, we could go from the House of Reps and, in my case, down to the cabinet room. No matter what you are saying to the attendant on days like that, they just do not hear you. They go back to the lowest common denominator—'No, you can't come in.' All right, you can understand when there is a bit of a hubbub. But then these are the same attendants that let in the video camera. If you are talking about security, if a video camera got into the House of Representatives, why couldn't anything else get in?

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—Did you get the feeling that perhaps a video camera would not get in again?

Mr Jones—No. I reckon it would.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—Do you? I always thought all that was a bit suss.

Mr PRICE—If we were to change the rules for DPS to say that they can take any shots, providing they are not distractive or intrusive, would you still be wanting to have cameras in the gallery? How does that affect you?

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—It is partly what Paul picks up on. He says in his submission, 'We need to be able to access other in-house camera angles.'

Mr Bongiorno—No. We would argue that we would like to be able to have our own cameras in there. We probably would not have them in there all the time, frankly.

Mr PRICE—If you have the still photographers there, as well as your TV crews, might you not have a problem of how many you can fit, because there are limited places that you can shoot from?

Mr Bongiorno—Sure. As it is now, the TV networks tend to run two pools. There is an ABC-Ten pool and a Seven-Nine pool. Maybe they would on occasions, from the point of view of

resources, want to do pooling. Maybe there could be arrangements which the Prime Minister's office sometimes sets up—that is, super pooling. It could be that the networks may agree that they will send in only three cameras. That could be worked out with the networks. We could go to those sorts of details.

Could I underscore something here: I have been, from the word go, involved in negotiations for television into the parliament. I have noticed that we do get greater liberalisation of the rules when we have a change of government. The last liberalisation was when the Manager of Opposition Business Peter Reith became the manager of government business. We were allowed to use on our TV news bulletins withdrawn statements and points of order, which were banned by the previous government. I must say that the committee—and we have had this discussion—are greatly heartened by the Leader of the Opposition, who believes that the House of Representatives as the people's chamber should have no restrictions in its coverage.

Mr PRICE—That is very kind to you, Paul!

Mr Bongiorno—We are hoping that this view may infect, in fact, all sides of politics and we might not have to wait for a change of government to see some greater liberalisation.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—Will you take that on note, please.

Mr Pickering—We have in the past provided what we call iso shots—isolated camera shots—to the media of different things that are happening in the chamber, when you have permission through the Speaker's office. I thought I would throw that in. We have done that in the past, and we can. It is more a matter of getting permission to do it.

Mr Bongiorno—I think we are really only talking about key events. As it is now, none of the networks have enough cameras to cover all the committees, for example, and oftentimes we are alerted to something that is newsworthy at 10.55 and we ring up DPS and say, 'Can we have the vision from 10.55 till 11.15?' or whatever, and it is sent to us. The key events would be question time, major visits, maybe censure motions—things like that.

Mr Farr—Major legislation.

Mr Grubel—I think last time it was somebody over there with the voluntary euthanasia legislation. You provided a cutaway shot of the division because it was a free vote, and we informed the gallery that, if the TV wanted the second shot, you would replay that after the vote because that was a newsworthy shot that they would normally get.

Mr Bongiorno—Today there was a question to Minister Abbott about health records. Dr Mal Washer's name was mentioned, but the director did not get to him in time, I do not think. We did not have a shot of Dr Washer today, when he was relevant to what was being said. I would say that if one of our news crews was in there, they would have been making sure they got a shot of Dr Washer today, because it was newsworthy.

Mr Pickering—Yes, that is right. It is a timing issue, isn't it?

Mr Farr—The minister turned to him and it was all aflow, as it were.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—How come you didn't get it?

Mr Pickering—I am not sure. We normally would have, if someone is mentioned.

CHAIR—If you watch it, you will see the camera will even zoom back in on the person asking the question, after the minister has started the response.

Mr Bongiorno—That often happens, yes. That is an example.

Mr Pickering—Generally we do, yes.

Mr Meakin—For the sake of financial expenditure, among other things, we do not as networks want to send camera crews trampling all round the House anyway. I am reassured by DPS's statement that, subject to the guidelines, they are prepared to provide what service is required. That is fine. I am not seeking to undermine their role, but if their role can be broadened, if their responsibility can be enlarged, we would all be grateful.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—That would give you additional footage that you could use.

Mr Bongiorno—That is true.

CHAIR—At no cost, I might add.

Mr Meakin—Exactly. That is the way I think—

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—There is another thought. Is that reasonable?

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—James, your problem in getting access to documents from the table, is that during question time or outside of question time? When do the difficulties really arise?

Mr PRICE—They want embargoed copies, I think.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—You want embargoed copies?

Mr Grubel—No.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—I did not think it was embargoed copies.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—Once it is tabled.

Mr Grubel—No. We certainly do not expect stuff that is embargoed, because we know there is a problem with that. Sometimes that can happen.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—Is it in question time or outside question time?

Mr Grubel—We usually wait until after question time anyway. If somebody tables something during question time, we will go down there and try and get a copy. Sometimes that

can take a little while. I am thinking of major reports, major committee reports. I know it is an issue that comes up but I have not brought any specifics with me. It may even be a Senate issue as well. Sometimes there are big reports that are very difficult to access.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—I thought the point you were making was that they have been cutting back on the numbers that they print.

Mr Grubel—That is the sense we get. We are told one copy per organisation, which is fine because we only want one, but sometimes we are told, ‘No, we’ve run out. You’ll have to wait until tomorrow before we get more.’ Then you think, ‘Well, it’s been tabled today.’ It is this big, the federal election report or something from the committee, and you think, ‘Well, we need it now.’ It is very difficult to read those things on the Internet. There is a media liaison person for the House of Reps and I think that is a fantastic thing because they let us know what committees are coming up. I think that has been fantastic. I have talked to people in the Senate. I would love the Senate to do the same thing, or the one person to do it for both chambers, but I realise that is an issue.

Mr PRICE—Could I ask about the Main Committee?

Mr Grubel—The Main Committee is my only other point. I am not even sure exactly where in the building it is yet.

CHAIR—Isn’t that amazing? It has been here for years.

Mr Grubel—I get it on my TV. I sit and watch it sometimes.

Mr PRICE—You reckon it is a secret chamber.

Mr Grubel—It is. The best debates may well be happening there, but I do not think anyone has the resources—we do not. We put three journalists on the Senate and three on the Reps and they rotate to try and track legislation. It is impossible then to have another three people watching the Main Committee.

Mr PRICE—How can we help you with the Main Committee?

Mr Grubel—I have no idea what goes on in the Main Committee. Every now and then you will see somebody on there, but I do not know what the photographic rules are—if they are the same as the chamber.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—It is a committee.

Mr PRICE—It is just the same.

CHAIR—No, it is a chamber.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—It is not actually. Technically, it is a sitting of a committee, hence its name.

Mr Bowers—I did it once, and you had to approach and ask permission.

CHAIR—You can go in.

Mr Grubel—Does anybody ever watch it?

Mr Bongiorno—It is always televised.

Mr Grubel—Does anybody watch it or pay attention to it, or do you just get the *Hansard* and say, ‘There was something interesting there yesterday and we missed it.’

Mr PRICE—How many people know where it is? Three.

Mr Bongiorno—I know where it is. Members will alert you to something and maybe you will look, you will tune in.

CHAIR—It basically is for those non-controversial bills. That is what it is used for at the moment.

Mr Grubel—I suppose we only want to pay attention when it gets controversial.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—Every now and again it has a break-out.

Mr Grubel—When it gets controversial, they stop, and they go back—

Mr Bongiorno—When there is a break-out, we are told about it.

CHAIR—You are told about it?

Mr Bowers—Chair, I would like to say something quickly. There are three people here from the press gallery who have been banned from working in the House of Reps for breaching guidelines. All three of them are photographers. There is a little bit of a sense in the gallery that we bear the brunt of these guidelines and rules. I think the other guys would agree with me, and I would like to thank you for this opportunity to state our case. We could argue the merits of the bannings until the cows come home, but we appreciate very much this opportunity.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—You raise the question of training on this side. Can I say back to you that there is also an onus on your side to look after new people in the gallery, in terms of the rules.

Mr Bowers—Yes, sure.

Prof. McKinnon—Are members of parliament, and particularly this committee, satisfied with the way parliament is reported to the public?

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—Never!

Prof. McKinnon—I am sorry if your photo was not in every day.

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—That is the principal reason why she is not satisfied.

CHAIR—We think it can be enhanced. A lot of the work that we have done in the committee we feel is ignored by people such as yourselves. We have changed the hours that the House sits. We are trying to involve the education of our youth. Someone has touched on that tonight. We have rewritten the standing orders. That has been an enormous job for this committee. It has not been done for a long time. It is the modernisation of the standing orders. I am particularly interested in the comments that were made tonight about revisiting the guidelines that you are talking about when you talk about technology.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—We had a private little conversation there.

CHAIR—Yes. For us, that is huge input. But there are also some of the things we have undertaken, the reports we have brought down. We are particularly interested in Angelo talking about educating the youth of the country. All they ever get to see is snippets of question time. You go and talk to schoolkids and they think we are all a bunch of brawlers. That is all that they see every day.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—It is the wrong image.

CHAIR—It is the wrong image of us. We would love to open up our committee.

Prof. McKinnon—That is really what I am trying to get at. The rules make it the wrong image.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—Angelo is trying to do something about it. When I was talking to the kids today up in hospitality, I literally explained to them that the width of the table between the government and the opposition is the width of two sabres. It is confrontation, it is replacing battle in that sense, and it is combat in that sense. But the rest of it is not. There is a lot of complementary work, where opposition and government work together to get a good outcome. Nobody ever sees that. I suppose we find that frustrating.

Prof. McKinnon—Is it forbidden?

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—What?

Prof. McKinnon—That people can see that and report it and photograph it and so on?

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—It goes in the good news story category and nobody wants to know.

Mr PRICE—It is not an unfair point. Every picture tells a story. It was always going to be an interesting committee deliberation. We had a TV crew that went through the private parts, the public parts—the whole lot. We did a doco on it, warts and all, to show how people actually do react in committees.

Prof. McKinnon—The issue I am trying to raise is, you can do a doco and, no matter how good it is, it is still dull if you report the actuality of this happening. I wish I was on parliament

30 years ago when Lionel Bowen and Doug Anthony got together on a schools bill that changed the course of government—whether it was going to be pulled down or not. I was in the Canadian parliament when they threw red paint over the debate on whether they would change the flag. None of these things got out in a way which made any sense to the public. I think there is an onus on parliamentarians to address this issue.

Mr Bowers—It is so difficult to get access to the chamber that you only tend to go down that path when it is something that is really big and important. I am not saying that we would cover absolutely everything that happens in there, but if you were allowed to get in there without the hoops you have to go through, the chances of it happening would be higher, I think.

Mr PRICE—In a number of reports, the committee—particularly in relation to parliamentary committees—has really sought to facilitate the operation of the press. Hitherto, all these rules were either the joint broadcasting committee or the Speaker's preserve. The fact that we have jumped into it is something that I do not recall that we have done previously.

CHAIR—On the Main Committee, our second chamber, we celebrated our 10th birthday last week. It has been going for 10 years.

Mr PRICE—And you still do not know where it is!

CHAIR—We are going to have a new chamber.

Mr Jones—On the point of showing a nice working harmonious relationship that generally exists between both sides of political parties, for the most part we are prevented from doing strong images. We could come in and do a committee and we would get two people—a government and an opposition person—but by far the most dramatic pictures are generally those around Parliament House: two people having coffee at Aussie's; two people outside the chamber. If you want to start showing that, no.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—Who is talking to who?

Mr Jones—When Michael Bowers, myself and Peter Morris's predecessor started pushing for doing question time—you are always going to get whoever is in the news being photographed—one of the things we put to the presiding officers at the time was, 'If we can't photograph them here in Parliament House, then it becomes a trawl around Manuka, Kingston, while people are having dinners, and everything else like that.' In the Australian parliament, that was one of the issues as far as collecting news pictures. You guys have been very well served—without being too glib—in that you do not have to go and do grubby pictures of people arriving from work and all of that business.

That is one thing that has been safeguarded from you, in that if a person is on the news, it may not be a photograph of them doing their business in question time but it would be today's picture of Member X. If that was not granted—such as in an incident that happened to a former Labor Party Queensland senator when we could not get that access in the Senate—it becomes a chase around town. The media, by the nature of its beast, go hunting and that is something that really has to be considered. You have not been that badly served by the media access within Parliament House as opposed to what could happen outside Parliament House.

Mr Meakin—That is stills access, not television access.

Mr Jones—That is right, and that is an issue where you can see where TV are coming from. If they can get a photo of Dr Mal Washer, then they do not have to go and get another photo of Dr Mal Washer.

CHAIR—Any further comments? Thank you all for your time tonight. We will send you transcript.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—I would like to say that it was helpful from my point of view to listen to the problems that you have. Thinking a little bit off to the side, there could be some solutions that might come from a different direction than we might have normally felt. We are not unsympathetic to what you have had to say to us. I just think we have to strike that balance.

Mr Farr—We are fighting history here. There are a couple of hundred years of Westminster tradition. It does not dissolve easily.

Committee adjourned at 8.09 p.m.