

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- 3.2 The reference to “motor driven cameras” is outdated and should be removed from the guidelines. Similarly, guideline (l) which reads

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.

- 3.3 The first part of this guideline is 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. The rule cannot be applied to digital photography. First, so many images are “shot” that the photographer in the gallery cannot make judgments about each one. Files are passed to the photographic editor for selection without being seen individually by the photographer. Rule (e) about the use of the resulting photographs already addresses “the dignity of the House”. The guidelines would lose nothing by the deletion of guideline (l).

Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that the Speaker amend the guidelines for still photography in the chamber as follows: delete the words “and motor driven cameras” from still photography guideline (j) and delete the whole of guideline (l).

Extended access for still photographers

- 3.4 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.
- 3.5 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.
- 3.6 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.
- 3.7 In relation to identifying additional set times at which still photographers could access the galleries, the committee considers that discussions of Matters of Public Importance, divisions and adjournment debates would be appropriate additional opportunities.

Recommendation 3

The committee recommends that the Speaker revise guideline (c) of the rules for still photography in the chamber to extend automatic permission to discussions of Matters of Public Importance, divisions and adjournment debates for a trial period of three months.

Television coverage

Providing more choice

- 3.8 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).¹ 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.²

Access to more camera feeds

- 3.9 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.

¹ *Transcript of Evidence of Round Table Conference*, p. 3.

² *Transcript of Evidence of Round Table Conference*, p. 16.

Access to specially filmed excerpts – “iso feeds”

- 3.10 The Broadcast staff of DPS can provide specific footage of proceedings if requested in advance by television bureaus.³ 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.
- 3.11 “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 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.
- 3.12 As noted in 2.28 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.
- 3.13 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.⁴
- 3.14 In the committee’s view, this option is likely to prove the most practical way of providing bureaus with more of the footage they are

³ *Transcript of Evidence of Round Table Conference*, p. 15.

⁴ The DPS submission, p. 1, stated that “Any new service would have to be costed and additional funds obtained”.

seeking when they are not satisfied with the images on the House Monitoring System feed.

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.

Allowing television bureaus to take their own camera footage

- 3.15 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.
- 3.16 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.
- 3.17 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 does not consider this is a practical suggestion.
- 3.18 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.
- 3.19 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.

- 3.20 The committee intends to pursue these matters with the television bureaus and the DPS Broadcasting staff to determine whether better access for additional cameras is possible.

Other matters

Accessing documents.

- 3.21 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 problems.
- 3.22 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

- 3.23 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

- 3.24 Committee members were somewhat surprised to learn that many members of the press gallery did not know where to find the Main Committee. Little wonder then 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.
- 3.25 The committee considers that still photography of Main Committee proceedings would be facilitated if photographers could directly

apply for permission to the Deputy Speaker. His office could then inform the duty Chair and clerks that permission has been given. The committee is keen to pursue with the press gallery ways to facilitate their coverage of activities in the Main Committee.

Access to parliamentary committee proceedings

Television coverage

- 3.26 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 has cameras but this room is used almost exclusively by Senate estimates committees and rarely by House of Representatives committees.
- 3.27 The committee would like to see more committee rooms equipped with inbuilt cameras. The DPS submission notes that this would require substantial additional funding.⁵ 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.
- 3.28 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 need to make arrangements to hold its public hearings in a room with televising facilities.
- 3.29 Sky News is interested in providing more coverage of parliamentary committees and the committee strongly supports this approach.⁶ 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

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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.

hearings could resolve to permit televising – either through the House Monitoring System or by bureau television cameras for a set period.

- 3.30 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 5

The committee recommends that the Department of Parliamentary Services install inbuilt cameras in House of Representatives committee rooms to allow additional television coverage of committee proceedings. Given cost constraints, it may be practical to stagger the installation of such cameras.

Still photography access to committee hearings

- 3.31 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.
- 3.32 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.

Conclusion

- 3.33 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.

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