

Current and emerging issues

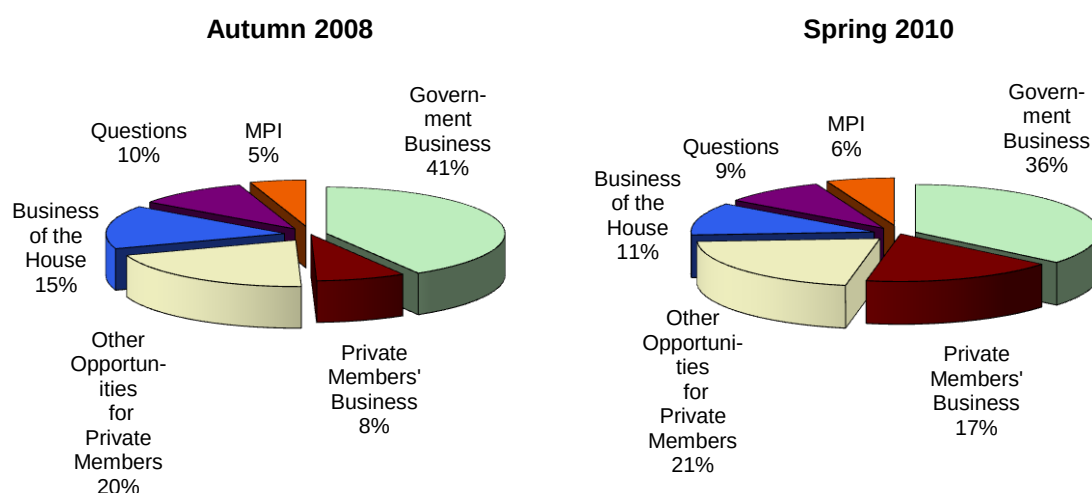
- 5.1 For many of the procedural reforms in the 43rd Parliament, it is too early for the Committee to provide a considered view. However, specific issues have been identified which the Committee would prefer to see addressed quickly, or has noted warrant further monitoring.
- 5.2 Members indicated they hold significant concerns over the increase in weekly sitting hours and the adverse impact of longer sitting days on the health and wellbeing of Members, their staff and parliamentary staff. Members are also concerned about the impact of additional sitting hours on their productivity and their ability to perform their duties effectively. These are considered in more detail below.
- 5.3 Other issues raised include possible refinements to enhance the implementation of procedural changes or to address anomalies. Where the Committee believes there is appropriate justification for immediate change, it has made comment accordingly. For other issues that have arisen, the Committee will monitor these closely over the next several months prior to forming a considered view in its next report.

Changes to weekly sitting hours

- 5.4 Reforms to provide additional opportunities for private Members have been accompanied by both an increase in sitting hours and an extension of sitting days with significant consequences for Members, their staff and parliamentary staff.

5.5 In the 42nd Parliament, the scheduled weekly sitting hours comprised 48 and a half hours: 36 hours in the House and 12 and a half hours in the Main Committee. The scheduled time has been extended by 7 and a half hours in the 43rd Parliament, now totalling 56 hours over four sitting days per week (40 hours in the House and 16 hours in the Main Committee). Figure 5.1 shows how the House's time has been allocated in the first five sitting weeks of the 43rd Parliament in comparison to the first four weeks of the previous parliament. The graphic below illustrates the significant increase in the proportion of time allocated for private Members' business and the decrease in the proportion of time allocated to government business.

Figure 5.1 Business conducted in the House of Representatives 42nd and 43rd parliaments



Source: Statistical Digests prepared by the Chamber Research Office.

Government business includes government sponsored legislation and motions (including motions to suspend standing orders) and ministerial statements.

Private Members' business includes legislation and motions (including motions to suspend standing orders) sponsored by private Members and statements by Members.

Other opportunities for private Members includes adjournment debates, grievance debates and debate on the Address in Reply.

Business of the House includes time spent on petitions, giving notices, presentation of papers (excluding motions to take note), privilege matters, personal explanations, dissent motions, announcements of ministerial arrangements, motions to appoint committees (unless moved by private Members), statements and debate on committee reports, motions for addresses, votes of condolence, leave of absence and special adjournment.

- 5.6 The additional sitting hours have had a significant impact on the average length of each sitting day. For the first sitting period of the 43rd Parliament the extended hours translated in practice to an average sitting day¹ of 10 hours and 2 minutes in the House and 4 hours and 12 minutes in the Main Committee. Compared to the equivalent period in the 42nd Parliament, the average sitting day has been extended by one hour in the House and one hour in the Main Committee. A comparison of the set meeting and adjournment times for the current and previous parliaments is reflected in Tables 5.1 and 5.2 below.

Table 5.1 Set meeting and adjournment times of the House, 43rd Parliament

1	2	3	4
day	meeting commences	adjournment proposed	House adjourns
Monday	10.00 am	9.30 pm	10.30 pm
Tuesday	2.00 pm	9.30 pm	10.30 pm
Wednesday	9.00 am	7.00 pm	8.00 pm
Thursday	9.00 am	4.30 pm	5.00 pm

Source: Standing order 29(b), 20 October 2010.

Table 5.2 Set meeting and adjournment times of the House, 42nd Parliament

1	2	3	4
day	meeting commences	adjournment proposed	House adjourns
Monday	12 noon	9.30 pm	10.00 pm
Tuesday	2.00 pm	8.30 pm	9.00 pm
Wednesday	9.00 am	7.30 pm	8.00 pm
Thursday	9.00 am	4.30 pm	5.00 pm

Source: Standing order 29(b), 1 December 2008.

- 5.7 The duties of a parliamentarian do not begin and end when parliament is sitting. Days start early with caucus and committee meetings, particularly on Monday and Tuesday mornings. Many Members spend considerable time travelling to and from Canberra and on returning to their electorate have obligations in their offices and their communities.
- 5.8 When parliament is sitting, Members are not required to be present in the House or Main Committee continuously, enabling them to attend to other activities. Due to the close numbers, Members have a greater requirement

1 All times given in paragraphs 5.5 to 5.6 exclude time for suspensions.

to be 'on call' for divisions than in previous parliaments. Even at times when divisions and quorums are deferred, not all Members are free from their obligations to be 'on call' and do not leave Parliament House until the House adjourns.

- 5.9 Feedback from Members identified two further ways that the close margin in numbers between government and opposition Members in the House has impacted on the demands on Members' time. It was noted that there is less flexibility in pairing arrangements which enable Members to be absent from the House for periods of time to attend to other business or personal matters. It was also noted that those government Members serving on the Speaker's Panel have faced additional workloads as the opposition has not nominated any of its Members to serve on the panel.
- 5.10 The additional time for private Members' business has had workload implications for Members and their staff in terms of research and preparation. As shown in Table 5.3 the number of private Members' speeches in the first five sitting weeks of the 43rd Parliament is more than twice the number for the first four sitting weeks in the 42nd Parliament (525 speeches versus 219 speeches respectively).

Table 5.3 Number of speeches

Private Members' Speeches	42 nd Parliament (Autumn 2008)		43 rd Parliament (Spring 2010)	
	Occurrences	Number	Occurrences	Number
Adjournment	17	101	21	214
Grievance	2	7	4	25
90 second statements	2	20	14	134
3 minute constituency statement	9	91	15	152
Total		219		525

Source: Chamber Research Office statistics, as at December 2010.

The impact of longer sitting hours

- 5.11 The longer sitting hours have been questioned publicly by representatives from both sides of politics² and prompted Members to raise concerns about potentially adverse effects on the health of Members, their staff, and

2 ABC News Website, viewed on 15 December 2010 at: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/11/27/3078096.htm>.

parliamentary staff. Members who participated in a private round table meeting with the Committee were unanimous in their view that the current sitting hours cannot be sustained because of their implications for good health and the quality of their work.

- 5.12 In October 2010 Dr Mal Washer MP expressed his concerns about the physical and emotional toll on Members and their staff. In an interview with the ABC, Dr Washer observed:

...at the moment I've got people walking around with lots of respiratory problems because their immune systems are being compromised, they're fatigued, they're not as sharp as they would normally be.

And so we're creating to some level slight dysfunctionality in our politicians.³

- 5.13 Dr Washer reiterated these concerns, noting:

These additional hours are having an adverse effect on the mental and physical health of Members, their staff and the staff of the Parliament.

The result is mental and physical fatigue leading to altered mood with higher levels of anxiety and depression, poor concentration and often abnormal sleep patterns. Physically there is a drop in fitness levels and reduced immunity which would affect resistance to infection and malignancy and exacerbate chronic disease. There is a greater tendency for the use of medication to assist with sleeping and with some increased alcohol consumption.

Many Members have time zone differences up to 3 hours during Eastern Daylight Saving further compounding the problem and are fatigued by up to 7 or more hours of travelling to Canberra.

We all have a duty to care for ourselves and our staff.⁴

- 5.14 The potentially adverse health effects due to long sitting hours are not a new concern. Previous Procedure Committee reports have supported the view that the fatigue associated with late night sittings may compromise the health and wellbeing of Members and staff.⁵

3 ABC News Website, viewed on 15 December 2010 at:
<<http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2010/s3052657.htm>>.

4 Dr M Washer, *Submission no. 2*, p 1.

5 See Standing Committee on Procedure, *Days and hours of sitting and the effective use of the time of the House*, 29 May 1986, Parliamentary Paper No. 108/86; and Standing Committee on Procedure, *About Time: Bills, questions and working hours* – Report of the inquiry into reform of the House of Representatives, 28 October 1993, Parliamentary Paper No. 194/93.

- 5.15 In 1994, for example, substantial changes to the hours and routine of business in the House, including the abolition of late night sittings and the establishment of the Main Committee as an alternative debating forum, resulted from recommendations of a Procedure Committee report chaired by the Hon Dr Neal Blewett. The 1993 report, *About Time: Bills, questions and working hours*, sought to address concerns about the adverse consequences of late sitting hours on the health of Members and parliamentary staff. Members at the time had also questioned their effectiveness in carrying out their duties as parliamentarians due to the length and lateness of the hours they were working.⁶

Adapting to additional sitting hours

- 5.16 The increased sitting hours have caused Members to significantly alter their travel habits. Monday morning sittings now commence at 10 am in the House and 10.30 am in the Main Committee.⁷ For some Members, it is no longer possible to travel in the morning on sitting Mondays. Instead, Members have to travel on the Sunday, leaving less time for constituency matters and family commitments.
- 5.17 Informal feedback suggests that some Members, in considering the wellbeing of their staff, are not requiring their staff to work the later hours and are allowing them to travel to Canberra on the Monday morning in spite of the earlier start. As a consequence, Members are carrying a greater proportion of the additional workload than they otherwise might.
- 5.18 The Committee notes that Monday morning travel would not be a viable option during the winter months because of uncertainty due to fog.
- 5.19 The Committee is conscious that while Members can choose to send their own staff home while the House is sitting, they have no influence over the working hours of parliamentary support staff, and Members have observed the additional strain on these staff.
- 5.20 There was no evidence to suggest that the new arrangements had led Members to spend less time discharging their responsibilities as parliamentarians. Members noted they were adjusting by reducing their sleep and exercise and travelling earlier to Canberra on Sundays (foregoing attending electorate functions which they were previously able

6 Standing Committee on Procedure, *About Time: Bills, questions and working hours* – Report of the inquiry into reform of the House of Representatives, 28 October 1993, Parliamentary Paper No. 194/93, p 30.

7 Formerly on Mondays sitting commenced at 12 noon in the Chamber and 4.00 pm in the Main Committee.

to attend) in order to avoid an additional late night at the start of a sitting week. Members also indicated they were less satisfied with the quality of their work now, particularly their speeches, and this was exacerbated towards the end of a sitting week. Members questioned whether the increased hours had generated increased productivity.

Committee comment

- 5.21 Members recognise that parliament is at the core of their role as representatives. However, the hours in which the House chooses to conduct its business should aim to reflect community expectations of efficiency balanced with workplace health and safety.
- 5.22 During the Committee's private roundtable, a number of options were canvassed in consultation with Members as to how their workloads may be reduced with minimal impact on the business of the House. Suggestions focused largely on ways to reduce the length of sitting days to allow Members, particularly those from Western Australia, to travel to Canberra later on Sundays or early on Mondays. There were no suggestions to reduce the amount of time allocated to government business. Some of the proposed 'solutions' included:
- revising the order of business, including:
 - ⇒ delaying the commencement of sitting on Monday to 12 noon to allow Members to travel to Canberra later on Sunday or early on Monday mornings of sitting weeks;
 - ⇒ compensating for the later commencement on Mondays by sitting at 12 noon on Tuesdays;
 - ⇒ reducing the time allocated for the adjournment debate from an hour to half an hour on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, thereby reducing the sitting day by half an hour;
 - ⇒ moving the adjournment debate to the Main Committee at an earlier hour;
 - ⇒ reducing the time allocated for private Members' business (currently accounting for 17% of the House's time) and with no reduction of the time allocated for government business (currently accounting for 40% of the House's time);
 - extending the periods where divisions and quorums are deferred (currently on Monday and Tuesday evenings from 6.30-8.00 pm); and
 - scheduling (an) additional sitting week(s) to enable a reduction in sitting hours through the rest of the year.

- 5.23 Members expect to work hard and they are honoured to have their various obligations. What does concern them, however, is the likelihood that because of the increased length of sitting days and corresponding additional competition for their time, they will not be able to meet their expectations of themselves, much less the expectations of their constituents or colleagues in their party or on their committees and so on. The Committee acknowledges the point made by the Clerk of the House in a submission to the Committee's inquiry into the conduct of the business of the House: '[I]mportant as its work is, the House is also a workplace.'⁸

Recommendation 3

- 5.24 **The Committee recommends that the House considers measures to manage the workload of Members during sitting weeks, having regard to the health and wellbeing of Members, their staff and parliamentary staff, including but not limited to:**
- a) commencing at 12.00 noon on Mondays in the House and 12.30 pm in the Main Committee;**
 - b) commencing at 12.00 noon on Tuesdays in the House;**
 - c) offsetting the reduction in sitting hours resulting from a) and b) by reducing the time allocated to private Members' business each week by three hours;**
 - d) providing that divisions called for after 8.30 pm on Mondays and Tuesdays be deferred until the following day; and**
 - e) reducing the time allocated for adjournment debate by half an hour on one evening.**
- 5.25 The Committee expects that if this recommendation is adopted, the current provision in standing orders for divisions and quorums to be deferred between 6.30 pm and 8.00 pm⁹ on Mondays and Tuesdays will be removed. Typically, when divisions have been conducted after the deferral period on Monday evenings, less time has been available for the final item of private Members' business.¹⁰ Removal of this provision will

8 Department of the House of Representatives, Submission no. 4, p. 2, to the Inquiry into the conduct of the business of the House.

9 Standing order 133(b), 20 October 2010.

10 Mr B Wright, Clerk of the House of Representatives, *Submission no. 1*, p 2.

ensure that there is no disruption to private Members' business on Monday evenings.

- 5.26 The Committee also acknowledges that, if adopted, the measures recommended above will have a positive impact on Members' commitments and working hours but that obligations on parliamentary staff will continue to be onerous. These obligations on staff should be monitored closely and additional staffing be funded as necessary.

Refinements to improve the efficiency of proceedings

- 5.27 In addition to offering some general observations on the implementation of the procedural changes, the Clerk of the House submitted detailed suggestions for consideration, some of which would require fine-tuning of standing orders, and others which would require a change in practice. The proposed changes are intended to address unforeseen anomalies in the standing orders and/or to enhance procedural efficacy. Specific issues raised include arrangements for:

- speaking times associated with the presentation of private Members' bills;
- scheduling of private Members' items in the Main Committee and return of items from the Main Committee; and
- speaking time limits for debates not otherwise provided for and items of private Members' business.

- 5.28 The following section summarises refinements proposed in the Clerk's submission which have not been addressed earlier in this report. The Clerk's submission has been included at Appendix E for easy reference.

Presentation of private Members' bills

- 5.29 There is a degree of duplication arising from the two-stage approach to private Members' bills, whereby a Member may make a statement (not exceeding 10 minutes) on presenting a bill, and then may speak again in support of the bill if the Selection Committee sets time for the second reading to be moved:

This two-stage approach has been a feature of the arrangements for private Members' bills for more than 20 years. It seems that the original idea was that a private member would present a bill on a Monday and make a 5 minute statement. The second reading

would then be moved and debated on the Thursday; the 5 minute statement having allowed members to explain their proposals briefly.¹¹

- 5.30 This duplication could be addressed by amending standing orders to facilitate Members presenting private Members' bills to move the second reading at the time of presentation, rather than making a statement with debate then being adjourned.¹² Such a move would also ensure that private Members' bills are treated procedurally in the same manner as government bills.

Private Members' items in the Main Committee

- 5.31 Two modifications suggested to enhance procedural efficacy relate to the scheduling of private Members' business items for the Main Committee and the return of items of private Members' business from the Main Committee.

- 5.32 When the Selection Committee schedules items of private Members' business for the Main Committee, currently the Speaker presents copies of the items to the House and further debate is automatically referred to the Main Committee.¹³ A refinement to the standing orders would provide that items scheduled for the Main Committee by the Selection Committee are deemed to have been referred by the House:

This would obviate the need for the Speaker to table the terms of matters in the House and for the matters to be deemed to be presented or moved before they can stand referred to the Main Committee. It would also allow the Member responsible for a notice to initiate a matter in the Main Committee by presenting a bill or moving a motion.¹⁴

- 5.33 The second proposal relates to the return of items of private Members' business from the Main Committee. Presently, this is achieved via a formal report by the Speaker when other business is not before the House.¹⁵ A more efficient practice would be for a Member to move, in the Main Committee, that further proceedings be conducted in the House, as provided by standing order 197(a).¹⁶ This would enable returned items to

11 Mr B. Wright, Clerk of the House of Representatives, *Submission no. 1*, p 1.

12 Mr B. Wright, Clerk of the House of Representatives, *Submission no. 1*, pp 1-2.

13 See standing orders 41(d) and 41(g), 20 October 2010.

14 Mr B Wright, Clerk of the House of Representatives, *Submission no. 1*, p 2.

15 See standing order 198, 20 October 2010.

16 Mr B Wright, Clerk of the House of Representatives, *Submission no. 1*, p 2.

be listed as orders of the day on the Notice Paper, where they could be called upon to be voted on during government business time if standing orders were suspended. This change would require a change in practice and is not prohibited by the standing orders.

Speaking time limits

- 5.34 The reduction in time limits for most second reading speeches from 20 minutes to 15 minutes appears to be successful. Consideration might be given to also reducing time limits for debates not otherwise provided for (currently 20 minutes for the mover and 15 minutes for other speakers) to 15 minutes for the mover and 10 minutes for other Members. The current 'default' provision applies in the case of motions to take note of papers and motions to suspend standing orders by leave.¹⁷
- 5.35 An anomaly relates to the time limits which apply when items of private Members' business are called on during government business time. The Selection Committee routinely sets time limits for each Member speaking on an item during time set aside for consideration of private Members' business. However, when an item is called on during government business time, Members are subject to the standard time limits, which are usually longer than those determined by the Selection Committee.
- 5.36 A further issue with speaking time limits was raised by the Selection Committee in its report to the House on 21 October 2010. The Selection Committee noted its difficulty in allocating lower speaking times than those provided under standing order 1 for the mover and lead speakers in the second reading debates of private Members' bills. While standing order 222 provides for the Selection Committee to determine speaking times for second reading debates, it is unclear whether this overrides the maximum times specified under standing order 1.
- 5.37 The Committee would welcome all of these matters being considered by the House in the expectation that the House is committed to continuing to improve and refine procedures.

17 Mr B Wright, Clerk of the House of Representatives, *Submission no. 1*, p 3.

Other issues

Stating the question on amendments

5.38 A discussion paper submitted by the Clerk¹⁸ considered a change in practice to the way questions on amendments are stated and put to the House.

5.39 The long-standing practice has been for amendments to motions to be moved in the form that all words after ‘that’ be omitted with a view to substituting other words, as provided by standing order 122(a)(ii):

Standing order 122(a)(ii):

If the purpose is to omit certain words in order to insert or add other words, the question shall be –

That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question.

If this question is resolved in the affirmative, the amendment is disposed of: if negatived, the Speaker shall put a further question –

That the words proposed be [inserted, or added].

5.40 The Clerk noted that stating the question in this form can be ‘counter-intuitive and puzzling to members and observers’ because Members in favour of an amendment must vote ‘no’ on the initial question. Furthermore, where an amendment is supported by a majority but contested, two divisions are required for the amendment to be made.¹⁹

5.41 Standing order 122(b) already includes provision for the shortened form ‘that the amendment be agreed to’, provided that no Member objects. The wording in this provision is such that if any Member objected, the Chair would have no discretion and the longer form of the question would need to be put.²⁰ The simpler form is currently used for detailed stage amendments and sometimes for amendments to motions, such as those moved by Ministers to non-government Members’ motions.

5.42 The Clerk identified a number of advantages of the question on amendments always being stated in the alternative simpler form:

- it is much more straight forward than the “words stand” form and will always be clear to members and those following

18 Exhibit no. 1.

19 Mr B Wright, Clerk of the House of Representatives, *Exhibit no. 1*, p 14.

20 Mr B Wright, Clerk of the House of Representatives, *Exhibit no. 1*, p 12.

proceedings. Members in favour of the amendment vote 'aye' and those against it vote 'no' ...;

- it allows amendments to be moved to the amendment itself;
- if an amendment is defeated other amendments can be moved to the main question, as well as amendments to the question "that the motion, as amended, be agreed to";
- in the case of amendments going to a vote, one division only is required to make a decision on the amendment.²¹

- 5.43 One of the negative aspects of moving to the shorter form for all amendments is that should an amendment to a motion be agreed to, the second question will be that the motion, as amended, be agreed to. The mover of the original motion is therefore denied a distinct vote on their proposition.²² Another, perhaps less significant, consequence of moving to the simpler form is that, if the trend whereby most amendments are moved by non-government Members to government sponsored motions were to continue, most Members would be required to cross to different sides of the House for divisions.
- 5.44 The Committee acknowledges the potential for confusion in the way in which questions on amendments are currently stated and put to the House. While the closeness of the current numbers in the House has drawn attention to this matter, the Clerk emphasised that change should only occur on the basis that it would be a long-term change, irrespective of the composition of the House.²³
- 5.45 The Committee considers that there is merit in trialling the shortened form 'that the amendment be agreed to' for all amendments, noting that standing orders already provide that it would remain open to any Member to object and require that the longer form be used.

Listing of private Members' business items to be voted on in the Notice Paper

- 5.46 Current practice is that items of private Members' business which the Selection Committee has recommended be voted on are listed in reports of the Selection Committee. Selection Committee reports are published online on the Committee's home page after presentation to the House. While this makes the recommendations public, it may be of assistance to Members and others if items recommended for voting are listed in the Notice Paper.²⁴ This could be facilitated by a minor amendment to

21 Mr B Wright, Clerk of the House of Representatives, *Exhibit no. 1*, p 15.

22 Mr B Wright, Clerk of the House of Representatives, *Exhibit no. 1*, pp 15-16.

23 Mr B Wright, Clerk of the House of Representatives, *Exhibit no. 1*, p 17.

24 Mr B Wright, Clerk of the House of Representatives, *Submission no. 1*, p 3.

standing order 222 which requires that the Selection Committee's recommendations on items to be voted on are published on the Notice Paper prior to any action being taken on them.

- 5.47 The Committee would be pleased if this action were taken and expects that it would reduce any possible confusion.

Selection Committee

- 5.48 As discussed in Chapter 2, the House Selection Committee was re-established at the beginning of the 43rd Parliament with a wider role than Selection Committees established in the 41st and previous parliaments. The 11-member Committee is chaired by the Speaker and is comprised of government, opposition and non-aligned Members. Previous Selection Committees were chaired by the Deputy Speaker. The Clerk has suggested that, while it has been beneficial to have the Speaker chair the Committee given its wider responsibilities, it may be appropriate to consider whether the Speaker should be a step removed given the potential significance of decisions of the Committee, for example, in the scheduling of items of business and consideration of the referral of bills to committees.²⁵

Appointment of supplementary members to House committees

- 5.49 Reforms to House committees have sought to increase flexibility by reducing the number of permanent committee positions and increasing opportunities for Members to be supplementary members on inquiries of particular interest to them. In informal feedback provided to the Committee, it has been suggested that the current phrasing in standing orders 215(d) and 229(c) which provide that a committee may 'supplement its membership' has created the mistaken impression by some people that committees have a role in appointing their supplementary members. A minor amendment to the standing orders may be required to clarify that appointment of supplementary members occurs through the usual mechanisms pursuant to standing order 229.

25 Mr B Wright, Clerk of the House of Representatives, *Submission no. 1*, p. 4.

Naming of the Main Committee

- 5.50 The Deputy Speaker, the Hon Peter Slipper, invited the Committee to consider the matter of renaming the Main Committee, which has been proposed by previous Procedure Committees in 2000 and 2004.²⁶
- 5.51 In 2000, the then Procedure Committee recommended that the Main Committee be renamed 'the Second Chamber', while the 2004 Procedure Committee recommended the name 'the Federation Chamber of the House of Representatives' ('Federation Chamber' for short).²⁷ Neither recommendation was adopted.
- 5.52 The Deputy Speaker noted that the rationale behind previous proposals to rename the Main Committee included that the separation of the Main Committee from the Main Committee Room has resulted in confusion between the two, but also that a name change could enhance the status and role of the alternative chamber. The Deputy Speaker stated:
- I consider the reasons given in earlier reports for a name change were very persuasive.²⁸
- 5.53 The Committee intends to consult more broadly on this issue prior to giving this matter further consideration.

Committee comment

- 5.54 The Committee agrees in principle to the need for minor amendments and updates to the standing orders and, where necessary, changes in current practice, to enhance the operations of the House, correct oversights and ensure consistency.

Recommendation 4

- 5.55 **The Committee recommends that draft amendments to standing orders which enhance the operations of the House and correct oversights and inconsistencies be prepared and proposed for consideration by the House.**

26 See Standing Committee on Procedure, *The second chamber: enhancing the Main Committee*; 14 August 2000, Parliamentary Paper No. 158/2000; and Standing Committee on Procedure, *Renaming the Main Committee*, 3 June 2004, Parliamentary Paper No. 118/2004.

27 Hon P Slipper, *Submission no. 3.1*, p 1.

28 Hon P Slipper, *Submission no. 3.1*, p 1.

Concluding statement

- 5.56 Following a prolonged period of majority governments at the federal level in Australia, the power of the executive is reflected in the practice of the House. A corollary of this dominance has been a decrease in the authority of the parliament as an institution. While this situation continued, calls for parliamentary reform to redress the balance went largely unheeded by successive governments. However, the outcome of the 2010 election provided an ideal opportunity to negotiate a parliamentary reform agenda and the *Agreement for a Better Parliament: Parliamentary Reform* came into being. The 43rd Parliament opened on 28th September 2010 and on the following day significant procedural reforms were implemented.
- 5.57 The Committee, while recognising that the reforms will necessarily need a period of adaptation, considered an important part of its role was to capture early views, experiences and information. In this report the Committee has sought to provide an overview of the Agreement and the mechanisms used to support the implementation of its proposals. Based on observations from the early stages of the 43rd Parliament, input from Members and the Clerk, the Committee has, where possible, provided initial comments on the practicality and operability of the procedural reforms. The Committee has considered more detailed evidence including suggestions for fine-tuning standing orders to address anomalies and/or to enhance procedural efficacy. Where appropriate the Committee has indicated in-principle support for change.
- 5.58 As the 43rd Parliament progresses, the Committee will continue to monitor and review the changes. It will provide further opportunities for input on all aspects of the reforms. The Committee intends to report in more detail to the House on matters associated with the procedural reforms after there has been a greater opportunity for assessment. It may then make further recommendations on aspects of the reforms that require fine tuning, or more substantial amendment.

JULIE OWENS MP

Chair

28 April 2011

