

Interim Report: Monitoring and review of procedural changes implemented in the 43rd Parliament

House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Procedure

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Foreword

Following the election of 21 August 2010 the finely balanced numbers in the Parliament provided an opportunity for unaligned Members to pursue a more open Parliament by changing some of the habits and practices that had been developed over decades of substantial majority governments on both sides.

A more open Parliament was sought through ‘an increase in the authority and opportunity for participation for all 150 Members of the House, regardless of their party or status’.

Changes to House practice and procedure to support a new style of Parliament were agreed during the negotiations between the political parties and unaligned Members in the period between the election and the formation of government. They were expressed in the Agreement for a Better Parliament: Parliamentary Reform and are embodied in procedural changes introduced into the House and passed on 29 September 2010, the second day of the 43rd Parliament.

The Agreement was founded on the role of all Members as ‘local’ Members and the Parliament’s institutional role and authority, separate from Executive Government. It sought cultural as well as procedural change.

At the time of commencing to write this report, the House had sat for five weeks – enough time to make some early observations, but insufficient to comprehensively review the changes in action.

Consequently, this interim report will be followed by a more considered report after there has been more time to observe the impact of the changes.

In keeping with the Procedure Committee’s responsibility to scrutinise the practices and procedures of the House, this report is principally a technical review. It sets out the various changes agreed to and the means by which they are being implemented. It does not evaluate them as substantive and fulfilling of

initial hopes, or otherwise. It documents the early days, tells of the initial reactions of Members and suggests some initial fine-tuning.

The word 'reform' connotes improvement and correction. Whether the 43rd Parliament ushered in a period of procedural reform and strengthening of the Parliamentary institution or simply a period of change – of a different framework - remains to be seen, as does whether or not the objectives of the changes have been met – or will be met.

While it is unusual for Chairs to comment on the body of a report in the foreword, I raise one issue that was presented strongly by backbenchers from both sides of Parliament, and that is the length of the sitting day and the increased workload of the additional sitting hours. It is probably not politically wise to raise this issue, but nor is it wise to be silent on it.

Members of Parliament recognise that Parliamentary work is the central role of representatives, but Members of Parliament have the same responsibility as all members of the community to consider the balance between their health, their ability to do quality work, and a healthy relationship with family. Many Members of Parliament regularly work 12 hour days both in Parliament and in their electorates, but there is a strong view that the new hours which extend the Parliamentary days beyond that are not sustainable.

Consequently we have asked for a moderation of hours at this early stage of the review process.

Julie Owens MP
Chair



Membership of the Committee

Chair Ms Julie Owens MP

Deputy Chair Mr Russell Broadbent MP

Members	Ms Sharon Bird MP	Mr Ewen Jones MP
	Hon Joel Fitzgibbon MP	Mr Sid Sidebottom MP
	Mr Steve Irons MP	

Committee Secretariat

Secretary Ms Catherine Cornish

Inquiry Secretary Ms Alison Clegg (to 17/02/11)
Mr Justin Baker (from 20/02/11)

Research Officers Ms Naomi Swann
Ms Penny Branson



Terms of reference

To monitor and report on procedural changes implemented in the House of Representatives in the 43rd Parliament.



List of abbreviations

ALP	Australian Labor Party
MPI	Matter of Public Importance
PBO	Parliamentary Budget Office



List of recommendations

3 Strengthening the parliament: increased participation by all Members

Recommendation 1 (para 3.27)

The Committee recommends that the Selection Committee be encouraged to implement the 'General principles relating to the selection of private Members' business' and exercise the flexibility that is available to it pursuant to standing order 222 and the principles, particularly in relation to the length of debates and speaking times allocated.

Recommendation 2 (para 3.30)

The Committee recommends that the House take up the Selection Committee's recommendation that it consider adopting the 'General principles relating to the selection of private Members' business' (contained in Report No. 3 of the Selection Committee of 21 October 2010).

5 Current and emerging issues

Recommendation 3 (para 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.

Recommendation 4 (para 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.

