

Promoting community involvement in the work of committees

Conference of committee chairs, deputy chairs and secretaries
6 March 2001

House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Procedure

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Contents

Foreword.....	v
Membership of the committee	vii
Committee secretariat.....	vii
Terms of reference of the committee.....	ix
1 Introduction.....	1
‘It’s your House’ report	1
The work of committees	3
Strategies for promoting inquiries	3
2 Conference of committee chairs, deputy chairs and secretaries	5
Format of the conference	5
Since It’s your House.....	5
Identity	6
Advertising	7
Publications	8
Seminars	9
Media liaison.....	10
Internet	11
Developing staff.....	11
Involving schools	12
3 Ideas in action.....	13
Case study 1—Economics Committee.....	13
Taking the city to the country	13

Case study 2—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Committee	17
Working with remote communities	17
Case study 3—Joint Standing Committee on Treaties.....	19
Explaining international treaty making to the public	19
Some other effective ways of improving input to inquiries	20
Letting large numbers of people have a say	20
Radio advertising.....	21
 4 Conclusions and recommendations.....	 23
Organisation of the conference	23
Structure	25
Proposals emerging from the conference	25
Support services.....	25
Issues	26
 Appendix A – Conference agenda and participants.....	 31
 Appendix B – It’s your House report: Recommendations relating to committees and the community	 35
 Appendix C – Speaker’s response to Procedure Committee report: It’s your House	 41
 Appendix D – Government response to Procedure Committee report: It’s your House	 59



Foreword

When he was tabling *It's your House*, the report of the Standing Committee on Procedure into community involvement in the procedures and practices of the House of Representatives and its committees, the then chair of the committee, Christopher Pyne MP, remarked that the committee had 'ventured beyond the parameters of its normal, dry, procedural field of activity to look at the interaction between the House and the community'.¹

That inquiry reflected a concern among Members that the constructive work that the Parliament achieves was being discounted by the increasing cynicism with which the institution of Parliament and its Members are regarded by the community. That report and this follow up represent the Procedure Committee's concern to look at the processes of the House, especially its committees, to try to make them more effective and relevant to today's Australians. Bob McMullan MP, Manager of Opposition Business in the House, rightly reflected when discussing the *It's your House* report:

If people's respect for these institutions is declining, it is those of us in the institutions who have to look at what we are doing. We should not say, 'Why is it that the people do not understand what a wonderful job we are doing?' In a democracy, we need to respond to the concern that they are articulating. ... It is important that members of the House and the Parliament as a whole give serious attention to questions about the processes: their openness, their accessibility and their appropriateness to the coming 21st century and its demands and expectations.²

This report gathers together information about some of the action that committees have been taking to improve community understanding of their work and get people more involved in what they are doing.

1 House of Representatives Debates, 22.11.99, p.12237

2 House of Representatives Debates, 8. 12.99, p.13173

I trust that Members of the House to whom this report is principally addressed will take encouragement from the efforts of their peers and be inspired to pursue greater innovation and outreach to the community they work in and represent. The process of improving connections between the Parliament and the community is an ongoing one and I look forward to reports of continuing progress at the next conference.

Gary Nairn MP
Chair



Membership of the committee

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Terms of reference of the committee

To inquire into and report on the practices and procedures of the House generally with a view to making recommendations for their improvement or change and for the development of new procedures

Introduction

‘It’s your House’ report

- 1.1 On 6 March 2001 the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure hosted a conference of committee chairs, deputy chairs and secretaries. The aim of the conference was to share experiences and ideas on how to promote a better public understanding of the work of House of Representatives committees and joint committees of the Parliament.
- 1.2 The impetus for the conference came from recommendation 12 of a report by the Procedure Committee on community involvement in the procedures and practices of the House of Representatives.¹ Entitled *It’s Your House*, this report was presented to the House on 22 November 1999.
- 1.3 The *It’s Your House* report highlights the importance of Members of Parliament individually and collectively keeping in touch with community views, monitoring the effects on people of legislation and government action, and encouraging the public to better understand and participate in the work of committees. This is especially important in an environment characterized by community scepticism about the ability of Members to understand and respond to community needs. The *It’s Your House* report reflected the view of Members that more effective community involvement is essential to maintain and build confidence in parliamentary processes.

1 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, *It’s your House: Community involvement in the procedures and practices of the House of Representatives and its committees*, October 1999, p.44

- 1.4 *It's Your House* examined the opportunities for individuals and community groups to become more involved in the procedures and practices of the House. Committees represent the greatest opportunity for community involvement and, as a consequence, the report placed considerable emphasis on their work. The report discussed ways of improving community involvement in, and understanding of, committees. Thus, of the 31 recommendations made in the report, 20 concern committees². (Report recommendations concerning committees can be found at Appendix B.)
- 1.5 Many of the actions recommended in the *It's Your House* report did not require approval by the House and were implemented speedily. Some other recommendations have since been implemented by the House. The recommendations concerning committees can be loosely grouped into four main categories, these are:
- making the committee process more open;
 - making committees more independent;
 - encouraging committees to be more flexible and innovative; and
 - improving the image and understanding of committees in the general community.³
- 1.6 The Speaker and the Government separately responded to the report on 10 October 2000 (for responses see Appendixes C and D). Both responses supported a once per Parliament meeting of committee chairs, deputy chairs and secretaries.⁴ The conference hosted by the Procedure Committee on 6 March 2001 was the first of these meetings.
- 1.7 The aim of this report is to summarise action taken since the *It's your House* report, document the issues raised at the conference and examine in more detail some of the strategies different committees have used to promote public participation in inquiries and raise awareness of the work that committees do.

2 *ibid.*, p.41–81

3 Robyn Webber, *Parliament 2000: Towards a modern committee system—Increasing public participation in the work of parliamentary committees*, Australasian Study of Parliament Group, National Conference 2000, p.5

4 Speaker of the House of Representatives, *Speaker's response to the report by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure—It's your House: community involvement in the procedures and practices of the House of Representatives and its committees*, 10 October 2000, p.6; Government, *Response to the report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure: It's your House: community involvement in the procedures and practices of the House of Representatives and its committees*, 10 October 2000, p.4

- 1.8 Chapter 2 discusses changes that have occurred since the *It's Your House* report, a number of issues raised at the meeting and new strategies being used by committees to promote their inquiries and gain greater public involvement.
- 1.9 Chapter 3 uses case studies to examine some of the innovative work being done by committees in this area.
- 1.10 Chapter 4 sets out the committee's conclusions and proposals for future action.

The work of committees

- 1.11 The House of Representatives establishes committees comprising government and non-government Members to carry out investigative type work not easily conducted by the larger body of the House itself. It delegates to its committees some of its important work in scrutinising government administration and activity and in representing community and other views in the policy review process. Committees report their findings and recommendations to the House. In this way the reports are made public and the information and recommendations are fed into the policy making process, hopefully resulting in better administration and public policy.
- 1.12 The work of committees places parliamentarians in direct contact with the public and enables them to canvas a wide range of public views through written submissions, public hearings, inspections and other activities. Committees are a key conduit for the representative role of the House.
- 1.13 More than any other parliamentary activity, committee inquiries bring Parliament to the people by promoting public awareness and debate on matters being considered by the Parliament and by allowing people to directly contribute their views to the parliamentary process.

Strategies for promoting inquiries

- 1.14 Committees have developed a variety of techniques aimed at promoting inquiries and encouraging as wide a range of input as possible. Such strategies include:
 - advertising committee inquiries in major newspapers, special interest magazines or journals related to the subject of the inquiry;

- press releases outlining the terms of reference of the inquiry and other information directed at gaining media attention and participation;
- media conferences, media interviews with the chair of the committee and other members;
- mail-outs of letters to specialists or experts in a field, academics, organisations, state and federal government agencies and departments and lobby groups;
- flyers, pamphlets and brochures detailing an inquiry;
- public meetings, seminars and round table discussions to promote interest in an inquiry;
- production of videos concerning the subject matter of an inquiry;
- electronic communication such as the Internet and email; and
- display of banners and signs at public hearings and seminars as a means of promoting the committee.⁵

1.15 Some of these strategies, such as advertising in major papers or mail-outs, have been in use for many years, while others such as banners and the use of the Internet are still relatively new and their value in assisting the work of committees not yet fully known. The *It's Your House* report recommended that '(r)ather than each committee working in a vacuum there is potentially a benefit in committees sharing their experiences and ideas on how to engender better understanding of their work.'⁶ The conference of chairs, deputy chairs and secretaries was therefore recommended by the committee as a way of coordinating efforts, generating new ideas, sharing experiences and encouraging action.⁷

5 Department of the House of Representatives, *Committee Office Manual of Procedure and Practice*, February 2000, pp 5-12

6 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, *It's Your House: Community involvement in the procedures and practices of the House of Representatives and its committees*, October 1999, p.44

7 id.

Conference of committee chairs, deputy chairs and secretaries

Format of the conference

- 2.1 In introducing the conference the chair of the committee stated that the objectives of the conference were to:
- assess the value of strategies developed so far;
 - share those strategies and ideas among all the committees; and
 - consider priorities for future action.
- 2.2 A copy of the agenda for the conference and a list of those who attended are at appendix A. It began with a briefing on the work being done by the Department of the House of Representatives to support committees in their efforts to promote their inquiries. Two committee chairs presented case studies on particular steps their committees had taken to engage the community in their work. There was some questioning of the presenters and the remainder of the conference was spent in general discussion.
- 2.3 This chapter outlines the information given by presenters and comments made in general discussion structured into activity groupings. Additional details gained separately from committees and others has been incorporated.

Since It's your House

- 2.4 In 1999 the Department of the House of Representatives decided to strengthen its support for committees and the House in their efforts to

engage people more in their work. This decision was chiefly a response to the work done by the Procedure Committee in the *It's Your House* inquiry and an earlier survey of Members' views. A small cell of people was established to work with committees and a specialist communications adviser was employed to boost the media skills available to committees.

2.5 Three main challenges to changing people's attitudes to the House of Representatives were identified. These were:

- helping people to better understand and appreciate the work undertaken by the House and its Members;
- increasing understanding of the way in which the House operates; and
- encouraging people to contribute to the work of the House.

Some of the concerns which created these challenges included:

- negative perceptions about the House and Members within the community;
- a tendency for people to focus on the combative nature of Parliament, rather than on the bipartisan work that is undertaken;
- varying degrees of community understanding about how the House operates; and
- lack of awareness about key operations of the House, such as committees.¹

2.6 Since the report of the committee efforts to achieve change have occurred in a number of areas.

Identity

2.7 The *It's Your House* report identified the need to create an identity for House of Representatives committees separate from that of their Senate counterparts. It is not uncommon for House committees to be confused with Senate or even government committees. It was suggested at the conference that at least some segments of the media did not really understand that there was a comprehensive House committee system operating.

1 House of Representatives, *What's happening at your House? Marketing the House of Representatives*, 2000 National Public Sector Awards for Marketing Excellence, submission



- 2.8 An emblem was designed to make House committees more visible and identifiable. While committees can, and do, use the Australian Coat of Arms and, at times, other logos or symbols such as a stylised Parliament House flagpole, these are also used by other bodies. The new emblem clearly symbolises the House of Representatives chamber.
- 2.9 It is used in publications, signage, advertisements and on banners, particularly at public hearings. An example of the successful use of the new banners and signs is described in chapter 3.

Advertising

- 2.10 In order to reach as many people as possible, traditionally committees have advertised their inquiries in major metropolitan daily newspapers. There is a need to question whether this approach is still appropriate and whether it represents value for money. The conference was told that it is not uncommon for the cost of advertising an inquiry across all major metropolitan newspapers to be about \$20,000 for one advertisement on one day.² This expenditure on one form of advertising limits what other types of advertising committees might choose to pursue and assumes a breadth of readership which metropolitan newspapers may no longer have. Committees have noted that the number of submissions received as a result of traditional newspaper advertisements seems to be limited. Nevertheless committees have an obligation to publicise their inquiries as widely as possible and newspapers are one possible way to do that.
- 2.11 One approach which has been taken is to redesign the style and format of the advertisements to reflect modern design characteristics and be more eye catching. The text of advertisements now uses plain English, avoiding parliamentary jargon and conveying simpler messages.
- 2.12 The first use of the new format was for a Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee inquiry into human cloning. The advertisement received more than 60 responses from the public after it appeared and was featured in

2 Conference, transcript of proceedings (unpublished)

the lead story on the Channel 9 *Today on Saturday* program.³ The new style has now been adapted for all House advertising. This use of a consistent style for committee advertising also helps to strengthen recognition of House committees as a body.

- 2.13 A regular monthly advertisement in the *Australian* newspaper under the title, *What's happening at your House?*, provides consolidated information about committee inquiries and activities. It is placed prominently in the news section of the paper rather than in the classified section. It would appear that these advertisements have resulted in an increased number of inquiries from the general public. The advertisement is also forwarded to more than 30 Members to provide information that can be used in their personal newsletters and other electorate material.⁴
- 2.14 The possibility of extending regular block advertising to other newspapers is being considered to improve the cost effectiveness of advertising.
- 2.15 Advertising of inquiries in other media is also being tested by committees. The inquiry by the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs into human cloning used radio to promote public awareness of its inquiry. The Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts used regional radio to promote a public meeting in a rural area (see Chapter 3).

Publications

- 2.16 A need to consolidate information about the House of Representatives and the committees in a user friendly format was identified. The House of Representatives has many publications about its work but there was no comprehensive single source of information for the public about the House and little recognition of committee work in the community. Two new publications for a general readership have been introduced and a media information bulletin is in preparation.

Your key to the House

- 2.17 A community guide to the House entitled *Your Key to the House* presents basic information on what the House does and how to find out more. The guide uses simple language and visual images of the House. Over 26,000 copies of this publication have been requested throughout Australia since November 1999.⁵

3 House of Representatives, *What's happening at your House? Marketing the House of Representatives*, 2000 National Public Sector Awards for Marketing Excellence, submission

4 id.

5 Conference, transcript of proceedings (unpublished)

About the House magazine

- 2.18 Another publication provides current information about the work of committees, inquiries, reports and facts about the House. This takes the form of a high quality bi-monthly magazine entitled *About the House*. Produced by the Department of the House of Representatives, this publication has grown from around 6,000 copies for the first edition to 13,000 copies in March 2001 distributed throughout Australia.⁶ The magazine features a broad coverage of committee inquiries with each edition. The magazine has generated a significant response from the general public.

Electronic media bulletin

- 2.19 A new electronic media alert bulletin *House Work* has been developed to convey a regular, consolidated summary of committee activity to the media. Distributed by email to media representatives, the bulletin will cover all the subjects of current inquiries. Journalists interested in a particular subject area will be able to access the relevant committee contact details, public hearing schedules and some information on the progress of the inquiry. The bulletin is expected to be available from May.

Seminars

- 2.20 In response to concerns by members about the level and quality of input to committee inquiries particularly from lobby groups and the public sector, a program of seminars was developed.
- 2.21 The seminars, conducted on a cost recovery basis, attract around 700 people annually.⁷ Several different seminars are available: 'About the House', 'About parliamentary committees', 'About legislation' and 'About parliamentary consideration of the Budget'. Seminars have also been tailored in response to specific requests.
- 2.22 Most seminars have been held in Canberra with the primary audience of public servants and lobbyists in mind. However one was successfully conducted in Adelaide in conjunction with a seminar on the work of the Treaties Committee (see chapter 3) and one is scheduled for Melbourne in collaboration with the Public Service and Merit Protection Commission.
- 2.23 The conference discussed the possibility of conducting seminars in regional areas. It was suggested that a seminar could be run in conjunction with a public hearing in a regional centre. This would alleviate some of the

6 House of Representatives, *What's happening at your House? Marketing the House of Representatives*, 2000 National Public Sector Awards for Marketing Excellence, submission

7 Conference, transcript of proceedings (unpublished)

cost and provide a focus for the seminar to attract an audience. The Clerk of the House indicated that the pricing structure for the seminars would be reviewed if any were to be held mainly for individuals rather than representatives of organisations. He thought that it would be appropriate for the price to be reduced in such circumstances.

- 2.24 The conference also discussed the possibility of conducting seminars especially for new press gallery journalists. It was felt that poor understanding of the work of the House and its committees among journalists hindered media coverage.

Media liaison

- 2.25 The *It's your House* report recognised the importance of the media in developing a connection between Parliament and the community. It made a number of recommendations aimed at lifting the media profile of House committees. Its principal recommendation was that the Department of the House of Representatives work with committees to develop a media strategy to improve media support for committees, including the implementation of a professional communications service to provide media support and liaison for committees.⁸ The conference was told of the appointment of a specialist communications adviser and given an outline of some of the action taken to implement this recommendation.
- 2.26 The chair of a committee which had made use of the services of the adviser remarked to the conference that it 'ha(d) really added some horsepower to getting the message across'.⁹ However it was also suggested that there was a particular challenge in gaining more mainstream media attention for the work of those committees or inquiries whose subject matter did not automatically command interest.
- 2.27 It was pointed out that the slow response rate by the Government to reports is a major contributing factor to the lack of media attention experienced by many committees. The media seeks outcomes and results for stories that have a limited life as far as the public interest is concerned. It is difficult to 'sell' the importance of a committee inquiry if the outcomes are not apparent. Recommendations by the Procedure Committee to improve the responsiveness of governments to committee reports have not been implemented.

8 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, *It's your House: Community involvement in the procedures and practices of the House of Representatives and its committees*, October 1999, p.51

9 Conference, transcript of proceedings (unpublished)

- 2.28 As an alternative approach, the Joint Standing Committee on Migration, has in the past regularly called representatives from the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs before the committee to give briefings on progress in responding to or implementing reports of the committee.
- 2.29 Another committee chair suggested that by making a smaller number of recommendations reports could be responded to in a more timely manner. This committee has also begun producing an annual report which evaluates the performance of the committee against recommendations accepted by the Executive.

Internet

- 2.30 The Internet is an important source of information about the work of the House and its committees, particularly for those in remote and regional areas. Committees reported receiving fewer requests for hard copies of submissions and transcripts of proceedings as more people are able to download the information that they require from their websites.
- 2.31 However, while there is a wealth of information available from the House's Internet site, it can be difficult for those not familiar with the House to find what they are looking for. A new *About the House* site was due to be launched in April which would be an electronic version of the magazine and have an emphasis on news and current affairs in relation to the work of committees.
- 2.32 It is intended that the site will eventually incorporate a 'Have your say' facility enabling people to submit their views in relation to particular committee inquiries.
- 2.33 To encourage greater public use of the Internet site, free postcards are available to Parliament House visitors through the guide service. These postcards which can be posted free of charge to anywhere in Australia include the House of Representatives Internet address.

Developing staff

- 2.34 Part of the strategy for improving media support for committees is the development of greater media liaison skills in committee staff. The specialist adviser has been tasked with coordinating workshops, on the job training and media related activities to strengthen these skills across all committee staff. The first workshops were successfully conducted in late 2000.

Involving schools

- 2.35 Committees have increasingly been moving towards encouraging the involvement of school students in their work. The Joint Standing Committee on Treaties has produced a video about the way it works which it hopes can be distributed to schools and universities. The Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration has worked in conjunction with the Parliamentary Education Office to attract senior economics students to its hearings. The Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations in its inquiry into educating boys involved students directly by hosting school forums which sought the views of boys directly concerning their educational needs and experiences.
- 2.36 The *About the House* magazine is being distributed on request to schools and libraries. A number of Members also distribute the magazine to some schools. It was suggested that Members should be asked to nominate a number of organisations, including schools, within their electorates which would form part of a mailing list for the publication.

Ideas in action

- 3.1 The conference heard from two committee chairs about their specific experiences with encouraging better community involvement in the work of their committees. This chapter describes those experiences as well as those of some other committees. The information has been collated from the presentations at the conference and from other information supplied by the committee secretaries.

Case study 1—Economics Committee

Taking the city to the country

- 3.2 The *It's your House* report suggested that committees 'look at public hearings not just as vehicles for gathering information and opinion from witnesses but as opportunities to demonstrate their relevance to a wider audience.'¹ The Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration (Economics Committee) holds six monthly meetings with the Governor of the Reserve Bank. In the past these meetings have been held in Sydney or Melbourne, being the main financial centres in Australia.
- 3.3 Last year the committee decided to hold its 1 December 2000 meeting with Reserve Bank Governor Macfarlane in the regional centre of Wagga Wagga. The members wanted to give a rural community the opportunity

1 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, *It's Your House: Community involvement in the procedures and practices of the House of Representatives and its committees*, October 1999, p44

to see the work of the committee as well as to expose the Reserve Bank Governor to regional Australia's concerns.²

- 3.4 Wagga Wagga was chosen by the committee for a number of reasons. It was accessible enough for ease of travel from Sydney, Melbourne or Canberra. It was able to offer the committee the facilities required for the meeting and has a sufficiently large population to provide an interested audience for such an event. The local member for Riverina, a member of the Economics Committee, went to considerable lengths to assist the arrangements for the visit.
- 3.5 Approximately 30 media representatives attended the meeting. The committee's Reserve Bank meetings always attract a large contingent of media. However the chair noted that representation by some of the major media at Wagga Wagga was slightly less than usual.
- 3.6 About 40 members of the public took the opportunity to attend the meeting, many of whom had attended the Mayor's civic reception held for the committee and the Reserve Bank Governor before the hearing.
- 3.7 There was representation from two local schools with approximately 25 senior economics students attending the hearing. The meeting offered them an opportunity to witness first hand the processes of parliamentary accountability at work. A member of the committee at the meeting put a question that had been constructed by the students to the Reserve Bank Governor. The Governor and the committee members met with the students during a break in proceedings. Students were also provided with an activity working sheet to stimulate their interest and help them maintain their concentration. The activity sheet was developed by the Parliamentary Education Office (PEO) working in conjunction with the committee secretariat.
- 3.8 The local federal Member in Wagga Wagga arranged a civic reception with the Mayor and other activities to give the members of the committee and the Reserve Bank Governor a chance to meet the community. The Member worked with local media to promote the event. In particular, the Governor agreed to give a personal interview on the local television station, something which he very rarely does.
- 3.9 The events which ran in conjunction with the meeting enabled members of the Economics Committee and the Reserve Bank Governor to meet with representatives of the Wagga Wagga community to hear how current economic issues were impacting on regional Australia.
-

2 Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration, media release, 5 September 2000

- 3.10 The meeting in Wagga Wagga stimulated considerable interest from a community that would not otherwise be exposed to the work of this committee. It also gave members and the Reserve Bank Governor an opportunity to enhance their knowledge about regional and rural concerns and their perspective on the monetary policy issues being examined. As a result of this hearing the committee has decided to undertake future regional hearings and it has been suggested by the Governor of the Reserve Bank that more remote locations could be considered.
- 3.11 The hearing in Wagga Wagga built upon other initiatives of the Economics Committee in making its work more widely known and understood.

Targeting school participation

- 3.12 Before the Wagga Wagga meeting, the committee secretariat and the PEO had trialed a proposal to promote the committee's meetings to schools. Prior to a meeting with the Reserve Bank in Melbourne on 22 May 2000, letters were sent to 15 to 20 schools in the local area inviting the attendance of senior secondary economics students. As a result, approximately 120 students attended the meeting.
- 3.13 The students were allocated seats at the venue and refreshments were provided for them. During the meeting break members of the committee talked to them and answered their questions. They also met the Governor of the bank.
- 3.14 The feedback from schools that attended was positive although a very small number of students had found the length of the meeting made concentration a little difficult to maintain. In response to this, the PEO designed the activity worksheets which were used at the Wagga Wagga meeting.

Media liaison

- 3.15 The House Economics Committee has worked on developing a good relationship with the media. At the Wagga Wagga meeting the media representatives were provided with particular facilities in the hearing room including power access for laptops.
- 3.16 Audio feed of the Reserve Bank hearings is transmitted to Parliament House so it can be included as an audio webcast on the Parliament's Internet site and broadcast within Parliament House. This allows the community as well as the media in the parliamentary press gallery and

others at Parliament House to hear an audio broadcast of the meetings and also assists Hansard to produce the transcript of the hearings quickly.

3.17 The committee, unlike some other House committees, has always attracted media attention, however, the committee has found the media's focus on the Reserve Bank rather than the work of the committee unsatisfactory. It was concerned that the committee was becoming a platform for the Reserve Bank with no recognition of the committee's role and its work. To counter this the committee has employed a number of strategies. These are:

- a cooperative attitude of working with the media to promote the event and facilitate the financial media's gathering of the facts;
- displaying House of Representatives banners prominently at hearings;
- using a shortened version of the committee's name, House Economics Committee, on all promotional material and work;
- putting name plates with the committee's name on the table in front of the Governor and Deputy Governors at meetings so as to maximise recognition for the committee in television footage;
- directing where the television cameras and photographers are located during hearings to ensure that there are opportunities to get pictures of both the Governor and the committee members;
- recognising that the Governor's comments would be the focus of media attention after the hearing therefore directing the committee's media activities to before the hearing; and
- contacting the media prior to the hearing to organise interviews with radio and television especially the media outside Parliament House and in regional areas.

Taking advantage of other events

3.18 The date set for the following Reserve Bank meeting to be held in Melbourne coincided with the day after the Centenary of Federation celebrations in that city. The committee decided to make a feature of this and worked towards getting the hearing promoted as an extension of the Centenary of Federation celebrations. The meeting was held in the Victorian Legislative Council Chamber which gave an historic ambience and provided an interesting backdrop for television coverage.

3.19 The committee's work with the media and with students was extended further for this hearing with several different styles of media alert issued beforehand and the communications adviser accompanying the committee

to Melbourne to manage media liaison. In addition the large number of students who attended were provided with information packs about the issues involved in the hearing, the work of committees generally and the centenary of Parliament. Copies of the centenary special issue of *About the House* magazine proved popular with the students and other visitors.

- 3.20 The chair of the Economics Committee noted that his experience showed that an important factor in achieving success in building better understanding between committees, the media and the community is to take a flexible and creative approach. Encouraging such flexibility was a key goal of the Procedure Committee in its *It's your House* recommendations.

Case study 2—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Committee

Working with remote communities

- 3.21 In 1999 the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs undertook an inquiry into the Reeves Review of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1979*. The subject matter of the inquiry was controversial and generated considerable media attention and strong public opinion.
- 3.22 The committee sought the views of as many as possible of the communities that would be affected by the recommendations of the Reeves Review. This required them to travel to indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. On these occasions journalists would often be present. On one occasion a journalist travelled with the committee.
- 3.23 This close association with the media carried with it inherent risks. However rather than exclude the media, the committee embraced their interest and provided a framework for them to operate in.
- 3.24 The media was required to seek the approval of the chair of the committee for any tape recording when meetings were held in urban areas, as is usual practice for recording any proceedings. When in remote communities, permission had to be sought from the community itself. One journalist was warned for taping private conversations but in general journalists respected the potential sensitivity of the situation and accepted the committee's guidance. The committee encouraged the media involvement and provided background briefings.

- 3.25 The chair commented that, at the end of the inquiry, the media had a better understanding of the parliamentarians and the work of the committee because they actually saw them in operation. He also felt that the publicity given on national television showed a positive image of parliamentarians of all political persuasions, men and women, working together and listening to the concerns of people in remote areas of the Northern Territory.

Non traditional evidence gathering

- 3.26 Many formal submissions were received by the inquiry into the Reeves Review, however, the committee recognised the need to work with a range of cultures and not simply rely on traditional ways of evidence gathering. The committee held public meetings which were advertised via local radio stations in four or five regionally specific languages. These public meetings could attract around 200 to 300 participants. Committee staff were able to take a Hansard officer and translators and go into the gathering to record statements from participants.
- 3.27 Initially there was some question as to what actually constituted the record of these meetings. After some consideration it was decided that the translators word as spoken would be recorded by Hansard and that would be considered as evidence.
- 3.28 The committee found that some indigenous people were reluctant to speak in front of large groups. The committee accommodated this reluctance by agreeing to speak to the people concerned in private on the understanding that the transcript of the conversation would be published in the normal way.

Video reporting

- 3.29 During the inquiry the committee found considerable cynicism among communities in the Northern Territory concerning the inquiry process. Many of the participants in the inquiry had been involved in previous inquiries, not necessarily parliamentary inquiries, which had come and gone without seeming to generate any results. This had left the communities with a strong feeling that their views were not really considered. Members of the committee were keen to produce a report that could be accessible to all members of the community and which demonstrated that the committee had listened to and considered community views and concerns.
- 3.30 A video version of the committee's report, *Unlocking the Future*, was produced which employed visual images, symbols and other techniques

to communicate with people whose principal way of gaining information is not through the traditional printed report. It featured film footage of dramatic moments during some of the meetings with Aboriginal communities and explained the process of the inquiry and some of the recommendations.

- 3.31 Copies of the video were provided to communities who had contributed to the inquiry. The cost of production of such a video needs to be assessed in relation to the overall committee budget. However, the chair of the committee believed that, in this case, the approach had been a success and resulted in effective communication of findings and a positive portrayal of the inquiry process and the work of parliamentarians.
- 3.32 The demand for the video has fallen somewhat since the report was first presented in August 1999, however, the reach of the video has gone beyond those involved in the report with it being distributed on demand to some universities.

Case study 3—Joint Standing Committee on Treaties

Explaining international treaty making to the public

- 3.33 The Joint Standing Committee on Treaties deals with an area which has considerable potential impact on the Australian community. Its role is to improve the openness and transparency of the treaty making process. Treaties should reflect and advance the interests of the community but treaty making and international agreements are not well understood by many people.
- 3.34 The Treaties Committee held two free public seminars designed to improve public awareness of the opportunities that exist for people in the community to be involved in the process of making and reviewing Australia's international treaty obligations. The first seminar was held in Adelaide on 12 November 1999 and the second in Brisbane on 20 July 2000. The Adelaide seminar was combined with a general seminar on the work of the House and its committees.
- 3.35 The idea to host the seminars was an acknowledgment of the controversial nature of some international treaties and the desire by the committee to help people make an informed contribution to its review processes.
- 3.36 Advertisements for the seminars were placed in local newspapers and members of the committee who represented electorates in the city where

the seminar was to be held promoted the seminar through the local media. A brochure was prepared and sent to interest groups, university legal studies departments, legal firms and local schools.

- 3.37 The first of the seminars in Adelaide attracted approximately 120 people while the Brisbane seminar attracted around 200. Participants for the Brisbane seminar were asked to fill in a form registering their interest in attending.
- 3.38 The seminars began with a video produced by the committee which features members describing the treaty making process. It is hoped that the video will be distributed to schools and universities in the future.
- 3.39 Following the video a number of speakers gave presentations. Guest speakers included the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Hon Alexander Downer MP, and representatives from the State Parliament involved in treaty making. An open forum provided an opportunity for comments and questions from the public.
- 3.40 The two seminars proved to be an effective way of allowing people to have their say on matters that concerned them as well as allowing members to be informed of community views. It also proved to be an effective way of raising general awareness of the work of the committee.

Some other effective ways of improving input to inquiries

Letting large numbers of people have a say

- 3.41 The Treaties Committee has also used innovative means to gain input from a large number of people to a specific inquiry. When the committee was conducting an inquiry involving the World Trade Organisation a great deal of public concern over the issue became apparent. It would not have been practical to hold formal hearings of all those interested in the inquiry.
- 3.42 The committee invited people who had expressed an interest, either formally in a submission or through informal contact with the committee, to attend a public meeting.
- 3.43 These public meetings were held in a number of capital cities. Participants were given the opportunity to make five minute statements to the committee. This gave the committee an overview of public opinion and allowed a large number of people who had strong interests to contribute their views.

- 3.44 A similar process has been used by the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs for its controversial inquiry into human cloning. In this case public forums were held which enabled input from members of the public as well as those who had made submissions.

Radio advertising

- 3.45 The Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts developed a radio advertisement to inform a regional community about a forthcoming public meeting to be held in Geraldton for its inquiry into regional radio.
- 3.46 The local radio station was approached and peak time advertising booked for the advertisement which was to be played three times a day, for three days before the public meeting. The cost for the advertisement to appear nine times was around \$300. The local ABC radio station also played the advertisement in their community announcement segment free of charge.
- 3.47 The script for the advertisement was written by the committee staff and presented by a member of the committee using the facilities of the Department of the Parliamentary Reporting Staff.
- 3.48 While the success of the advertisement is difficult to estimate, approximately 50 to 80 people attended the meeting representing a good turnout. However traditional methods such as advertising in newspapers and mail-outs had also been used.
- 3.49 In order to assess the effectiveness of different advertising techniques, the committee has sent a survey to each person who lodged a submission. It is hoped that this will provide useful information on the method of promotion which was most successful in gaining public participation.

Conclusions and recommendations

Organisation of the conference

- 4.1 The conference held on 6 March 2001 was the direct result of a recommendation of the Standing Committee on Procedure. Because of this the committee felt it was appropriate that it organise and host the inaugural meeting. It was the intention of the committee's original recommendation that the conference become a regular feature of each Parliament. In light of this it is of value to make an assessment of the arrangements made for the first one and to propose some suggestions for the future.
- 4.2 The conference was one of the only formal gatherings allowing cross fertilisation of ideas between committee chairs and members of different committees and between committee secretaries as a group and committee members as a group. This was a valuable opportunity, not only for sharing of ideas, but to assist in understanding of issues and constraints for staff and members. It should be continued and built upon.

Recommendation 1

- 4.3 **The committee recommends that another conference of committee chairs, deputy chairs and secretaries be held in the first half of the 40th Parliament and similar conferences be conducted at regular intervals.**

- 4.4 While the Procedure Committee was the logical host for the first conference it is not necessarily the most appropriate body to host conferences on a continuing basis. Reasons for this include:
- the desirability of constantly refreshing the ideas and approach to promotion of committee work and the conference itself;
 - because its field of operation relates to the procedures of the House, the Procedure Committee has much less interaction with the community than most other committees; and
 - because of its specialist nature, the Procedure Committee requires little media liaison and a limited range of evidence gathering techniques and therefore its staff are less familiar with the range of issues confronting other investigative committees.
- 4.5 A suitable approach to hosting future conferences may be to rotate hosting responsibilities among different committees, perhaps selecting each time a committee which has undertaken an especially innovative process or been involved with a particular issue of community interaction which could be a focus for the conference.
- 4.6 The committee believes that the Liaison Committee of Committee Chairs and Deputy Chairs would be in a position to seek volunteers from among committee chairs and select an appropriate committee to host the conference on each occasion. It should also be responsible for determining when, in the life cycle of a Parliament, it would be most suitable to conduct conferences of this nature.

Recommendation 2

- 4.7 **The committee recommends that the responsibility for coordinating and hosting future conferences be rotated to different committees and that the Liaison Committee of Committee Chairs and Deputy Chairs or similar body be responsible for selecting a host on each occasion.**
- 4.8 This approach would also help committees to build a shared sense of responsibility for improving community relations.

Structure

- 4.9 The time of Members of Parliament is a very valuable commodity with many demands being made on it. This conference was held on the evening of a sitting Tuesday and lasted for just under 2 hours. Several Members were unable to stay for the entire duration.
- 4.10 The conference structure combined presentation of information and an open discussion among members. This blend should be continued but the arrangement and balance between the two could be fine tuned to ensure that everyone who attends, even if only for part of the proceedings, is able to have their say. It was evident that most members had put considerable thought into the issues being discussed and had valuable ideas and comments to contribute.
- 4.11 There may be value in providing more structure to the open forum segment of proceedings perhaps through separate segments for: responses to the presentations; contributions of personal ideas and comments from participants; and discussion of broader issues and priorities. Circulation of a brief issues paper before the conference may assist members in their preparation.

Proposals emerging from the conference

Support services

- 4.12 The conference provided a number of suggestions for enhancements to support services which the Department of the House of Representatives and committees can consider when reviewing their strategies for promotion of the work of committees. These were:
- Consideration be given to conducting *About the House* or similar seminars in regional centres. The seminars could be held in conjunction with public hearings for a particular committee.
 - A seminar tailored for press gallery and political reporters be developed.
 - Members be asked to nominate a 'free list' of schools and organisations in their electorates to receive *About the House* magazine.
 - Committees work to develop a better understanding of media deadlines and the way in which media representatives plan their time

so they can provide timely advice of activities and capture journalists' attention in the most effective way.

- Committees consider developing a structured approach to involving journalists more fully in their inquiries perhaps by having journalists travel with committees in appropriate circumstances.

Issues

- 4.13 Discussion at the conference drew out a number of issues which are concerning Members and which would warrant further consideration by committees, staff, the House and the Government. These are described briefly below.

Beyond question time

- 4.14 Members are concerned to find ways of increasing reporting of the constructive and bipartisan work of the House, especially its committees. There is concern that media coverage is restricted to the theatrical battleground of question time.
- 4.15 This concentration on one aspect of the House's activities gives an unbalanced picture of the work of the Parliament and its role in society. It hampers understanding of the importance of the parliamentary institution. Members would like to try and change the media's attitude to reporting parliamentary activities. One member remarked that 'until we start to challenge the media coverage of question time and make the committee system a very sexy system that the media is really interested in, I think we are really just going to be nibbling around the edges'.¹
- 4.16 A recent article in the *About the House* magazine explores the views of senior journalists about why media reporting is so focussed on question time.² In the article Laurie Oakes, Nine Network Political Editor, is quoted as saying 'Parliament's lost a lot of its importance. Before it gets more coverage, it's got to start mattering more'. Another senior journalist, Paul Kelly, International Editor at the *Australian*, offers a more hopeful comment—'Committees are more important these days and certainly more interesting and valuable, and committee reports don't get the attention they deserve. The media is misjudging its audience in its approach to reporting politics.'

1 Conference, transcript of proceedings (unpublished)

2 Peter Cotton, 'When the copy was good', *About the House*, issue no.8, May / June 2001

- 4.17 While committees, working with the new communications adviser, have begun to achieve better exposure for some committee inquiries and reports, the conference identified some key areas where improvements could be made.

Achieving outcomes

- 4.18 A key stumbling block to convincing people of the importance of the work of committees is the slowness of achieving results. In particular the failure of the Government, in many cases, to respond in a timely manner to recommendations contained in reports. Successive Governments have undertaken to respond to committee reports within three months of tabling but this commitment seems to be honoured more often in the breach.
- 4.19 This issue was discussed in the *It's your House* report and a recommendation made to enshrine in the standing orders the requirements for a timely government response.³ The Government did not support the proposal⁴ or other similar recommendations made in earlier Procedure Committee reports.⁵ Nor did the Government respond positively to the recommendation that committees take responsibility for disseminating government responses to their reports.⁶ The committee believes that the Government should improve its efforts to prepare responses to parliamentary committee reports.
- 4.20 The timely production of responses would not only demonstrate the value of the work of committees but would also show that the Government was consulting and considering the views of the community in its policy development.

3 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, *It's your House: Community involvement in the procedures and practices of the House of Representatives and its committees*, October 1999, pp.66 - 68

4 Government, *Response to the report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure: It's your House: Community involvement in the procedures and practices of the House of Representatives and its committees*, 10 October 2000, p.8

5 For example, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, *Ten years on: A review of the House of Representatives committee system*, May 1998, p.25

6 Government, *Response to the report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure: It's your House: Community involvement in the procedures and practices of the House of Representatives and its committees*, 10 October 2000, p.8

Recommendation 3

- 4.21 **The committee recommends that the Government strengthen its undertaking to provide a response to a parliamentary committee report within three months of tabling the report and Ministers and departments be directed to improve their performance in relation to this.**
- 4.22 The conference heard of one committee which has been regularly briefed by departmental officials on progress in responding to or implementing its reports. However this can only work with the support of the Minister concerned and even then will be ineffective unless the outcomes of the reports are publicised.
- 4.23 In its response to *It's your House* the Government suggested that committees could provide links from their Internet sites to government sites for information on the response to a report.⁷ In light of this the committee believes that government departments should ensure that responses to committee reports are readily available through their Internet sites and committees are provided with sufficient information to find them and include links on their own pages.

Recommendation 4

- 4.24 **The committee recommends that as soon as a government response to a parliamentary committee report is tabled in either House of the Parliament a copy of the response be posted on the Internet site of the relevant department and the committee concerned be informed of its location.**
- 4.25 The committee was also interested in a proposal put forward by Malcolm Aldons, a former committee secretary with the Department of the House of Representatives, in a recently published journal.⁸ Mr Aldons proposed that the Government should be asked to table, at regular intervals, an action report on committee reports. This would include information on the implementation of recommendations the Government

7 id.

8 Malcolm Aldons 2001, 'Rating the effectiveness of committee reports: some examples', *Australasian Parliamentary Review*, vol 16 no.1, p.59

had accepted and the final view on recommendations the Government said needed further consideration or those that had been referred to others.

- 4.26 This type of report would have the advantage of following committee recommendations beyond simple agreement or otherwise by the Government and give information on actual implementation. Many committee reports do lead to improvements in administration or services but it is not always easy to track the connection. More exposure of these processes of continuing review and improvement in public administration would help to give a more balanced and positive picture of the work of government as well as committees.

Recommendation 5

- 4.27 **The committee recommends that the Government table at six monthly intervals an action report detailing progress on implementing recommendations contained in reports of parliamentary committees.**

Arguing the case

- 4.28 Another issue which was raised at the conference and has been a long running problem for the Procedure Committee and the House itself is the amount of time available for members of a committee to speak in the House on the tabling of a report. Logistically, this is a difficult matter to address because of the overall constraints on the time of the House and the variability in numbers of reports being tabled at any one time.
- 4.29 Members feel, rightly, that the amount of time and effort they put into producing worthwhile reports is not reflected in the amount of time they have to 'launch' it in the House. In addition there is only a small window of time when a report can be expected to generate interest among the media so committee members are keen to have the opportunity to argue its case as close as possible to its public release.
- 4.30 The committee urges the Government to consider favourably a recommendation it made in its report on the second chamber⁹ which

9 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, *The Second Chamber: Enhancing the Main Committee*, July 2000, recommendation 8, p.54

would provide a block of time in the Main Committee for debate of committee reports on Wednesday evening, two days after tabling.

Using members' media skills better

- 4.31 It was also suggested at the conference that better use could be made of the skills of individual members in generating interest in, and media coverage for, committee reports. Most Members of the House have considerable skills in dealing with the media and extensive contacts particularly among local media in their electorates. When planning media activities committees should consider options for tapping into the media skills of their own members.
- 4.32 The issues and proposals raised in this report are part of an ongoing process by which the House and its committees are able to constantly evaluate and improve their performance. The Procedure Committee's role is to lead the continuous review of parliamentary procedure. It is the responsibility of all committees and all Members to look beyond the internal machinery of the House to the connections between the House and the society it serves.

Gary Nairn MP
Chair
23 May 2001



Appendix A – Conference agenda and participants

Promoting the work of committees

Conference of Committee Chairs, Deputy Chairs and Secretaries

Hosted by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure

8 pm, Tuesday 6 March 2001

Committee room 2R3

AGENDA

Background

1. Introductory remarks, Mr Gary Nairn MP, Chair, Standing Committee on Procedure

It's your House report, genesis of conference, purpose of conference

Experience so far

2. Strategies for promoting the work of committees, Mr Andres Lomp, Department of the House of Representatives

Advertising, direct mail, media, magazine, seminars

3. Case studies

Mr David Hawker MP, Chair, Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration

Hon Lou Lieberman MP, Chair, Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Where to from here

4. Comments and ideas from Members

Round table discussion giving participants a chance to relate their experiences and put forward ideas for new approaches

Participants

Procedure Committee members

Mr G R Nairn MP (Chair)

Mr J A Forrest MP

Mrs J Gash MP

Committee Chairs and Deputy Chairs

Mr K J Andrews MP, Chair, Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs

Fran Bailey MP, Chair, Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Regional Services

Ms A E Burke MP, Deputy Chair, Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration

Mr R E Charles MP, Chairman, Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

Mr D Cox MP, Vice-Chairman, Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

Mr D P M Hawker MP, Chair, Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration

Hon L S Lieberman MP, Chair, Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Mr P E Nugent MP, Chair, Joint Committee on the National Crime Authority

Hon A M Somlyay MP, Chair, Committee of Privileges and Committee of Members' Interests

Other Members

Ms K S Elson MP, Government Whip

Department of the House of Representatives officials

Mr I C Harris, Clerk of the House

Mr D Elder, Clerk Assistant (Committees)

Ms R McClelland, Clerk Assistant (Procedure)

Ms C Cornish, Secretary, Standing Committees on Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander Affairs and Legal and Constitutional Affairs

Mr G Dodd, Assistant Director, Media and Communications, Liaison and Projects
Office

Mr I Dundas, Secretary, Standing Committees on Environment and Heritage and
Primary Industries and Regional Services

Ms B Forbes, Secretary, Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public
Administration and Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

Mr A Lomp, Director, Liaison and Projects Office

Mr P McMahon, Secretary, Standing Committees on Employment, Education and
Workplace Relation and Industry, Science and Resources

Ms M Swieringa, Secretary, Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence
and Trade



Appendix B – It’s your House report: Recommendations relating to committees and the community

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE

It’s your House

Report on community involvement in the procedures and practices of the House of Representatives and its committees

Recommendations relating to committees and the community

Recommendation 12

The committee recommends that a conference of committee chairs, deputy chairs and secretaries be held at least once each Parliament to discuss strategies for promotion of committee work.

Recommendation 13

The committee recommends that the Speaker, in consultation with committees, investigate having a ‘fly on the wall’ type of documentary about committees made professionally for showing on television.

Recommendation 14

The committee recommends that a brochure about House of Representatives committees be published and made available on a similar basis to the brochure on the House of Representatives.

Recommendation 15

The committee recommends that details of the public hearing schedules of committees be published regularly using the following vehicles:

- (a) The Daily Program of House business (the Blue);
- (b) Announcements on the parliamentary broadcast (NewsRadio). The information could be included in a daily summary of business expected to be dealt with. The Joint Committee on the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings is asked to make any necessary changes to the standing determinations relating to the radio broadcasting of parliamentary proceedings to enable this to take place; and
- (c) The existing television coverage of Parliament provided by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation—Question time telecast and /or the *Order in the House* program.

Recommendation 16

The committee recommends that:

- (a) The Department of the House of Representatives take steps to improve coverage of House committees in educational material supplied to schools;
- (b) Video material explaining the committee process and showing House of Representatives committees be made available to schools and other groups; and
- (c) School groups visiting Parliament House be provided with information about public hearings which may be held during their visit and be encouraged to observe proceedings if a suitable hearing is expected to be held.

Recommendation 17

The committee recommends that the Department of the House of Representatives work with committees to develop a strategy to raise the profile of committee web pages, including establishing links with other sites, promoting web addresses, reviewing design and content and developing electronic feedback facilities.

Recommendation 18 *

The committee recommends that the Department of the House of Representatives work with committees to develop a media strategy to improve media support for committees, including the implementation of a professional communications service to provide media support and liaison for committees.

Recommendation 19

The committee recommends that, as far as possible, committee titles be retained on a long term basis.

* Recommendation not supported by the Government

Recommendation 20

The committee recommends that committees develop a short name and use it consistently for media liaison and public communications.

Recommendation 21 *

The committee recommends that the standing orders be amended to provide for tabling of committee reports at a time prior to 11 am.

Recommendation 22 *

The committee recommends that standing order 353 be amended as follows (*paragraph (b) added*):

Report and minutes presented

353 The report of a committee, together with the minutes of the proceedings, shall be presented to the House by a member of the committee.

Provided that a committee may resolve to do either or both of the following:

(a) if the House is not sitting when a committee has completed a report of an inquiry, the committee may send the report to the Speaker, or in the absence or unavailability of the Speaker, to the Deputy Speaker. Upon receipt of the report by the Speaker or the Deputy Speaker:

(i) the publication of the report is authorised by this standing order; and

(ii) the Speaker or Deputy Speaker, as the case may be, is authorised to give directions for the printing and circulation of the report.

The report shall be presented to the House in accordance with this standing order as soon as possible.

(b) to seek the approval of the Speaker, or in the absence or unavailability of the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker, to publish a summary version of its findings on a day prior to the report being presented to the House. If the Speaker or the Deputy Speaker approves the request:

(i) the publication of the summary version of the committee's findings is authorised by this standing order; and

(ii) Members of the House shall be advised of the publication and given access to the text of the document.

Recommendation 23

The committee recommends that standing order 346 be amended to read (*paragraph (iii) added*):

Publication of evidence and proceedings

346 (a) A committee or subcommittee shall have power to authorise publication of any evidence given before it or any document presented to it.

(b) The evidence taken by a committee or subcommittee and documents presented to it, and proceedings and reports of it, which have not been reported to the House, shall not, unless authorised by the House or the committee or subcommittee, be disclosed or published to any person other than a member or officer of the committee.

Provided that a committee may resolve to:

(i) publish press releases, discussion or other papers or preliminary findings for the purpose of seeking further input to an inquiry;

(ii) divulge any evidence, documents, proceedings or report on a confidential basis to any person or persons for comment for the purpose of assisting the committee in its inquiry or for any administrative purpose associated with the inquiry; or

(iii) authorise any member or members of the committee to provide such public briefings on matters related to an inquiry as the committee sees fit. The committee may impose restrictions on such authorisation and in any case a member so authorised shall not disclose evidence or documents which have not been specifically authorised for publication.

Recommendation 24

The committee recommends that committees make use of the *Checklist of strategies to maximise community involvement in a committee inquiry* set out in this report and that the checklist be updated and expanded on an ongoing basis.

Recommendation 25 *

The committee recommends that:

(a) the House agree to a resolution providing procedures for interaction with witnesses in the terms set out in appendix C to this report; and

(b) a pamphlet including a summary of the procedures be provided to all witnesses prior to hearing oral evidence from them.

Recommendation 26 *

The committee recommends that the standing orders be amended so that a motion to take note of a committee report automatically stands referred to the Main Committee for consideration and that time be made available for debate in the week following presentation of the report.

Recommendation 27 *

The committee recommends that new standing order 354A be inserted as follows:

Government responses to committee reports

354A (a) The Government shall prepare and present to the House no later than four months after the presentation of a report from a House of Representatives or joint committee, a response to the recommendations contained in the report. This provision does not apply to reports from the following committees: House, Library, Members' Interests, Privileges, Publications (except for reports on inquiries), Selection and the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works. If the Government does not consider it appropriate to respond to a particular report, it shall inform the House giving reasons for its decision.

(b) The Speaker shall prepare and present to the House a schedule listing government responses to committee reports which have been presented and reports presented to which responses have not been presented. The schedule shall be presented by the Speaker twice in each calendar year or as often as the Speaker deems appropriate.

Recommendation 28 *

The committee recommends that committees inform witnesses and other relevant people of the contents of a government response to the committee's report. Where possible the text of a government response should be posted on a committee's Internet page.

Recommendation 29 *

The committee recommends that the standing orders be amended to empower committees to undertake activities to inform themselves on issues within their portfolio areas without the necessity for a formal reference from the House or a Minister. The power to call for witnesses or documents should not extend to such activities.

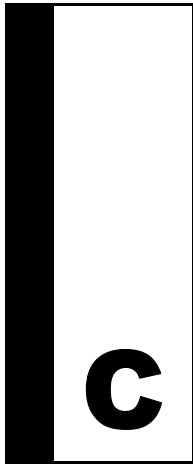
Recommendation 30

The committee recommends that standing order 339 be amended by inserting new paragraph *(ab)* as follows:

(ab) A committee may resolve to conduct proceedings using audio visual or audio links with members of the committee or witnesses not present in one place. If an audio visual or audio link is used committee members and witnesses must be able to speak to and hear each other at the same time regardless of location.

Recommendation 31

The committee recommends that committees refer to guidelines for the use of audio visual or audio links when considering whether to use this technology for the conduct of proceedings. The Standing Committee on Procedure will present a set of guidelines to the House and review them from time to time.



Appendix C – Speaker’s response to Procedure Committee report: It’s your House

Introduction

I welcome the Procedure Committee's report on community involvement in the procedures and practices of the House of Representatives and its committees.

I agree with the committee that in order to perform its role effectively, Members individually and collectively need to keep in touch with community views and the effects on people of legislative and government action.

The committee's report makes many positive recommendations for ways in which the interaction between the House, its Members and its committees can be enhanced. Continuing the implementation of the recommendations, and reinforcing the recommendations through further initiatives, is seen as a priority for the Department of the House of Representatives.

Overview

While welcoming the report of the Procedure Committee and recognising the positive initiatives it proposes, it should be noted that the House and its committees have been aware of the importance of increasing awareness of, and involvement in, the work of the House and committees.

The establishment of a comprehensive House committee system, the implementation of a "Right of Reply" procedure and the development of the ABC's Parliamentary and News Network are good examples of the strong interest there has been in ensuring the community can be more effectively involved in the processes of the House and its committees.

Most recently, in the last 12–18 months, a number of initiatives have been undertaken, in association with Members and committees, to lift the profile of the

House and its committees. These initiatives have had some early successes, with more media coverage and significant interest being shown by the community, for example, in publications and committee processes.

Key initiatives

Establishment of Liaison and Projects Office

In July 1998, the Department established a Liaison and Projects Office to coordinate activities that would help to raise awareness of the House and its operations, and that would help to build productive relations between the House and the community. A number of those activities are detailed below. While these are not strictly within the purview of the Procedure Committee, the information provides a context for the procedural aspects of greater community involvement in the functions and operations of the House.

Seminar program

The Department conducts a seminar and workshop program, which aims to inform people about the procedures and processes of the House and how they can best participate in and contribute to those processes. The program includes presentations on legislative and committee procedures and processes of the House of Representatives; detailed explanation of the passage of legislation and a comprehensive guide to accessing documents relating to the legislative process; an interactive workshop for those people who wish to find out how to contribute effectively to inquiries conducted by parliamentary committees; and a briefing that provides a practical insight into the procedures involved in the various stages of budget consideration. There is also scope for more specific presentation. For example, a seminar has been targeted at the special needs of Departmental finance managers.

The seminars are opened by the Speaker (when possible) and are presented by senior officers of the Department, with highlights of the About the House seminars being Members' participation in one segment of the seminar. The Members' segment deals with the political context in which the House and its committees operate.

More than 2 100 people have participated in the seminars since they first commenced in September 1997. The largest number of participants has come from the public sector, with a smaller number of participants from lobby groups and private sector organisations. Members' (including Ministers') staff also have participated.

Publications

The Department has produced a number of publications to inform people about the House. The publications include a community guide to the House and the

About the House magazine which is published every two months to inform people about the work of the House and its committees. The *About the House* magazine has been a particular success, with 12 000 copies currently in circulation, and a readership potentially significantly in excess of that circulation as copies go to agencies at the three levels of government and to community organisations.

Parliamentary Education Office (PEO)

Committees work more closely with the PEO to increase the understanding in the community of the House of Representatives committee system with the broader goal of encouraging greater participation. As one example of this closer connection, the PEO worked with the House Economics Committee to have about 120 high school students attend the six-monthly public hearing of the Governor of the Reserve Bank.

Media Strategy

The Department of the House of Representatives has employed a media specialist to assist the House and its committees to implement a strategy to increase media coverage of their activities. The major elements of the strategy include:

- targeting of, and liaison with, relevant journalists and publications;
- improving the content, timing and distribution of media releases;
- encouraging and facilitating press conferences, and providing support for chairs and other members with advice on both content and procedure issues in dealing with the media;
- facilitating greater interaction between members and journalists;
- ensuring that the presentation of committee reports takes account of the needs of the media; and
- changing the style of advertising to ensure it has more impact and encourages contributions.

The strategy appears to be meeting with success.

An exhibition promoting the work of House of Representatives committees

Work has commenced on a proposal to stage an exhibition in a display area of Parliament House. The purpose of the exhibition will be to highlight the significance of House of Representatives committees to visitors to the building, possibly emphasising the non-Canberra locations of much committee work.

Response to recommendations

Attached is a response to the individual recommendations of the Procedure Committee. I make no response to those recommendations, separately listed, that

are matters for the House to determine, such as changes to the standing orders or resolutions of the House. I envisage there will be a response from the Leader of the House to these recommendations.

THE SPEAKER'S RESPONSE TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE REPORT

CHAPTER 2 – PETITIONING THE HOUSE

Recommendation 1 (paragraph 2.30)

The committee recommends that the standing orders governing petitions (nos. 112 to 132) be amended to make them clearer, simpler and more accessible as set out in appendix B.

Speaker's position:

Agree

Comment:

As part of the task which the Clerk of the House is undertaking to revise the standing orders to make them more logical, intelligible and readable (recommendation 8), the standing orders relating to petitions will be revised in accordance with the recommendations of the Committee. The changes will, at this stage, be limited to improving clarity and simplicity. Changes of substance to the standing orders are matters for the House. No changes will be proposed without consultation with the Procedure Committee and the House.

Recommendation 3 (paragraph 2.58)

The committee recommends that an annual report to the House be prepared setting out petitions presented and ministerial responses to them. The Standing Committee on Procedure intends to implement this recommendation itself.

Speaker's position:

Agree

Comment:

I understand that the Standing Committee on Procedure intends to make arrangements in the Spring sitting period in 2000 to implement this recommendation.

CHAPTER 3 – THE RIGHT OF REPLY PROCEDURE

Recommendation 6 (paragraph 3.26)

The committee recommends that information about the availability of the right of reply process be placed on the Parliament's Internet site on the pages from which Hansard reports and live telecasts of proceedings are accessed, with links to full details on how to apply.

Speaker's position:

Agree

Comment:

This recommendation is being implemented.

Recommendation 7 (paragraph 3.30)

The committee recommends that information be added to the explanatory material about the protection of persons referred to in the House to specify what course people may take if they believe they have been adversely referred to in the published evidence of a committee.

Speaker's position:

Agree

Comment:

The resolution and guidelines regarding the protection of persons referred to in the House have been added to the explanatory material and published on the House of Representatives Standing Committee of Privileges Internet site.

A pamphlet is also being developed for distribution to those wishing to obtain information about the Right of Reply procedure.

CHAPTER 4 – THE PROCEDURES OF THE HOUSE

Recommendation 8 (paragraph 4.11)

The committee recommends that the standing orders be restructured and rewritten to make them more logical, intelligible and readable. The committee recommends that the Clerk prepare a draft for the committee's consideration.

Speaker's position:

Agree

Comment:

The Clerk of the House has commenced the task of revising the standing orders to make them easier for Members to use. It is proposed to both restructure the standing orders in a more logical way as well as to express them in plain English where possible. A draft will be made available to the Procedure Committee later this year.

CHAPTER 5 – ACCESS TO PROCEEDINGS**Recommendation 10 (paragraph 5.28)**

The committee recommends that a link to the live broadcast of proceedings (when available) be provided on the top page of the Parliament's Internet site.

Speaker's position:

Agree

Comment:

This recommendation has been implemented.

Recommendation 11 (paragraph 5.29)

The committee recommends that a summary of the main items of business for consideration in the House and the Main Committee and scheduled public hearings of committees be shown on the House of Representatives Internet home page. The information should be updated daily and provide a link to the full daily program.

Speaker's position:

Agree in principle

Comment:

The Department of the House of Representatives is currently examining an effective way of providing summary information on the Internet home page.

CHAPTER 6 – COMMITTEES AND THE COMMUNITY**Recommendation 12 (paragraph 6.16)**

The committee recommends that a conference of committee chairs, deputy chairs and secretaries be held at least once each Parliament to discuss strategies for promotion of committee work.

Speaker's position:

Agree

Comment:

I am aware that this recommendation was discussed at a recent meeting of the Liaison Committee of Chairs and Deputy Chairs and the value of such a meeting was supported. I understand it is proposed that the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure intends to coordinate the first of these conferences during the Spring sitting period in 2000. Thereafter the Liaison Group of Committee Chairs and Deputy Chairs will assume responsibility for coordinating the conference.

Recommendation 13 (paragraph 6.21)

The committee recommends that the Speaker, in consultation with committees, investigate having a 'fly on the wall' type of documentary about committees made professionally for showing on television.

Speaker's position:

Agree in principle

Comment:

I have asked the Clerk of the House, in consultation with the Liaison Committee of Chairs and Deputy Chairs, to investigate the cost and feasibility of producing such a documentary.

Recommendation 14 (paragraph 6.26)

The committee recommends that a brochure about House of Representatives committees be published and made available on a similar basis to the brochure on the House of Representatives.

Speaker's position:

Agree

Comment:

The House of Representatives Committee Office is currently drafting a brochure about House and joint committees.

Recommendation 15 (paragraph 6.28)

The committee recommends that details of the public hearing schedules of committees be published regularly using the following vehicles:

- (a) The Daily Program of House business (the Blue);
- (b) Announcements on the parliamentary broadcast (NewsRadio). The information could be included in a daily summary of business expected to be dealt with. The Joint Committee on the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings is asked to make any necessary changes to the standing determinations relating to the radio broadcasting of parliamentary proceedings to enable this to take place; and
- (c) The existing television coverage of Parliament provided by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation—Question time telecast and / or the *Order in the House* program.

Speaker's position:

Agree

Comment:

- (a) The Department of House of Representatives has made provision for the daily public hearings schedule to be included in the Daily Program of the House business (Blue). Notification of the daily schedules of public hearings commenced on Monday 29 May 2000.
- (b) Announcements will be made on News Radio of the public hearing schedules of committees.
- (c) The format of the ABC's coverage of Question Time and Order in the House does not lend itself easily to the incorporation of details of public hearing schedules. However, the ABC could take up this recommendation if it considered that promotion of committee activities could be included in its television coverage.

The Department is also investigating the possibility of notifying House events more prominently in the building's entry foyer.

Recommendation 16 (paragraph 6.30)

The committee recommends that:

- (a) The Department of the House of Representatives take steps to improve coverage of the House committees in educational material supplied to schools;
- (b) Video material explaining the committee process and showing House of Representatives committees be made available to schools and other groups; and
- (c) School groups visiting Parliament House be provided with information about public hearings which may be held during their visit and be encouraged to observe proceedings if a suitable hearing is expected to be held.

Speaker's position:

Agree

Comment:

As noted above, one of the initiatives being pursued is a closer connection between House of Representatives committees and the Parliamentary Education Office. It is expected that, over time, this will result in improved coverage of House committees in educational materials in schools. Where possible, these materials will include video material about the working of House committees. The Parliamentary Guides have been advised of the listing of public hearings in the Daily Program and have been asked to encourage visiting school students to attend public hearings. (See also the response to recommendation 15).

Recommendation 17 (paragraph 6.33)

The committee recommends that the Department of the House of Representatives work with committees to develop a strategy to raise the profile of committee web pages, including establishing links with other sites, promoting web addresses, reviewing design and content and developing electronic feedback facilities.

Speaker's position:

Agree

Comment:

A review of the parliamentary Internet site is currently under way. The Department of the House of Representatives will ensure the new site which develops from the review will assist with the implementation of the Committee's recommendation.

The Committee Office Printing and Publishing Working Group is currently undertaking a general review of the House Committee Office Internet site. The group will look to implement the Committee’s recommendation to the extent possible through the review process.

Recommendation 18 (paragraph 6.48)

The committee recommends that the Department of the House of Representatives work with committees to develop a media strategy to improve media support for committees, including the implementation of a professional communications service to provide media support and liaison for committees.

Speaker's position:

Agree

Comment:

In November 1999 the Department of the House of Representatives recruited a Media and Communications officer to help promote the work of the House of Representatives and its committees.

As noted above in the section on key initiatives, considerable progress has been made in implementing a media strategy for the House and its committees. A series of media workshops will be held beginning June/July 2000 for Committee Office staff to further this work.

Recommendation 19 (paragraph 6.50)

The committee recommends that, as far as possible, committee titles be retained on a long term basis.

Speaker's position:

Agree

Comment:

Every effort will be made in looking to the structure of committees in the future to retain the existing titles of committees.

Recommendation 20 (paragraph 6.52)

The committee recommends that committees develop a short name and use it consistently for media liaison and public communications.

Speaker's position:

Agree

Comment:

Committee secretaries within the Department of the House of Representatives have been advised to discuss with their committees the development of a short name to use as suggested in this recommendation. A number of committees have started to use short titles in their literature, advertising and media work, eg, House Economics Committee, House Transport Committee, House Industry Committee.

Recommendation 24 (paragraph 6.75)

The committee recommends that the committees make use of the *Checklist of strategies to maximise community involvement in a committee inquiry* set out in this report and that the checklist be updated and expanded on an ongoing basis.

Speaker's position:

Agree

Comment:

Committee secretaries within the Department of the House of Representatives have been advised to refer to the checklist in developing their approaches to the promotion of committee inquiries. The approaches in the checklist are being reflected in the work practices of committee secretariats. The meeting of Chairs, Deputy Chairs and secretaries to take place at least once a Parliament (recommendation 12) will have as one of its tasks, the reviewing and updating of the checklist.

Recommendation 28 (paragraph 6.105)

The committee recommends that committees inform witnesses and other relevant people of the contents of a government response to the committee's report. Where possible the text of a government response should be posted on a committee's Internet page.

Speaker's position:

Agree

Comment:

Committee secretaries within the Department of the House of Representatives have been asked to implement this recommendation.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE REPORT THAT ARE MATTERS FOR THE HOUSE TO DETERMINE

CHAPTER 2 – PETITIONING THE HOUSE

Recommendation 2 (paragraph 2.48)

The committee recommends that the standing orders be amended to allow Members to present petitions during the period of Members' 90 second statements in the House or 3 minute statements in the Main Committee. The proposed amendment to the standing orders is shown in appendix B.

Recommendation 4 (paragraph 2.62)

The committee recommends that the standing orders be amended to provide for petitions to stand referred to general purpose standing committees for any inquiry the committee may wish to make.

CHAPTER 3 – THE RIGHT OF REPLY PROCEDURE

Recommendation 5 (paragraph 3.23)

The committee recommends that the resolution of the House of 27 August 1997 concerning protection of persons referred to in the House continue in effect without alteration.

CHAPTER 4 – THE PROCEDURES OF THE HOUSE

Recommendation 9 (paragraph 4.17)

The committee recommends that the following sessional order be adopted for a period of 12 months:

Questions from citizens

148A A Member may give notice of a question in terms proposed by a person who resides in the Member's electoral division. The following conditions shall apply to notices of questions given under this sessional order:

- (a) A Member shall satisfy himself or herself that the person proposing the question resides within the Member's electoral division.
- (b) The question shall show the name of the person who proposed the question.
- (c) A Member may not give notice of more than 25 questions in a calendar year.
- (d) Questions shall conform with the standing orders.

(e) Provided the foregoing provisions are met a Member must give notice of every question proposed to him or her up to the limit of 25 per year.

CHAPTER 6 – COMMITTEES AND THE COMMUNITY

Recommendation 21 (paragraph 6.55)

The committee recommends that the standing orders be amended to provide for tabling of committee reports at a time prior to 11 am.

Recommendation 22 (paragraph 6.61)

The committee recommends that standing order 353 be amended as follows (*paragraph (b) added*):

Report and minutes presented

353 The report of a committee, together with the minutes of the proceedings, shall be presented to the House by a member of the committee.

Provided that a committee may resolve to do either or both of the following:

(a) if the House is not sitting when a committee has completed a report of an inquiry, the committee may send the report to the Speaker, or in the absence or unavailability of the Speaker, to the Deputy Speaker. Upon receipt of the report by the Speaker or the Deputy Speaker:

- (i) the publication of the report is authorised by this standing order; and
- (ii) the Speaker or Deputy Speaker, as the case may be, is authorised to give directions for the printing and circulation of the report.

The report shall be presented to the House in accordance with this standing order as soon as possible.

(b) to seek the approval of the Speaker, or in the absence or unavailability of the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker, to publish a summary version of its findings on a day prior to the report being presented to the House. If the Speaker or the Deputy Speaker approves the request:

- (i) the publication of the summary version of the committee's findings is authorised by this standing order; and
- (ii) Members of the House shall be advised of the publication and given access to the text of the document.

Recommendation 23 (paragraph 6.70)

The committee recommends that standing order 346 be amended to read as follows (*paragraph (iii) added*):

Publication of evidence and proceedings

346 (a) A committee or subcommittee shall have power to authorise publication of any evidence given before it or any document presented to it.

(b) The evidence taken by a committee or subcommittee and documents presented to it, and proceedings and reports of it, which have not been reported to the House, shall not, unless authorised by the House or the committee or subcommittee, be disclosed or published to any person other than a member or officer for the committee.

Provided that a committee may resolve to:

- (i) publish press releases, discussion or other papers or preliminary findings for the purpose of seeking further input to an inquiry;
- (ii) divulge any evidence, documents, proceedings or report on a confidential basis to any person or persons for comment for the purpose of assisting the committee in its inquiry or for any administrative purpose associated with the inquiry; or
- (iii) authorise any member or members of the committee to provide such public briefings on matters related to an inquiry as the committee sees fit. The committee may impose restrictions on such authorisation and in any case a member so authorised shall not disclose evidence or documents which have not been specifically authorised for publication.

Recommendation 25 (paragraph 6.87)

The committee recommends that:

- (a) the House agree to a resolution providing procedures for interaction with witnesses in the terms set out in appendix C to this report; and
- (b) a pamphlet including a summary of the procedures be provided to all witnesses prior to hearing oral evidence from them.

Recommendation 26 (paragraph 6.96)

The committee recommends that the standing orders be amended so that a motion to take note of a committee report automatically stands referred to the Main Committee for consideration and that time be made available for debate in the week following presentation of the report.

Recommendation 27 (paragraph 6.102)

The committee recommends that new standing order 354A be inserted as follows:

Government responses to committee reports

354A(a) The Government shall prepare and present to the House no later than four months after the presentation of a report from a House of Representatives or joint committee, a response to the recommendations contained in the report. This provision does not apply to reports from the following committees: House, Library, Members' Interests, Privileges, Publications (except for reports on inquiries), Selection and the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works. If the Government does not consider it appropriate to respond to a particular report, it shall inform the House giving reasons for its decision.

(b) The Speaker shall prepare and present to the House a schedule listing government responses to committee reports which have been presented and reports presented to which responses have not been presented. The Schedule shall be presented by the Speaker twice in each calendar year or as often as the Speaker deems appropriate.

Recommendation 29 (paragraph 6.111)

The committee recommends that the standing orders be amended to empower committees to undertake activities to inform themselves on issues within their portfolio areas without the necessity for a formal reference from the House or a Minister. The power to call for witnesses or documents should not extend to such activities.

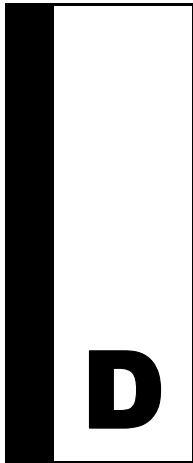
Recommendation 30 (paragraph 6.165)

The committee recommends that standing order 339 be amended by inserting new paragraph *(ab)* as follows:

(ab) A committee may resolve to conduct proceedings using audio visual or audio links with members of the committee or witnesses not present in one place. If an audio visual or audio link is used committee members and witnesses must be able to speak to and hear each other at the same time regardless of location.

Recommendation 31 (paragraph 6.166)

The committee recommends that committees refer to guidelines for the use of audio visual or audio links when considering whether to use this technology for the conduct of proceedings. The Standing Committee on Procedure will present a set of guidelines to the House and review them from time to time. (The proposed guidelines are at appendix D.)



Appendix D – Government response to Procedure Committee report: It’s your House

Petitioning the House

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that the standing orders governing petitions (nos. 112 to 132) be amended to make them clearer, simpler and more accessible as set out in appendix B.

Supported in principle.

Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that the standing orders be amended to allow Members to present petitions during the period of Members' 90 second statements in the House or 3 minute statements in the Main Committee. The proposed amendment to the standing orders is shown in appendix B.

Supported

Presentation of petitions by Members during the existing time available for 90 second statements in the House or 3 minute statements in the Main Committee is supported.

Traditionally, the practice has been that all petitions are treated the same under the standing orders regardless of a Member’s views about the subject matter. The option for Members to present and support petitions on the floor of the House or Main Committee raises the issue that Members may be seen to give some petitions more favourable treatment than others. However, these are matters that Members are best placed to decide.

Recommendation 3

The committee recommends that an annual report to the House be prepared setting out petitions presented and ministerial responses to them. The Standing Committee on Procedure intends to implement this recommendation itself.

Not supported.

The Government does not agree that the Standing Committee is empowered to produce such a report, as such an activity would be outside its functions under the Standing Orders. The Government notes that the number and subject matter of petitions is already on the public record, as are any ministerial responses.

Recommendation 4

The committee recommends that the standing orders be amended to provide for petitions to stand referred to general purpose standing committees for any inquiry the committee may wish to make.

Not supported.

The time and resources available for committees to undertake inquiries into matters is limited. Requiring specific references ensures that committee activities are not directed to matters which are not relevant to the priorities of the House or the Government, and which have little prospect of being acted on.

Committee members and secretariats are able to monitor the subject matter of petitions presented to the House which are relevant to their responsibilities. If considered necessary, a committee chairman could raise the establishment of an appropriate inquiry directly with the responsible minister.

The right of reply procedure**Recommendations 5 - 7**

The committee recommends that the resolution of the House of 27 August 1997 concerning protection of persons referred to in the House continue in effect without alteration.

(Recommendation 5)

The committee recommends that information about the availability of the right of reply process be placed on the Parliament's Internet site on the pages from which Hansard reports and live telecasts of proceedings are accessed, with links to full details on how to apply. (Recommendation 6)

The committee recommends that information be added to the explanatory material about the protection of persons referred to in the House to specify what course people may take if they believe they have been adversely referred to in the published evidence of a committee. (Recommendation 7)

Supported in principle, subject to being implemented within existing resource constraints.

The procedures of the House

Recommendation 8

The committee recommends that the standing orders be restructured and rewritten to make them more logical, intelligible and readable. The committee recommends that the Clerk prepare a draft for the committee's consideration.

Supported in principle, subject to being implemented within existing resource constraints.

Recommendation 9

The committee recommends that the following sessional order be adopted for a period of 12 months:

Questions from citizens

148A A Member may give notice of a question in terms proposed by a person who resides in the Member's electoral division. The following conditions shall apply to notices of questions given under this sessional order:

(a) A Member shall satisfy himself or herself that the person proposing the question resides within the Member's electoral division.

(b) The question shall show the name of the person who proposed the question.

(c) A Member may not give notice of more than 25 questions in a calendar year.

(d) Questions shall conform with the standing orders.

(e) Provided the foregoing provisions are met a Member must give notice of every question proposed to him or her up to the limit of 25 per year.

Not supported.

The Government considers this recommendation is inconsistent with the principles of representative democracy, in which members are elected to represent their constituents. Members are ultimately responsible for all questions asked in the House and disclosing the identity of interested constituents would be inconsistent with that primary responsibility.

Access to proceedings

Recommendations 10 and 11

The committee recommends that a link to the live broadcast of proceedings (when available) be provided on the top page of the Parliament's Internet site. (Recommendation 10)

The committee recommends that a summary of the main items of business for consideration in the House and the Main Committee and scheduled public hearings of committees be

shown on the House of Representatives Internet home page. The information should be updated daily and provide a link to the full daily program. (Recommendation 11)

Supported in principle, subject to being implemented within existing resource constraints. The Government notes that a link to the live broadcast of proceedings has already been provided on the Parliament's Internet site.

Committees and the community

Recommendations 12 - 15

The committee recommends that a conference of committee chairs, deputy chairs and secretaries be held at least once each Parliament to discuss strategies for promotion of committee work. (Recommendation 12)

The committee recommends that the Speaker, in consultation with committees, investigate having a 'fly on the wall' type of documentary about committees made professionally for showing on television. (Recommendation 13)

The committee recommends that a brochure about House of Representatives committees be published and made available on a similar basis to the brochure on the House of Representatives. (Recommendation 14)

The committee recommends that details of the public hearing schedules of committees be published regularly using the following vehicles:

(a) The Daily Program of House business (the Blue);

(b) Announcements on the parliamentary broadcast (NewsRadio). The information could be included in a daily summary of business expected to be dealt with. The Joint Committee on the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings is asked to make any necessary changes to the standing determinations relating to the radio broadcasting of parliamentary proceedings to enable this to take place; and

(c) The existing television coverage of Parliament provided by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation-Question time telecast and/or the Order in the House program. (Recommendation 15)

The Government supports committee chairmen, members and secretaries and the Speaker and the Department of the House of Representatives exploring avenues to enhance community access to committees and understanding of committee operations. It is noted that information about daily public hearing schedules has started appearing in the Daily Program of House business (recommendation 15(a)). The Government also notes that any measures implemented will be subject to existing resource constraints.

Recommendations 16 and 17

The committee recommends that:

- (a) The Department of the House of Representatives take steps to improve coverage of House committees in educational material supplied to schools;*
- (b) Video material explaining the committee process and showing House of Representatives committees be made available to schools and other groups; and*
- (c) School groups visiting Parliament House be provided with information about public hearings which may be held during their visit and be encouraged to observe proceedings if a suitable hearing is expected to be held.*

The committee recommends that the Department of the House of Representatives work with committees to develop a strategy to raise the profile of committee web pages, including establishing links with other sites, promoting web addresses, reviewing design and content and developing electronic feedback facilities. (Recommendation 17)

Supported in principle, subject to being implemented within existing resource constraints.

Recommendation 18

The committee recommends that the Department of the House of Representatives work with committees to develop a media strategy to improve media support for committees, including the implementation of a professional communications service to provide media support and liaison for committees. (Recommendation 18)

Not supported. The purpose of committees is to investigate matters referred to them for the purposes of making specific recommendations. Resources available for these purposes are limited. Allocation of further resources for media purposes, at the cost of resources required for committees' investigations, is unwarranted.

Recommendations 19 and 20

The committee recommends that, as far as possible, committee titles be retained on a long term basis. (Recommendation 19)

The committee recommends that committees develop a short name and use it consistently for media liaison and public communications. (Recommendation 20)

Supported. It is noted that some committees are already using short names for media liaison and public communications.

Recommendation 21

The committee recommends that the standing orders be amended to provide for tabling of committee reports at a time prior to 11 am.

Not supported.

The current routine of business allowing for committee and delegation reports and private Members business on sitting Mondays has worked successfully over the last two parliaments. The Government is not convinced that changing the time for presentation of reports would overcome the Committee's concerns in relation to media (noting that other recommendations are directed to media strategies and resources for committees - principally Recommendation 18). The Government notes that tabling of reports on a Wednesday or Thursday morning would limit the capacity for reports to be referred to the Main Committee for debate in the week of tabling.

Recommendations 22 and 23

The committee recommends that standing order 353 be amended as follows (paragraph (b) added):

Report and minutes presented

353 The report of a committee, together with the minutes of the proceedings, shall be presented to the House by a member of the committee.

Provided that a committee may resolve to do either or both of the following:

(a) if the House is not sitting when a committee has completed a report of an inquiry, the committee may send the report to the Speaker, or in the absence or unavailability of the Speaker, to the Deputy Speaker. Upon receipt of the report by the Speaker or the Deputy Speaker:

(i) the publication of the report is authorised by this standing order; and

(ii) the Speaker or Deputy Speaker, as the case may be, is authorised to give directions for the printing and circulation of the report.

The report shall be presented to the House in accordance with this standing order as soon as possible.

(b) to seek the approval of the Speaker, or in the absence or unavailability of the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker, to publish a summary version of its findings on a day prior to the report being presented to the House. If the Speaker or the Deputy Speaker approves the request:

(i) the publication of the summary version of the committee's findings is authorised by this standing order; and

(ii) Members of the House shall be advised of the publication and given access to the text of the document. (Recommendation 22)

The committee recommends that standing order 346 be amended to read

(paragraph (iii) added):

Publication of evidence and proceedings

346 (a) A committee or subcommittee shall have power to authorise publication of any evidence given before it or any document presented to it.

(b) The evidence taken by a committee or subcommittee and documents presented to it, and proceedings and reports of it, which have not been reported to the House, shall not, unless authorised by the House or the committee or subcommittee, be disclosed or published to any person other than a member or officer of the committee.

Provided that a committee may resolve to:

(i) publish press releases, discussion or other papers or preliminary findings for the purpose of seeking further input to an inquiry,

(ii) divulge any evidence, documents, proceedings or report on a confidential basis to any person or persons for comment for the purpose of assisting the committee in its inquiry or for any administrative purpose associated with the inquiry; or

(iii) authorise any member or members of the committee to provide such public briefings on matters related to an inquiry as the committee sees fit. The committee may impose restrictions on such authorisation and in any case a member so authorised shall not disclose evidence or documents which have not been specifically authorised for publication.

(Recommendation 23)

Recommendation 22 is not supported. Recommendation 23 is supported.

The purpose of inquiries is to investigate issues referred to a committee for the purpose of making considered recommendations, not maximising media exposure for committees per se. It is difficult to see how early release of summarised findings would promote a higher level of community interest in committee work over media activities associated with the formal presentation of reports to the House. Publication of summarised findings could in practice demand immediate reactions from the Government, community organisations or opposition parties, without the benefit of the full reasoning behind committees' recommendations. This risks distorting and devaluing committees' considerations and would be unfair to witnesses who had taken the time and effort to participate in the inquiry.

Under standing order 346 committees have flexibility to prepare and publish material directed to maximising media exposure and community involvement in an inquiry and the committee process itself. Media focus on the report itself will be best managed by committees at the time reports are presented. This would be enhanced by ad hoc briefings throughout the course of the inquiry as proposed under recommendation 23, which is supported.

Recommendation 24

The committee recommends that committees make use of the Checklist of strategies to maximise community involvement in a committee inquiry set out in this report and that the checklist be updated and expanded on an ongoing basis.

Supported in principle, subject to committees having regard to resource issues.

Recommendation 25

The committee recommends that:

(a) the House agree to a resolution providing procedures for interaction with witnesses in the terms set out in appendix C to this report; and

(b) a pamphlet including a summary of the procedures be provided to all witnesses prior to hearing oral evidence from them.

The Government does not consider that a resolution is the most appropriate device to describe committee procedures, and remains concerned that a resolution of the House detailing procedures for dealing with witnesses could lead to arguments over the interpretation and application of committee rules. However, a pamphlet outlining guidelines to the conduct of committee proceedings would be of benefit to witnesses and committee members.

Recommendation 26

The committee recommends that the standing orders be amended so that a motion to take note of a committee report automatically stands referred to the Main Committee for consideration and that time be made available for debate in the week following presentation of the report

Not supported.

The success of the Main Committee is largely due to its operation as a consensus chamber whereby business is referred only by agreement between the parties. The Government does not support measures that would override this fundamental aspect of the Main Committee's operation. The Government does not consider that standing referral is in fact necessary, as the practice has been that when the Whips have been made aware of Members' desire for more debate time, the majority of reports have been referred to the Main Committee after consultation with the responsible minister. Referral should remain a matter between Whips who manage the time allocated to, and business conducted in, the Main Committee.

Recommendation 27

The committee recommends that new standing order 354A be inserted as follows:

Government responses to committee reports

354A (a) The Government shall prepare and present to the House no later than four months after the presentation of a report from a House of Representatives or joint committee, a response to the recommendations contained in the report. This provision does not apply to reports from the following committees: House, Library, Members' Interests, Privileges, Publications (except for reports on inquiries), Selection and the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works. If the Government does not consider it appropriate to respond to a particular report, it shall inform the House giving reasons for its decision.

(b) The Speaker shall prepare and present to the House a schedule listing government responses to committee reports which have been presented and reports presented to which responses have not been presented. The schedule shall be presented by the Speaker twice in each calendar year or as often as the Speaker deems appropriate.

Not supported.

The Government agrees that serious consideration of committee recommendations is an important function of Government activity, and that Government responses will be of significant interest to those members of the community who have an interest in the a particular inquiry. However, the proposed four-month time limit for responses is arbitrary. Tabling of a list of outstanding government responses is already the practice of the Government and the House and no amendment to the Standing Orders is necessary.

Recommendation 28

The committee recommends that committees inform witnesses and other relevant people of the contents of a government response to the committee's report. Where possible the text of a government response should be posted on a committee's Internet page

Not supported.

Distribution and publication of Government views and policies are executive functions of government, not committees. The Government considers that publication of responses on committees' Internet pages is unwarranted, but links to relevant Government sites would be appropriate. Links would make responses readily accessible from a committee's Internet page, while keeping more clearly separate the functions of the Government and committees.

Recommendation 29

The committee recommends that the standing orders be amended to empower committees to undertake activities to inform themselves on issues within their portfolio areas without the necessity for a formal reference from the House or a Minister. The power to call for witnesses or documents should not extend to such activities

Not supported.

The Government agrees that Members should be as well informed about relevant issues as possible, but considers that this is a normal part of Members' duties and

notes that standing referral of Annual Reports provides scope for broader consideration of issues.

Committees do not have unlimited jurisdiction to undertake activities. The time and resources available for committees to undertake inquiries into matters is limited. Requiring specific references ensures that committee activities are not directed to matters which are not relevant to the priorities of the House or the Government, and which have little prospect of being acted on. As resources are limited, committees' activities are properly constrained to matters referred to them.

Recommendations 30 and 31

The committee recommends that standing order 339 be amended by inserting new paragraph (ab) as follows:

(ab) A committee may resolve to conduct proceedings using audio visual or audio links with members of the committee or witnesses not present in one place. If an audio visual or audio link is used committee members and witnesses must be able to speak to and hear each other at the same time regardless of location. (Recommendation 30)

The committee recommends that committees refer to guidelines for the use of audio visual or audio links when considering whether to use this technology for the conduct of proceedings. The Standing Committee on Procedure will present a set of guidelines to the House and review them from time to time. (The proposed guidelines are at appendix D.) (Recommendation 31)

The Government supports the Committee's recommendations in relation to the use of latest technology in order to make inquiries as efficient as possible while recognising the capacity to conduct committee business and receive evidence.

The Government shares the Committee's concerns that alternative methods of transacting business should not be used to displace face to face meetings, particularly in relation to ensuring that people outside major metropolitan areas do not feel either excluded from Committee processes or that video or audio conferencing activities are second best. The Government asks the Committee to consider whether the proposed guidelines should make specific reference to these concerns for committees considering alternative methods of inquiry.