

# Procedure Committee

## Third report of 2015

The committee reports to the Senate on the following matters discussed at its meeting on 15 October 2015.

### Ministerial statements

At the request of the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate (Senator the Hon Penny Wong), the President referred to the committee, pursuant to standing order 17(3), a process for the presentation and debate of ministerial statements. The committee had previously considered options for presentation and debate of ministerial statements in the context of its long-running inquiry into the routine of business. It tasked the Clerk with preparing a further options paper which is published at **Attachment 1**.

The committee considered the paper and endorsed the following suggestions:

1. Ministerial statements continue to be included as a standard item on the Red for those occasions when there is a desire to debate a significant statement.
2. The practice of presenting routine ministerial statements with documents handed in at the commencement of sittings continue, consistent with recent attempts to streamline presentation and consideration of documents.
3. Governments be encouraged to present ministerial statements to both Houses unless the statement concerns an issue of relevance to one House only.
4. Governments be encouraged to provide information about forthcoming ministerial statements in time for consideration by the Whips meeting (for consultation on whether a statement should be presented separately at the designated place on the Red).
5. Governments be encouraged to notify Opposition spokespeople and cross-benchers in advance of particular ministerial statements.
6. Create a right for senators to move a motion to take note of a ministerial statement without notice.

In relation to suggestions 1 to 5, the committee commends these practices to all senators.

In relation to suggestion 6, the committee **recommends** that a temporary order providing a right for senators to move, without notice, a motion to take note of a ministerial statement presented other than at the commencement of sittings (pursuant to standing order 61) should be tested for the remainder of the current Parliament. The terms of the proposed temporary order are at **Attachment 2**.

### **Recommendation 1**

**The committee recommends that the Senate adopt the temporary order at Attachment 2, with immediate effect, until the end of the current Parliament.**

The committee also discussed whether the oral presentation of a ministerial statement should continue to require leave, but agreed to defer consideration of this matter until it had assessed the efficacy of the recommended temporary order.

### **Publications Committee**

The committee received correspondence from the Joint Committee of Publications seeking its view on a proposed change to standing order 22 establishing the Senate Publications Committee. The correspondence is reproduced at **Attachment 3**. The proposed change brings the standing order in line with contemporary practices for publication of documents in both printed and digital formats, and with the terms of reference of the Publications Committee of the House of Representatives with which it is empowered to meet jointly for the purpose of undertaking certain inquiries.

The committee considers that the proposed change to the standing order is appropriate, and encourages the Joint Publications Committee in its efforts to implement an electronic Parliamentary Papers Series.

Accordingly, the committee recommends that standing order 22(3)(a) be amended to omit reference to “printing”, so that paragraph (3) reads as follows:

- (3) When sitting with a similar committee of the House of Representatives, the committee shall also have power:
  - (a) to inquire into and report on the publication and distribution of parliamentary and government publications and on such related matters as are referred to it by the relevant minister; and
  - (b) to send for persons and documents.

### **Recommendation 2**

**The committee recommends that standing order 22(3)(a) be amended as follows:**

**Omit “printing,”.**

Senator Gavin Marshall

Chair