

Procedure Committee

Third report of 2019

Routine of business

Introduction

1.1 As part of its oversight of Senate practice and procedure, the committee **recommends** a trial of arrangements intended to streamline aspects of Senate business without any reduction in business time.

1.2 The proposed arrangements effectively transfer one hour of business time from Thursday evening sittings to Monday evening. Currently the Senate suspends on Monday from 6.30 to 7.30pm, before resuming and adjourning by 10.30pm. The committee proposes that the Senate continue to sit through that suspension; adding an extra hour of debating time.

1.3 The committee was also provided with statistics which demonstrate that, on average over recent years, under the Senate's standard routine of business, the adjournment on Thursdays has been proposed around 6.30pm, with the Senate adjourning between 6.50 and 7pm. With one hour of business time now added to proceedings on Mondays, the committee proposes bringing the Thursday adjournment times forward by one hour from that observed average time, so that the adjournment will be proposed at 5.30pm, and the Senate will adjourn not later than 6pm.

1.4 The committee also proposes different arrangements for the consideration of committee reports and other documents on a Thursday afternoon. More broadly, the committee also proposes a trial of reduced speaking times on bills and in other general debates, so that more senators may participate in the available time.

Detail

1.5 The committee **recommends** that the following arrangements operate as a trial from the first day of sittings in 2020 until the end of the first sitting week in August 2020.

The Senate continue to sit through the current Monday dinner suspension, to provide for an additional hour of business time on Monday evening. Business time from 6.30 to 7.30pm on Mondays shall operate on a "deferred divisions", as provided for in standing orders 57(2) and (3).

The routine of business and adjournment time on Thursday be varied as follows:

After questions and motions to take note:

- **up to one hour** for consideration of reports and documents, as follows:
 - first, tabling and consideration of **new** committee reports and government responses, with current speaking times of 10 minutes per speaker
 - then, consideration of documents and reports listed on the *Notice Paper*
- followed by **general business debate**;
- **at 5.30pm**, adjournment to be proposed and debated for up to 30 minutes (notionally **2 x 10 minute** and **2 x 5 minute** speeches, with the allocation of speaking times to be administered by the Whips)
- **at 6pm**, Senate adjourns.

Reductions in speaking times, as follows:

Item of business	Current	Proposed
General debate	20 minutes	15 minutes
Committee of the whole (noting that senators may make multiple contributions)	15 minutes	10 minutes
Returning to committee reports etc. listed on the <i>Notice Paper</i> **	10 minutes	5 minutes

** One particular matter to monitor in the trial is the effect of the 5 minute proposal in relation to committee reports listed on the *Notice Paper*, where debate is not able to be accommodated when the report is tabled.

1.6 Amendments to standing orders to give effect to these changes are in Appendix 1.

Notes

1.7 In recommending the trial of new arrangements for Thursday, the committee notes that, although significant time is notionally allocated to the consideration of documents and reports on Thursday, in practice, the average time used is much less:

	Notional allocation	Recent average use
Tabling and consideration of new committee reports etc.	60 minutes	16 minutes (2017-2018)
Consideration of documents listed on Notice Paper	60 minutes	7 minutes (2014-2018)

Consideration of reports etc. listed on Notice Paper	60 minutes	24 minutes (2014-2018)
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1.8 The committee recognises that, if new reports are debated for the whole hour proposed to be allocated, the other documents will remain on the *Notice Paper* for debate on another occasion.

1.9 The committee also notes that the median time for the adjournment to be proposed during the 45th Parliament was around 6.30pm. Although 40 minutes is notionally allocated to the adjournment, the average Thursday adjournment debate in recent years has been 21 minutes (August 2015 to December 2018).

Senator Sue Lines

Chair

