

Time allocated to committee work in the House and Main Committee

The need

- 2.1 Many hours of backbench Members' time and thought is devoted to the inquiries undertaken by parliamentary committees. As well there are often many community participants to those inquiries. At the completion of their investigations committees table a report on their inquiry. For many years Members have complained about the limited time and arrangements in the House and Main Committee for the presentation and debate on committee reports. Generally only the chair and deputy chair have the opportunity to speak when a report is tabled in the House. Rarely is further opportunity afforded to other Members to speak and on some occasions no time is allocated for debate of a report. A committee chair can request the Chief Government Whip to refer the report to the Main Committee for further debate, however, there is often a significant time lag between tabling in the House and the debate in the Main Committee. The Members' survey confirmed lack of time is an ongoing concern for Members while Members are satisfied with the other arrangements for presenting and speaking on committee reports (see Appendix C).

- 2.2 The Procedure Committee has addressed the time issue on a number of occasions in the past with varying success.¹ The major change occurred in 1987 when on the committee's recommendation the House introduced a dedicated weekly period for the presentation and debate of committee and delegation reports, private Members' business, Members' 90 second statements and the grievance debate.² The Clerk's submission points out:

...The timing and structure of this period has been adjusted on numerous occasions since, usually as a result of Procedure Committee consideration, although not always in accordance with the committee's recommendations...³

Another significant change occurred in 1994 when the Main Committee was established allowing committee chairs to seek referral of their committee reports to that chamber for further debate.

- 2.3 Time taken on committee and delegation reports by both the House and Main Committee for the last two financial years is shown at Table 2.1. This reveals the small amount of time the House and Main Committee devote to all committee reports and the minimal time on a sitting Monday.

1 See Appendix A - Clerk of the Department of the House of Representatives submission (hereafter referred to as Clerk's submission), pp 9-11 (original submission pagination), for details of the Procedure Committee's earlier reports and recommendations on time allocated for committee reports.

2 The Procedure Committee's initial report was not successful in achieving the changes but its follow up report was successful. Those reports were: House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure. May 1986. *Days and hours of sitting and the effective use of the time of the House*. AGPS, Canberra, pp 26-28; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure. Nov 1987. *Improved opportunities for private Members: Proposed Sessional Orders*. AGPS, Canberra, 49p.

3 Clerk's submission, p 1.

Table 2.1: Time for committee and delegation reports in the House of Representatives and the Main Committee 2003-04 and 2004-05

	2003-04		2004-05	
	Number of hours	% of total sitting/meeting hours	Number of hours	% of total sitting/meeting hours
House of Representatives: Total sitting hours (excluding suspensions)	694		467	
House time for presentation and consideration of all committee reports	14	2	5	1
House time for presentation and consideration of committee reports on a sitting Monday	8	1	3	<1
Main Committee: Total meeting hours	154		123	
Main Committee time for consideration of all committee reports	25	16	5	4

Note: Number of hours rounded to whole hours

Source Department of the House of Representatives, Chamber Research Office. *Statistics data base*

- 2.4 The time lag between tabling of a report in the House and its debate in the Main Committee is shown at Appendix D. There has been a longer time delay from tabling to debate in the Main Committee in 2004-05 and 2005-06 than in 2003-04.
- 2.5 The Procedure Committee's recent report on its first twenty years of operation points to the limited speaking time allocated for the tabling and debate in the House and Main Committee of that committee's reports over many years.⁴
- 2.6 An indication of the effort that goes into committee work and the limited time available for that work in the House and Main

⁴ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure. Nov 2005. *A history of the Procedure Committee on its 20th anniversary*. Canprint, Canberra, Chapter 6.

Committee can be seen by looking in detail at the time taken for two very different committee reports.

- 2.7 Example 1 - In February 2004 after six months of extremely intensive work on the important high profile child custody inquiry, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs received a total of 12 minutes speaking time during Government business in the House for the chair and deputy chair to speak. There was also debate for a total of 3 hours 24 minutes in the Main Committee spread over three days for 15 speakers of which six were non-committee Members (see Table 2.2 and Appendix D). As detailed later, each speaker had a time limit of 15 minutes.
- 2.8 Example 2 - The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration for its bi-annual report on the Reserve Bank of Australia addressing Australia's monetary policy received a total of 10 minutes speaking time for the chair and deputy chair in the House. A month later in the Main Committee two speakers, both committee Members, spoke for a total of 23 minutes. In this case while the time input of the Economics Committee is considerably less than that of the Family and Committee Affairs Committee, it is a very intensive effort and the topic demands timely reporting. Decisions on interest rates and other aspects of monetary policy are of great interest to the community, financial sector worldwide and the media and the work the Economics Committee undertakes is the major mechanism of public accountability of the Bank to the Parliament and community on this matter (see Table 2.3 and Appendix D).

Table 2.2: Example 1 - Comparison of committee and community effort on a committee report and the time available for the report in House and Main Committee

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs: Child custody inquiry

Report: *Every picture tells a story: Report on the inquiry into child custody arrangements in the event of family separation*

Inquiry referred 26 June 2003 with reporting date of 31 December 2003

Committee and community efforts

- Received 1716 submissions; 15 form letters from a total of 355 contributors; 216 exhibits
- 21 public hearings held all over the country in 2.5 months (that is, between 23 August & 12 November 2003) with 166 witnesses representing themselves or 105 organisations
- 188 three minutes statements given at 14 of those public hearings
- 240 page report
- Numerous private meetings related to the inquiry

Time for presentation and debate in House and Main Committee

- Report tabled by handing it to Speaker 29 December 2003
- Report tabled in House 10 February 2004 and referred to Main Committee same day
 - Total time 12 minutes with statement by chair and deputy chair
- Three sessions for debate in Main Committee on 11, 12 and 18 February 2004 (commencing one day after tabling)
 - Total time for debate 3hours 24 minutes
 - 15 speakers of which six were non-committee members
- Government response tabled 23 June 2005

Table 2.3: Example 2 - Comparison of committee and community effort on a committee report and the time available for the report in House and Main Committee

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration: Inquiry into the Reserve Bank of Australia

Report: *Review of the Reserve Bank of Australia annual report 2004 (First report)*

Inquiry initiated by Committee in February 2005 and is based on the Reserve Bank of Australia's quarterly statement on monetary policy

Committee and community efforts

- Pre-hearing briefings on 10 February 2005 from two economists
- Major hearing with Governor of the Reserve Bank on 18 February 2005 (some 250 members of community present, including approx 150 secondary school students; about 50 media present; hearing audio televised by Bloomberg to financial sector)
- 30 page report
- Critical issue is timeliness as Reserve Bank of Australia's statements on monetary policy are released every three months

Time for presentation and debate in House and Main Committee

- Report handed to Speaker out of session 7 April 2005
- Report tabled in House 23 May 2005 and referred to Main Committee 22 June 2005
 - Total time 10 minutes with statement by chair and deputy chair
- One session for debate in Main Committee on 22 June 2005 (one month after House tabling)
 - Total time for debate 23 minutes
 - Two speakers – both committee members
- Government response yet to be tabled

2.9 It is perhaps fair to say that the House committee system has been underutilised and overshadowed in the past, by comparison with the committee system in the Senate.⁵ With the change in the balance of power in the Senate, the House committees both will and should become a more significant way of examining issues and legislation. Thus committees should be accorded greater priority in the programming of House time. In particular, committee reports should not be debated many weeks after their tabling.

2.10 As the limited time available for the presentation and consideration of committee reports continues to be a major flaw in the proceedings of

5 A comprehensive committee system was established in the Senate in 1970 and in the House in 1987.

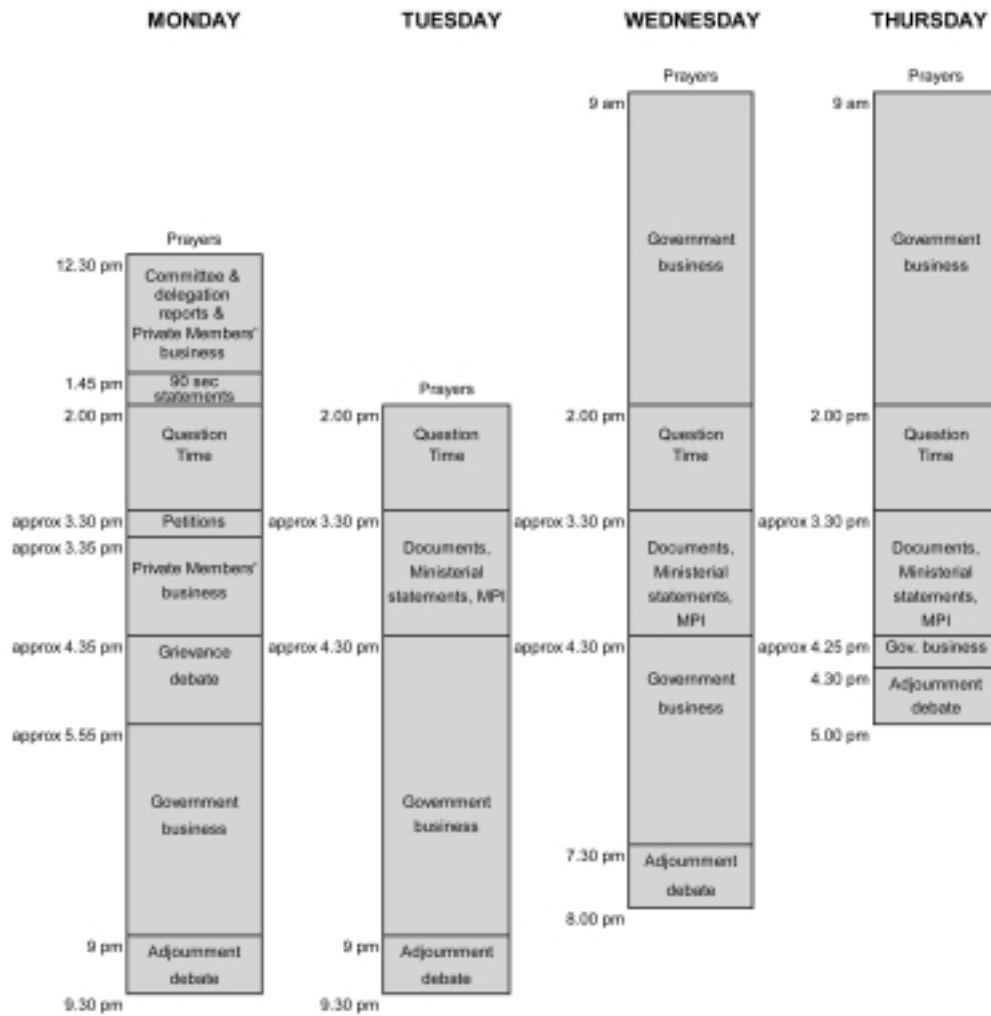
the House and a significant concern for Members, the Procedure Committee decided to examine the issue again.

- 2.11 At the outset the Committee stresses that if changes are achieved there is a responsibility on backbench Members to use the additional time available.

Current practice

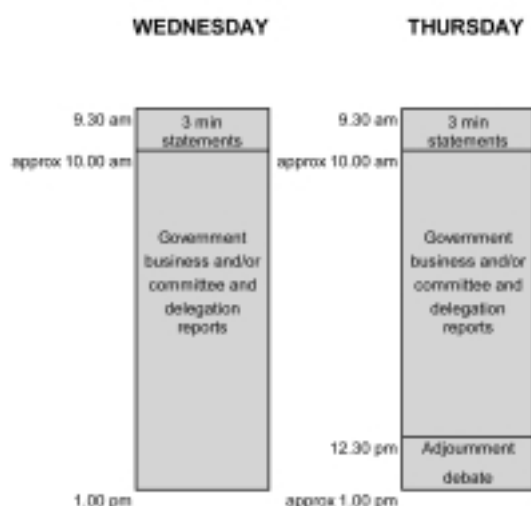
- 2.12 The House and Main Committee order of business is set out at Figures 2.1 and 2.2 respectively. Figure 2.1 shows that the 1.25 hour period before 1.45 p.m. on Monday for committee and delegation reports and private Members' business is a small proportion of the time of the House and part of that time is devoted to private Members' business. Figure 2.2 shows that the order of business of the Main Committee is mainly allocated to committee and delegation reports or Government business. In practice most of this time goes to Government business.
- 2.13 Standing orders 39 and 40 provide for the presentation and debate of committee and delegation reports (see Table 2.4). Whilst there is provision after presentation of reports on Mondays, for proceedings to resume in the House on motions moved in relation to committee and delegation reports on an earlier day, in practice this does not occur. Instead, the Selection Committee accords priority to private Members' business. Standing order 247 provides special arrangements for presenting a report to the Speaker (or Deputy Speaker if the Speaker is unavailable) and the report's publication, printing and distribution as well as its later presentation to the House.

Figure 2.1: House of Representatives order of business



Source House of Representatives. 2005. *Standing orders as at 8 February 2005*. Department of the House of Representatives, Canberra, p 25.

Figure 2.2: Main Committee order of business



Source House of Representatives. 2005. *Standing orders as at 8 February 2005 were amended by sessional order on 10 August 2005*. Department of the House of Representatives, Canberra, insert.

Table 2.4: Standing orders 39 and 40

39 Presentation of reports

(a) Members can present reports of committees or delegations:

- (i) as agreed by the Selection Committee, following prayers on Mondays; or
- (ii) at any time when other business is not before the House.

(b) Members can make statements in relation to these reports:

- (i) during the special set period on Mondays (*standing order 34*); the Selection Committee shall set time limits for statements, of not more than 10 minutes for each Member; or
- (ii) at any other time, by leave of the House.

(c) The Member presenting a report may move without notice, a specific motion in relation to the report. Debate on the question shall be adjourned to a future day.

40 Resumption of debate on reports

(a) After the presentation of reports on Mondays proceedings may be resumed on motions moved in relation to committee and delegation reports on an earlier day.

(b) The Selection Committee shall set:

- (i) the order in which motions are to be considered;
- (ii) time limits for the whole debate; and
- (iii) time limits for each Member speaking, of not more than 10 minutes.

Source House of Representatives. 2005. *Standing orders as at 8 February 2005*. Department of the House of Representatives, Canberra, pp 26-27.

2.14 Current practice for committee report presentation and debate can be summarised as follows:

- under SO 222 the timetable and order of business for committee and delegation reports and private Members' business on Monday's is the responsibility of the Selection Committee which reports its determinations to the House (usually on a Tuesday) in time for its decisions to be published on the Notice Paper of the sitting Thursday before the Monday being considered;
- the first period following prayers at 12.30pm on Monday is reserved for presentation of parliamentary committee and delegation reports and private Members' business;
- SO 39(b)(i) states that during the special period on Mondays the Selection Committee shall set time limits for statements, of not more than 10 minutes for each Member. However, the Selection Committee often has to assess a range of competing priorities with the result that it is not always possible for each Member to receive the maximum 10 minute speaking time. Often the total time for each report will be 10 minutes with two speakers each with five minutes speaking time ; and
- following the presentation of the report in the House and the moving of a motion to take note of the report, the order for the day for the resumption of the debate on the motion may be referred to the Main Committee. Some committee chairs write to the Chief Government Whip requesting referral of their reports to the Main Committee and listing speakers. Under SO 1 when debate resumes the mover (of the take note motion) will have up to 20 minutes and each other Member will have a maximum speaking time of 15 minutes (more than they receive at tabling in the House).⁶

2.15 The Clerk's submission notes that in 2003-04 of the 68 general purpose standing and joint committee reports presented in the House (excluding reports from the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works - PWC) only 18 reports were referred to the Main Committee for further debate.⁷ In 2004-05 of the 39 general purpose standing and joint committee reports presented in the House

6 Clerk's submission, pp 1-2.

7 Clerk's submission, p 2.

(excluding reports from the PWC) only three were referred to the Main Committee for further debate.⁸

- 2.16 An important factor in the small number of referrals is the time lag between tabling the report in the House and its debate in the Main Committee. Appendix D shows this is particularly evident in 2004-05 and 2005-06 to date. Committees want to table their report and make statements on them on the same day. As a result of the unpredictable time lag many committees are reluctant to seek to have their reports referred to the Main Committee and on other occasions when a report is referred the time delay means that it is more difficult to get Members to speak on a report. The time lag means that the impetus generated in tabling of the report is lost.
- 2.17 A further factor in relation to 2004-05 is that 2004 was a federal election year. Many reports during the period were tabled prior to the dissolution of the House before the federal election in October, and many other reports were tabled at the end of the period before the winter recess. This timing meant that the House was dissolved or not sitting following the tabling of the reports.
- 2.18 SO 39(a)(ii) provides that Members can present reports of committees or delegations at any time when other business is not before the House. With the exception of the tabling of PWC and some other reports (see later in this chapter and Appendix D), this option is rarely used as statements in relation to the report would impact on the time available for Government business.

Some constraints and principles

- 2.19 The underlying principles and other constraints that need to be considered before examining options to achieve more time for the presentation and debate of committee reports are outlined below.

1. Number of reports: variable and unpredictable demand for time

- 2.20 The Clerk's submission⁹ suggests that on average the number of reports ready for presentation in any sitting week varies from none to

8 *Department of the House of Representatives 2004-05 annual report*. Sept 2005. Canprint, Canberra, Appendix 3, pp 97-98; *House of Representatives Notice paper*, 3 August 2004 to 23 June 2005.

9 Clerk's submission, p 3.

about six to eight.¹⁰ However, towards the end of a sitting period there are likely to be more reports as committees finalise their work before a long adjournment.

- 2.21 Due to past problems with scheduling of committee reports the Selection Committee seeks assurance from a committee that it has formally adopted a report before the Selection Committee will allocate time for presentation of that report. This means that a committee may have to wait several weeks between completing a report and presenting it. For example, a report adopted by a committee during one sitting fortnight may be considered by the Selection Committee and tabled in the next sitting fortnight with a two week non-sitting fortnight in between.
- 2.22 The number of reports to be presented is finalised at least a week in advance of their presentation when the Selection Committee meets (usually on a sitting Monday) to consider the program of business for the next sitting Monday. The Procedure Committee believes it would be helpful if the Selection Committee were able to meet later in the week to reduce the delay between a committee's adoption of a report and its tabling. Committees would be very appreciative of any additional flexibility the Selection Committee was able to provide in these procedures.
- 2.23 Committees recognise that not all of their reports need the same amount of time for statements or debate and usually adjust their requests for time to the Selection Committee accordingly.
- 2.24 The combining of committee and delegation reports and private Members' business means the Selection Committee has flexibility in time allocation, in that if there are fewer reports for presentation the Selection Committee can schedule more time for private Members' business.
- 2.25 A factor in the time available is that the House may not sit on a Monday or sitting Mondays are lost due to public holidays. During 2005 there are scheduled to be 18 sitting weeks but only 13 sitting Mondays. The Procedure Committee notes that a past proposal by the Chief Opposition Whip for the House to sit on 7 October 2005 as a private Members' day to make up for the lost sitting Mondays was not accepted by Government (see Appendix B, point 7).

10 This estimate does not include reports of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works or the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit which are presented outside the current Monday timeframe.

2. Regular and predictable sitting times and business programming

- 2.26 The Procedure Committee accepts that it is important for the House to have regular and predictable sitting times and order of business so that Members and others who work or deal with Parliament can plan and undertake their work efficiently.

3. Constraints on the total sitting time available

- 2.27 In his submission the Clerk advises that the sitting times of the House have been adjusted considerably in the past and options for further adjustment and flexibility are limited.¹¹
- 2.28 Without adjustment to sitting times the time available for debate of committee reports can only be increased at the expense of other types of business, mainly Government business or private Members' business. The Clerk's submission states that:
- ...The current standing orders already encompass flexibility to use private Members' business time to accommodate the tabling of committee and delegation reports but the Selection Committee has demonstrated that it does not favour this approach.¹²
- 2.29 The establishment of the Main Committee in 1994 provided a significant increase in the time available for debate. It also meant all Members of the House may have the opportunity to speak on committee reports, not just committee members. While there is considerable scope for expansion of the hours of the Main Committee there are other constraints which have to be considered. These are discussed in the next section.

4. Constraints on the business of the Main Committee

Main Committee business derives from, and is finalised in, the Chamber

- 2.30 It should be noted that under SO 186 the Deputy Speaker sets the meeting times of the Main Committee and the Main Committee cannot meet when the House is not sitting. The Main Committee is a subordinate body to the House receiving its business from the House and returning it to the House. The only 'business' which the Main Committee originates itself is statements by Members and papers tabled in association with the statements or with business which has

11 Clerk's submission, p 3.

12 Clerk's submission, p 4.

been referred by the House, neither of which requires debate or decision.

2.31 The committee notes that the Clerk's submission states that:

...The presentation of a committee or delegation report and the moving of a motion to enable debate to take place, and potentially a decision made, in relation to it would be beyond the scope envisaged for the Main Committee. The House's power to delegate that degree of independence to a subordinate body could be open to question.

In addition, a committee is charged with inquiry and report to the House. Making its report to the Main Committee in place of, or prior to, reporting to the House could be considered a discourtesy to the House.

Perhaps almost simultaneous presentation to the House and further consideration by the Main Committee would resolve many of the difficulties. This would mean the Main Committee meeting on Mondays for committee and delegation report consideration, and possibly private Members' business.¹³

2.32 The Procedure Committee believes that the role of the Main Committee is an evolving one and thus does not agree that any discourtesy would be involved. It recognises, however, that the Main Committee as a determinant of its own business, involves a more fundamental issue.

2.33 As pointed out earlier, the Main Committee is often used for continuation of debate on committee reports which have already been presented in the House. In the past concerns have been raised about delays between tabling in the House and the resumption of the debate in the Main Committee. It should be noted that a recommendation by the Procedure Committee in year 2000 to use Wednesday evenings to consider committee and delegation reports and private Members' business under the programming control of the Selection Committee was not accepted.¹⁴ The Government response stated that:

The time currently available in the main Chamber and the Main Committee is sufficient for debate on those matters

13 Clerk's submission, p 4.

14 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure. July 2000. *The second chamber: Enhancing the Main Committee*. Department of the House of Representatives, Canberra, pp 50-54.

which it is agreed will be allocated parliamentary business time...

...If the quantity of business is such that the Main Committee needs to sit additional hours, this occurs as necessary by agreement of the whips.¹⁵

Main Committee meeting when the House is not sitting

2.34 The Procedure Committee sought additional advice from the Clerk on constraints, considerations or principles applying, other than SO 186, to prevent the Main Committee meeting when the House is not sitting. In response the Clerk's stated:

...My short response is that I can see no objections in principle, and in fact believe that there could be a number of advantages if this became common practice.

...

Initially, the Main Committee was considered to be on trial. Today, it has more fully justified its existence. It would not be inappropriate to explore the expansion of some of the earlier limitations, without changing the role of the Main Committee as being subordinate to the Chamber.

In my initial submission to the committee's current inquiry, I recommended that the Chamber should be the original source of parliamentary business and the final determinant.

However, within these parameters I think there is still scope for expansion. One such change would be permitting the Main Committee to meet when the House is not sitting...¹⁶

5. Timing of the debate on committee reports

2.35 The Clerk's submission suggests that there are two broad views on this issue.¹⁷ First, that the rationale underpinning the timing of the debate on a committee report may be viewed as being similar to the rationale for debating a government bill, that is, after a government bill is presented and the second reading speech explaining the bill delivered by the Minister, the debate is adjourned to give the House

15 *Government response to the report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure: The second chamber: Enhancing the work of the Main Committee*. June 2002, p 4. cited 18/10/05,
www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/proc/reports/secondchamber/govtresp.pdf

16 Clerk's supplementary submission, 2p (see end of Appendix A).

17 Clerk's submission, pp 4-5.

time to digest both the bill and the Minister's speech. This means that Members wishing to speak to a report other than the Members who are on the committee presenting the report have time to consider the report and the chair's tabling statement. On the other hand, this gap may mean that any contribution by committee Members lose impact and other (non-committee) Members don't put their name down to speak about the report.

- 2.36 Second, Members who are Members of the committee which has just reported are very familiar with the report and would probably like to debate the report immediately following its presentation.

6. New 15 minute in detail questioning on committee reports

- 2.37 One Member of the Procedure Committee, the Hon Roger Price MP, suggested that statements on reports be made in the Main Committee and that a new procedure be introduced to allow 15 minute in detail questioning of the chair and/or deputy chair about a committee report be introduced at the conclusion of statements. The chair of the committee tabling the report would answer the question asked or refer it to another Member of the committee with expertise on the matter who is present in the Main Committee. Mr Price recommended that this procedure apply only to committee reports (not delegation reports) (see Appendix B).
- 2.38 This procedure is consistent with the principle of interventions (under SO 66A) in the Main Committee and sits comfortably with the interactive character of the Main Committee.
- 2.39 While the Procedure Committee examined this issue in detail it considered that as a first step it is more appropriate to remind Members that during consideration of any order of the day (including the debate of motions moved in relation to committee reports) interventions can be used. The committee welcomes interventions during the debate of committee reports in the Main Committee and encourages Members to pursue their use.
- 2.40 Given the evolving role of the Main Committee the Procedure Committee would propose reconsidering the suggestion of an in detail questioning period on committee reports when the recommendation related to getting more time for debate of committee reports has been implemented and operating for about a year, and is subject to review by the committee.

7. The need for continuing flexibility

- 2.41 The Clerk's submission also notes that it is current practice of the House for certain committees to report at times other than that managed by the Selection Committee.¹⁸ It is important to maintain this flexibility for presenting and making statements on committee reports. Examples of other arrangements are:
- the PWC regularly reports on a sitting Tuesday and/or Wednesday in the afternoon after a matter of public importance (MPI) so that a government approval of works motion related to the work reported on by the Committee can be moved the following day;
 - the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties reports at other times to fulfil the Government requirement of reporting 15 days (or 20 days in some cases) before action is taken to bind Australia at international law to the terms of a treaty;
 - the Parliamentary Standing Committee of Public Accounts and Audit (JCPAA) and the Joint Statutory Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD may report during Government business; and
 - other committees reporting, especially on bills inquiries, to fulfil a short reporting deadline imposed by the House.
- 2.42 The Procedure Committee supports the need for this continuing flexibility.

8. Equality of opportunity for House joint committee members with their Senate joint committee colleagues

- 2.43 In his submission the Clerk points out that with little notice joint committees are able to table a report and speak to it on any sitting day in the Senate. This is a facility which is currently not available to House joint committee Members with the result that the report is usually tabled in the House later than it is tabled in the Senate.¹⁹ Should House joint committee Members be given the same flexibility as their Senate joint committee colleagues have?
- 2.44 While this would be desirable, the Procedure Committee recognises that this is unlikely to be practicable at this time.

18 Clerk's submission, p 5.

19 Clerk's submission, p 5.

Some options

2.45 There are limited options for achieving more time for presenting and debating committee reports, namely:

- increasing the sitting time of the House;
- changing the existing order of business of the House; and
- increasing the meeting time of the Main Committee.

2.46 The Members' survey (see Appendix C) revealed that Members:

- do not favour increased sittings of the House;
- do not wish to reduce the time available to debate private Members' business;
- have mixed views on transferring debate of private Members' business to the Main Committee;
- do favour increased sittings in the Main Committee to achieve more time to present and debate committee reports; and
- would support a proposal to permit debate of committee reports to start in the Main Committee.

Changes to specific sitting times Members would favour in the Main Committee were not canvassed in the survey.

2.47 An expansion of the options outlined above as presented in the Clerk's submission²⁰, and from other proposals, is presented at Table 2.5 together with a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of the options.

20 Clerk's submission, pp 6-8.

Table 2.5: Some options for achieving more time for presenting and debating committee reports

Proposal	Advantages/ Disadvantages
1. Increasing the sitting time in the House	
<p>a) Earlier Tuesday starting time: 12.30pm-2.00pm for committee and delegation reports</p> <p>Variation 1: Government business take precedence if time not required for committee and delegation reports</p> <p>Variation 2: Early meeting time on Tuesday to be optional depending on need</p>	<p>Advantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High degree of flexibility without intrusion on other business ▪ Opportunity for reports to be tabled on weeks when Monday is not a sitting day ▪ Could bring PWC, JCPAA and Audit and other committee reports not normally tabled on Monday into the Selection Committee process wherever possible ▪ More flexibility for committees to get reports printed and ready for tabling ▪ Regular 12.30pm start would slightly reduce complexity of sitting timetable as Monday and Tuesday would have same start and finish times <p>Disadvantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Possible overlap with party business time (parties meet on Tuesday mornings – though the Senate currently meets at 12.30pm and party meetings would presumably take account of this) ▪ If early sitting is optional – uncertainty for Members and others and increased complexity of managing support services for variable start time ▪ If spare time given to government business might lead to expectations or pressure from government for how much time they have on any particular day
<p>b) Earlier Monday starting time: 11.00am or 11.30am for committee and delegation reports</p> <p>Price proposal: Earlier Monday sitting from 10.30am-12.30pm</p>	<p>Advantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Keeps committee business together in one time slot <p>Disadvantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does not provide the same flexibility for committees to cover public holiday Mondays as the Tuesday option ▪ Same issues would arise in determining what to do about the time that was not needed for reports on any particular day (see Tuesday option above)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Difficult for some Members to get to Canberra earlier if needed
<p>c) Later Thursday finishing time: 4.30pm-(say) 7.30pm for further debate of committee and delegation reports and private Members' business</p> <p>Variation : Selection Committee could manage this time and use it mainly for private Members' business thus freeing up time on Monday for more timely debate on committee reports presented that day</p>	<p>Disadvantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Would need agreement or standing orders modified to defer calls for a quorum or division during this period ▪ Members may not be keen to delay their departures on Thursday
<p>2. Changes within the existing order of business</p>	
<p>a) Private Members' business reduced and focused in the time slot after question time</p>	<p>Disadvantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Not favoured by the Selection Committee ▪ Not favoured by the Members' survey
<p>b) Grievance debate moved to Main Committee to regular Tuesday afternoon/early evening sitting for 30 minutes with extra 30 minutes for Members' statements beforehand. This would free up approx 4.35pm-5.55pm time slot for committee and delegation reports</p>	<p>Disadvantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Members may not favour loss of Grievance debate from House

3. Dedicated time in the Main Committee for committee reports	
<p>a) Monday or Tuesday afternoon or evening say Monday 3.15pm-5.15pm for committee and delegation reports and private Members' business – motions would be moved and reports tabled as in current sitting program but with all debate in the Main Committee</p>	<p>Advantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fulfils Members' request to debate report on the same day as presentation ▪ Would not unduly interfere with current practice of Main Committee late afternoon/ evening (in 2005 starting at 4.00pm or 5.00pm until about 9.30pm) budget debate at certain times of year <p>Disadvantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Possible overlap with Question Time ▪ Overlap with time of private Members' business in the House
<p>b) Monday 4.00pm-6.00pm for committee and delegation reports</p>	<p>Advantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fulfils Members' request to debate report on the same day as presentation ▪ Meeting of the Main Committee unlikely to be suspended as a result of a division in the House – time substantially coincides with private Members' business and Grievance debate <p>Disadvantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ May interfere with current practice of Main Committee late afternoon/ evening (in 2005 starting at 4.00pm or 5.00pm until about 9.30pm) budget debate at certain times of the year ▪ Overlap with time of Grievance debate in the House
<p>c) Price proposal – Monday 11.00am-1.45pm for statements on committee reports</p> <p>Other components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Under SO 247 all reports sent to Speaker and published etc. even when they are proposed to be tabled in the House shortly thereafter ▪ New procedure in 	<p>Advantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The receipt of the report by the Speaker would allow the public release of the report at 8.00am on a sitting Monday thus allowing all Members, public and media early copies of the report ▪ Allows other Members to make statements about the report on a timely basis ▪ Detailed questioning in Main Committee sits more comfortably with the interactive character of the Main Committee ▪ Minimises the time for tabling in the House ▪ Allows more time for private Members' motions in the House ▪ Committee could hold media conferences anytime on the

<p>Main Committee to allow 15 minute in detail questioning of the chair and/or deputy chair about a committee report at the conclusion of statements in the Main Committee. Chair can answer question or refer it to other Members of the committee with expertise on matter. (This procedure is not proposed to apply to delegation reports)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Current arrangements for formal tabling in the House continue but all statements be held over for the Main Committee ▪ Selection Committee to schedule debate in the Main Committee and if requested by committees the 15 minute detailed questioning process 	<p>Monday rather than having to wait for the report to be tabled after 12.30pm as is currently the case. This is not a consideration for regional media as they are just as likely to pick up a relevant story the next day</p> <p>Disadvantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Requires a change to SO 186 which prevents the Main Committee meeting when the House is not sitting ▪ More work for the Speaker's Office in receiving all committee reports ▪ Minimises the time for tabling in the House
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Conclusion

- 2.48 Taking account of the constraints and principles outlined above and weighing the advantages and disadvantages of each of the options outlined, the committee draws the following conclusions for the reasons outlined. The committee concludes that:
- given the widely recognised significant effort that backbench Members devote to committee work, particularly their committee reports, and the contribution to this work by the community, there is a need to increase the time allocated for debating those reports;
 - given the pressure on business in the House, the additional time can most efficiently and effectively be achieved by expanding the hours allocated to committee work in the Main Committee;
 - in keeping with standing order 186 (that is, 'The Main Committee can meet at any time during the sitting of the House...') the additional hours allocated for committee business should be within the existing sitting hours of the House;
 - the preferred additional time is sitting Mondays 4.00pm-6.00pm which meets Members' requests to debate the report on the same day as presentation. This will require a change to standing order 39 (Presentation of reports), standing order 40 (Resumption of debate on reports), standing order 190 (General rules for suspensions and adjournments of the Main Committee) and standing order 192 (Main Committee's order of business);
 - to maximise debate on committee reports the additional hours be set aside for the debating of committee and delegation reports only (not Government business or private Members' business);
 - in keeping with current practice and the Main Committee receiving its business from the House, reports still be tabled in the House 12.30pm-1.45pm with statements;
 - in the unlikely event that there are no committee or delegation reports to be debated, the period 4.00pm-6.00pm not be scheduled by the Deputy Speaker;
 - arrangements for the extra time for debate on committee reports be made through the 'usual channels', including negotiation through the Whips, to build on well established processes already in place to arrange additional meetings of the Main Committee when there

are particular needs (such as special motions or time for Budget debate);

- as is current practice there would not be an automatic referral of reports. Chairs would need to initiate the referral by writing to the Chief Government Whip. There would need to be assurance that there were enough speakers to make the additional time worthwhile. A bid for time should be made including the names of committee Members wishing to speak (including the chair and deputy chair). Non-committee Members wishing to speak would put their names on speaking lists in Whips offices as currently occurs;
- the additional time on Monday in the Main Committee will give all committee Members the opportunity to speak on a committee report on the day of tabling;
- to give the maximum number of Members the opportunity to speak standing order 1 (Maximum speaking times) be changed so that when debating a committee report in the Main Committee on Monday each Member may speak for a maximum of 10 minutes;
- to enhance debate on committee reports Members are reminded of the option of using an intervention to ask a question about a committee report being debated in the Main Committee and are encouraged to use interventions in this context; and
- the additional hours and arrangements for debating committee and delegation reports be trialled during 2006 and reviewed by the Procedure Committee so that if the arrangements are successful their operation would be ongoing.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

2.49 The committee recommends that:

- the practice of presenting committee and delegation reports in the House on sitting Mondays continue;
- standing order 192 be amended on a trial basis during 2006 to extend the order of business of the Main Committee to have a dedicated weekly period of 4.00pm-6.00pm on sitting Mondays for the debate of committee and delegation reports if required;
- in the unlikely event that there are no committee or delegation reports to be debated, the period 4.00pm-6.00pm not be scheduled in the Main Committee by the Deputy Speaker; and
- the Procedure Committee review the trial in late 2006 so that if the arrangements are successful their operation would be ongoing.

Recommendation 2

2.50 The committee recommends that standing orders 1, 39(c), 40(b) and (c), 190(e) and 192(a) and (b) be amended (as indicated by underlining) by sessional orders for 2006, as follows:

1 Maximum speaking times

The maximum time limits that apply to debates, speeches and statements are as follows.

section of table to be replaced on page 3 of the standing orders:

<i>subject</i>	<i>time (max)</i>
<i>Committee and delegation reports on Mondays</i>	
<i>in the House</i>	
Each Member	10 mins
	maximum, as allotted by the Selection Committee
<i>in the Main Committee</i>	
Each Member	10 mins
<i>(standing orders 39, 40, 192(b))</i>	

39 Presentation of reports

(c) The Member presenting a report may move without notice, a specific motion in relation to the report. When a report has been presented on Monday under paragraph (a)(i) debate on the question shall be adjourned to a later hour and a motion may be moved that the

report be referred to the Main Committee. In other cases debate shall be adjourned to a future day.

40 Resumption of debate on reports

(b) For debate in accordance with paragraph (a) the Selection Committee shall set:

- (i) the order in which motions are to be considered;
- (ii) time limits for the whole debate; and
- (iii) time limits for each Member speaking, of not more than 10 minutes.

(c) During the period provided by *standing order 192* proceedings may be resumed in the Main Committee on motions in relation to committee and delegation reports referred that day or on an earlier day.

190 General rules for suspensions and adjournments of the Main Committee

The following general rules apply to meetings of the Main Committee:

(e) The Committee shall stand adjourned at 6 pm when the committee meets on Mondays in accordance with *standing order 192(b)*, or on completion of all matters referred to it, or may be adjourned on motion moved without notice by any Member –

That the Committee do now adjourn.

192 Main Committee's order of business

(a) If the Committee meets on a Wednesday or Thursday the normal order of business is set out in figure 4.

(b) On sitting Mondays the Committee shall meet from 4 pm to 6 pm if required to consider orders of the day relating to committee and delegation reports in accordance with *standing order 40 (resumption of debate on reports)*.

