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Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE

Reference: Effectiveness of House committees

THURSDAY, 29 OCTOBER 2009

CANBERRA

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE

Thursday, 29 October 2009

Members: Ms Owens (*Chair*), Mr Somlyay (*Deputy Chair*), Ms Bird, Ms George, Mr Hawker, Mr Price and Dr Washer

Members in attendance: Ms Bird, Ms George, Ms Owens, Mr Somlyay and Dr Washer

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

The effectiveness of House of Representatives domestic and general purpose standing committees including:

- the number, subject coverage, membership and means of appointment of committees;
- the type of work being undertaken by committees;
- the appropriateness of current Standing and Sessional Orders;
- the powers and operations of committees;
- factors influencing the effectiveness of House committees, including resources and structural issues.

WITNESSES

BREEN, Ms Susan Marie, Executive Producer, Australian News Channel Pty Ltd 1
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**LOMP, Mr Andres Alan, Director, Liaison and Projects Office, Department of the House of
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Committee met at 12.36 pm**BREEN, Ms Susan Marie, Executive Producer, Australian News Channel Pty Ltd****FRANGOPOULOS, Mr Angelos, Chief Executive Officer, Australian News Channel Pty Ltd****LOMP, Mr Andres Alan, Director, Liaison and Projects Office, Department of the House of Representatives**

CHAIR (Ms Owens)—I am pleased to declare open this public meeting of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure for its inquiry into the effectiveness of House committees. I welcome the witnesses. Thank you for meeting with the committee this afternoon. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that these hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. Would you care to make some introductory remarks?

Mr Frangopoulos—We would like to make an opening statement and also table a submission. Thank you very much for the invitation to Australia's Public Affairs Channel, A-PAC, to appear before this committee. Australian News Channel Pty Ltd produces Sky News, the Sky News Business Channel and A-PAC. Ms Breen and I look forward to answering your questions and providing any assistance we can to your inquiry into the effectiveness of House committees.

I would like to open by offering a brief overview of A-PAC. A-PAC commenced broadcasting on 20 January this year. The channel was announced by the Prime Minister, Mr Rudd, in December last year. A-PAC is a national not-for-profit service fully funded by the subscription television platforms Foxtel and Austar and is operated by Australian News Channel Pty Ltd.

A-PAC is provided at no cost to Australian taxpayers. We are a platform-neutral service as to the distribution of the channel. A-PAC is distributed across the nation to more than 2½ million Australian subscription television households, representing about eight million Australians, around 40 per cent of the population. Foxtel and Austar also make A-PAC available nationally to schools throughout both metropolitan and regional Australia as part of their education packages. A-PAC is also available to view free online 24 hours a day via our website. Depending on government decisions about terrestrial television spectrum use, we have offered to make A-PAC available on free-to-air digital television across the nation. A-PAC is also available in Parliament House on the parliamentary television service.

A-PAC is an important part of Sky News's overarching commitment to the coverage of politics. It is a project we started working on in 2004 after we launched the Sky News parliamentary channel here in the Great Hall. A-PAC is a dedicated 24 hours a day, seven days a week channel covering solely public affairs. Sky News is proud of the role it plays in delivering political news and debate to the Australian community in rural, regional and metropolitan Australia. Over the past decade, Sky News is the only television broadcaster to have reported and broadcast live every federal, state and territory election nationally across Australia. But A-

PAC, the channel, is not about political journalism. That is why A-PAC is operated at arms-length from Sky News, by Sue Breen and her team, with its own independent charter, which we have tabled to the committee. Editorialising is appropriately left to the other diverse arms of the existing Australian media, including the Sky News service.

A-PAC is local, national and international in its outreach. We aim for it to have an increasing role in the community in illuminating and explaining the political process and assisting the community's involvement in that process. Earlier this month we announced that A-PAC would add to its federal parliamentary coverage with increasing coverage, and in some cases completely new coverage, of the state parliaments. We will be broadcasting, and in some cases already have begun broadcasting, the South Australian, Tasmanian, New South Wales, Victorian, Queensland and West Australian parliaments.

A-PAC has also an international focus and has had that right from the very start. We launched the channel with an affiliation agreement with the US public affairs channel, C-SPAN. It is in fact the first time that C-SPAN has entered into any international affiliation agreement with any public affairs broadcaster outside the United States. Recently we entered into a similar affiliation agreement with Canada's public affairs channel, C-PAC, thanks to representations made to both C-PAC and A-PAC by the department of foreign affairs in Canada.

A-PAC's operating model is based on the C-SPAN model. C-SPAN was created in 1979 by the US subscription television industry as a public service. C-SPAN is a not-for-profit service that receives no government funding. Like A-PAC, its operations are fully funded by cable and satellite television companies. C-SPAN stands for the Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network. Importantly for Australian policy, A-PAC has also achieved first-ever agreements with C-SPAN and A-PAC to, in return, broadcast parts of proceedings of the Australian federal parliament back into the United States and Canada. We had our first broadcast in Canada some weeks ago, which was a highlights package of question time in the House of Representatives.

A-PAC is constantly seeking out new international alliances in public affairs broadcasting. For example, we broadcast *Prime Minister's Question Time* from Westminster, which I think we did this morning. We also broadcast extensively New Zealand parliament's question time. A-PAC's coverage, in addition to its state and federal parliamentary focus, includes broadcast of speeches and debate from prominent individuals and major public and private institutions, including organisations such as the National Press Club, the Lowy Institute, the Sydney Institute, the Melbourne Institute, the Australian National University and other universities and major business and public policy representative groups. A-PAC also covers public events of major national importance such as Australia Day, as well as Anzac and Gallipoli services. For example, on Australia Day this year we turned the channel solely into celebrating Australia Day. We did the same with Anzac Day.

However, A-PAC prioritises its coverage of the federal parliament. A-PAC broadcast the political debate in the House of Representatives and the Senate, and the committees of the House of Representatives and the Senate, as well as press conferences, without editorial filter. A-PAC has also covered events such as community cabinet meetings held outside Canberra. To date A-PAC has broadcast more than 500 hours of House of Representatives and Senate committees. Our viewer feedback shows they place a very high value on the non-editorialising approach of A-PAC. We have tabled to the committee email examples of that viewer feedback. Viewers are

looking for a trusted source of information about politics, and A-PAC is certainly building that trust.

In closing, we would like to place on the record our thanks to the Department of Parliamentary Services and its broadcasting arm, with whom A-PAC has an important relationship. In our experience the department is highly professional in cooperating with A-PAC so the Australian public can be shown their democratic process in action. I would also like to place on record our thanks to the Department of the House of Representatives and, in particular, to the team that is represented here at this committee, and particularly in relation to the *About the House* program which is an outstanding example of trying to provide some explanatory background as to the way committees work and of looking at the successes and the outcomes of committees. We have been broadcasting that program for several years on *Sky News* on Friday afternoons and we have also begun broadcasting that program on A-PAC. We think that production is a very important part of opening up the discussion and debate amongst our viewers that is so essential to the democratic process.

CHAIR—Thank you. Do you also have an opening statement, Mr Lomp?

Mr Lomp—Yes, thank you. I have a very brief statement. In the liaison and projects office we have a particular view about your inquiry's subject of the effectiveness of parliamentary committees. We believe that increasing the public profile of committees is one of the key factors in ensuring their effectiveness. The work that we undertake on behalf of the Department of the House of Representatives and in cooperation with committee secretariats—through our magazine, our media advisory service, our email alerts service, the television program and advertising—is an integral part of increasing the effectiveness of committees. It has, from time to time, been stated that Senate committees have a higher profile than House committees, but I would dispute that in the current environment. House of Representatives committees are gaining a substantial and an increasing profile. Just this week there has been the example of the climate change committee and the amount of media coverage it got. The amount of debate time it got on television demonstrates that the department has a strong role in promoting the work of committees. Together with secretariats we are having quite a lot of success.

In terms of statistics, we estimate that we now have about 80,000 people reading our magazine, which is probably comparative to some of the top magazines in Australia. So we are quite proud of the achievements. We, too, would like to thank *Sky News* and the A-PAC channel for the support they have given our television program in giving it public airtime. We are certainly happy to answer questions in that regard.

CHAIR—In your capacity, or in your role as broadcasters, is there anything about committee proceedings, or in the rest of parliament, you think would allow you to do more than you do now?

Mr Frangopoulos—It is a very good question. We have mulled over this. Our role with A-PAC is, I suppose, very much to be a fly on the wall, so the way the committees are structured and the way that you physically carry out your committee meetings is not really of any great importance to us. However, one issue that has come up is when committees hold sessions outside of Canberra, where the Department of Parliamentary Services does not provide television coverage of it. We have three committees, I think—

Ms Breen—Three committees—

Mr Frangopoulos—that we have actually filmed at our own cost outside of Canberra. We have limited budget to achieve this. So one thing that I would suggest may be reviewed at some point in the future is the value of actually filming some of these committees outside of Canberra. There is a real hunger amongst Australians, as I think we have demonstrated with our live coverage of the community cabinets, to have greater exposure to the democratic process. If they saw committees holding sessions in Sydney or Melbourne or Bathurst or wherever, I think that would actually have a great value. That is a limiting factor for us. Other than that, one of the trials and tribulations of a channel like A-PAC is that really it is programmed on the run. If a committee is running late, we are running late. If a committee decides to take an earlier break, or not take a break—

Ms BIRD—That is a realistic view of the work of the place!

Mr Frangopoulos—We are very open with our viewers. We say to them, ‘You are viewing this just as if you were a member in the public gallery,’ and that is the way it is. There has not been criticism of that in the feedback. It has been more frustration that, when they tune in at 11 o’clock and expect to see coverage of a committee, for some reason it is not on air until 11.30 or 11.40 or so.

Ms Breen—Or they are on an early coffee break or something.

Mr Frangopoulos—Yes, but that is our problem rather than something for the committee to review.

CHAIR—Jump in any time, by the way. It is an interesting thing that when the form of parliament was devised it was probably pre the printing press and certainly pre mass print media, so parliament was designed for people to be there. As a parliament it is probably true to say that we have never really considered the forms of parliament in the modern age, if you like. In some ways, we have bolted a camera to the middle aisle and we are broadcasting the theatre, like they did in the early days of television. Have you ever considered what it would actually look like if it were designed for the modern age? For example, we would be filming. We would probably be providing visual coverage of committees.

Mr Frangopoulos—It comes down to a question of cost and it is all about how many cameras there are. The more cameras the more compelling the footage is. Then you find yourself in a situation where more cameras would suggest that there are more cutaway shots, and are cutaway shots editorialising? My view has always been that one of the strengths of the committee coverage is that, generally speaking, it is a shot of the committee and it is a shot of the one or two or three individuals giving evidence. It is a very fluid process, whereas if you had a cutaway shot of someone, for example, gesticulating or writing notes or whatever, that would suggest something that may be unrelated to whatever is being discussed.

Ms Breen—And the audience is quite aware of that kind of cutaway shot as well. Because on the odd occasion, unfortunately, we have had some technical errors, so the line has dropped out, and we have had emails from people saying, ‘Why did you cut that? You are censoring.’ I think keeping it as simple as we can is much easier and—

Mr Frangopoulos—There is something compelling about the fly on the wall. The way we explain it is that you are there, and the committee is not designed to make great television—it is a committee or it is a session of parliament. You are there.

Mr Lomp—At the same time—and I totally agree with the committee coverage—I think it is also important that the stories that are being told to committees are coming out. The *About the House* television crew value the opportunity to follow committees on the road when they have gone on inspections, and in a sense we are uncovering the true stories that Australians are telling the committees. Sometimes submissions can be quite dry or they come from organisations that are renowned for doing submissions. Some of the true stories that Australians are telling committees are coming out when committees go either to the Torres Strait or to the Otways, for example. When people in the community read their story in the magazine or see their story on television, they are responding to the fact that, ‘My voice is being heard in Canberra,’ or ‘Someone is taking the trouble to come and see us.’ I think that is an important side coverage. You can combine the two: you can do the fly on the wall with committees but you then need an added element of what the committees are doing on the road, and we feel support for that is very important as well.

The other point that I wanted to make was that some committees have been particularly successful at raising their profile by having a concentration on things like the way they market themselves. The House economics committee, for example, is one of those sorts of committees.

Ms GEORGE—The Governor of the Reserve Bank comes along.

Mr Lomp—Yes, they have got a very high-profile hearing, but they have also adjusted their name. They used to be the Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration. Part of the reason they were never reported in the press as that is that clearly in the paper you cannot waste a lot of space on the name of a committee, so they have adapted their name.

Ms BIRD—One of the downsides of that from a House perspective is that often when you simply say, ‘We are the economics committee,’ everyone presumes it is a Senate committee. It is something that has come up in some of our hearings here in that people have been on committees that have got some coverage and even the media has referred to them as a Senate committee when it has actually been a House committee.

Mr Lomp—I think we have seen a bit of a change to that, particularly with the signage of the committee. Now in the *Sydney Morning Herald* when you see the governor appearing, the name of the committee is sitting in front of the governor. So there is a bit of marketing of committees that I think can be looked at in terms of strengthening the name ‘House’.

The other side of it too—and we do get feedback on this—is that people are very interested in government responses to committee reports. I think giving a public profile to those government responses is important. Sometimes government responses are very positive, sometimes they are measured and sometimes they are negative. When they do come, we do try to run items, through the magazine and the television shows, on what government responses are received, because the public then feel that there has been an end point to it. I think that is another side that we try to emphasise. When we do see a government response from a secretariat, we at least try to run an

article on it. We would like to continue doing that because people do get a sense that something has happened.

CHAIR—Do you get a sense, particularly with the committee work, that people are coming in and out, or are they looking for a narrative?

Ms Breen—A bit of both, I think. Certainly the narrative is important to many people. There are so many different committees with so many different subjects and it is incredible the amount of interest that people have got in each one. Also, the advice we have had from people is, ‘I did not know I was interested in that.’ So it is a bit of both really.

Mr Frangopoulos—Elaborating a bit on the point Andres just raised, perhaps one thing that could assist the understanding of what the committee is actually doing is that, at the start of each session of the committee, there could be a brief introductory statement by the chair saying, ‘This committee is discussing X, Y and Z, and we have been sitting now for a number of weeks—’

Ms BIRD—There is. You usually say—

Ms Breen—No, it is not for this—it is more.

Mr Frangopoulos—Even just one paragraph of commentary to give it some context, I suppose. We have got one channel and there is such a kaleidoscope of issues that our viewers are presented with that that would help to be able to keep track of what particular committees are looking at. It may also be helpful for people giving evidence.

Ms GEORGE—Mal and I have just been involved in the report on climate change impacts on the coastal zone. There are a couple of observations that I would like to make before Mal leaves. I think A-PAC is a great public interest service. I wonder whether it might be useful for the A-PAC channel to give some thought to an inquiry that is just starting so that you follow it through from start to end and pick one that looks like it would generate interest.

In terms of our parliamentary service, we have had good support in *About the House*. The support was critical with the release of the report. I think we have to bear in mind that we are all backbenchers. I do not have a media person. So Mal and I had to do that ourselves, from about quarter to six in the morning to all hours the next night. While the parliamentary people are doing a great service promoting the work of a committee, I wonder whether there is another element of that—that is, to give some assistance at the critical point when the report is tabled and you want to generate media. We will all be in that position as backbenchers. It was absolutely impossible—it was easier to put out some embargoed copies to people who had indicated an interest. If we want to raise the profile of the committee work, then A-PAC could go out from day one, from the time the committee starts their reference. I think the parliamentary service did a bit of our inquiry on the Central Coast. That was really useful and people have commented on that. A-PAC could follow it right through to the tabling of the report and then, very importantly, the government’s response. People need to know when they come before us and spend time making submissions and travelling to give evidence that it all does matter in the end, that there is an end outcome to it.

Andres, could you also look at whether the unit that does *About the House* might give consideration to that. I am happy to talk to the Clerk of the House. If we are really serious about generating the profile of the committees, we should do this. I know Sharon is on a committee that is doing a very interesting inquiry on pay equity—a hugely important issue. They will be tabling their report soon.

Ms BIRD—I would endorse that, Jennie, and I can provide a great example. I think one of the very first full committee hearings you broadcast was my education roundtable on study and work. I did not even know it was going to air until about half way through. To achieve what Jennie is talking about, it would be really good to sit down with the chairs of committees and say, ‘What is your program?’ and ‘Where could we fit in?’ Then we could make suggestions. If you have limited resources we could send somebody out on the road and make suggestions about where that might be best done.

Mr Frangopoulos—We welcome those conversations with chairs.

Ms BIRD—And that would enable us to achieve what Jennie is talking about in terms of an overall coverage of the activity around that inquiry.

Ms Breen—Yes, a lot more complete so that people sitting at home can see the progression.

Ms BIRD—And you could even—

Dr WASHER—I am sorry, I have to go. Thank you for what you are doing. Please maintain that role of being the fly on the wall. One of the beauties of the House committees is that they are not usually confrontational and I think we want to keep it that way. The more you become interactive the worse it becomes, as you know. So thank you for being there for us.

Ms BIRD—To some extent, we do set a program when we start an inquiry. I appreciate what you are saying about things coming up but if you had done the education roundtable and I could have made a commitment, at the end of it you could have said, ‘The next broadcast on this committee’s inquiry will be in two months time,’ when they do a visit to this particular school. That would assist you in creating a continuity of the story.

Mr Frangopoulos—I think that is a very good point. When we first began broadcasting the parliamentary channel back in 2004, we had conversations with the Department of Parliamentary Services concerning the documentation the chairs received with regard to the committee sessions themselves. I have never seen a document but I understand there is a document which you can tick ‘internet’ or ‘television’—

Ms BIRD—No, I have never done that.

CHAIR—Not that any of us have ever seen, but there may be something.

Mr Frangopoulos—I understand there is a mechanism behind that. One thing that would be very helpful would be some contact with the chairs of committees. We are a conduit. We are here to facilitate the broadcast of services and I think it is a fabulous idea that we can provide the

viewers with some sort of sense of continuity. Even though we may not be able to broadcast that session from some remote location, they may be near there and may be interested to attend.

Ms GEORGE—Most of us have a schedule of our work program, where we are doing site visits or Canberra roundtables.

CHAIR—Could we look at that a bit further, particularly in looking at political neutrality, which is what you have—as all the broadcasts of parliament, from our perspective, do. Do you broadcast all the committees?

Ms Breen—We would love to but, no, we have only one channel, unfortunately.

CHAIR—How is the choice made?

Ms Breen—If we have a choice of five or six committees, which sometimes does happen, it really is on the broadest interest for the audience. As an example, if there was a climate change or ETS committee that would probably be the one we would select, because it has a broad appeal. With one channel you can only really show one committee.

Ms GEORGE—Did you cover the debate on the report, on A-PAC?

Ms Breen—No.

Mr Frangopoulos—It also comes down to logistic issues. For example, if a committee is meeting for a 1½-hour session but there is another committee that is meeting for five hours, then we feel there is greater value in covering the five-hour committee because it has more context and depth.

Ms BIRD—Mine was four hours and it played on constant spiel because I think you were still getting material.

Ms Breen—I think that was the first committee we ever broadcast.

CHAIR—If the parliament decided that the broadcast of its committees—with their opening statements and narrative and all the rest of it—was actually a good thing and started to put money into the recording costs, the risk would be that you would then get a politically non-neutral decision-making process.

Mr Frangopoulos—It is a very important point. We tread a very fine line which is why, when we set the channel up, I was very committed to the concept of a charter. The charter has a basic principle that our first priority is the coverage of the federal parliament. So if the House of Representatives or the Senate is sitting then we cover that session. There are no questions about it. We do not even look at the committees. If those houses are not sitting then we will broadcast committees. We have to exercise some kind of decision-making process. I would not call it editorial; it is more practical. Sue is a former executive of Reuters. She is not a journalist and so she makes decisions purely on an operational and logistic basis. There can be a topic of the day; for example, we covered the OzCar sessions, for which there were significant requests for replays that weekend. We have to have a mind to what is going to have the broadest appeal. We

have tabled a list of all the committees, or the topics, that we have broadcasts. It is extremely extensive and includes economics, fuel and energy, emissions trading, Medicare benefits, food production, the National Broadband Network, social security, and the forestry and mining operations in the Tiwi Islands. It is very broad. I would say that if the Department of Parliamentary Services had greater resources to provide us with more recordings of committees we could schedule those at times on weekends and overnight. In this day and age, particularly on Foxtel and Austar, with DDR, IQ and MyStar, you can set a recording at two o'clock in the morning and not watch it. It is merely a delivery mechanism to your set-top box.

Ms BIRD—I found it fantastic because I learned more re-watching my inquiry roundtable than sitting in it. When you are chairing it, you are just trying to make sure that everybody gets a say and all that sort of thing. To be able to go home on the weekend, sit down and watch it was fantastic because I took in a lot more of the evidence.

Mr Lomp—I think also that because people use different mediums to access information about parliament we should not forget webcasting. We have implemented a video player on the parliament's website and each of the committees now has access to it. There is potential for committees to load onto their own web pages more information, including video information. They could load on press conferences of committee chairs and deputies and hearings.

Ms GEORGE—Are they all aware that they can do it?

Mr Lomp—Yes. One thing is that there is a resource issue. All of this takes time. It takes time to get Broadcasting to print them out. That is why at the moment we have put on the *About the House* television segments that are relevant to that committee. There has been a good response to that already: quite a few thousand people have viewed videos on the House of Representatives website. It is something that will grow over time. I think people will have a variety of choices. Some people still do not have access to pay television and, as a parliament, we have to be careful to make it available to them; webcasting seems to be one option at the moment.

Mr Frangopoulos—Which is why we make the channel available free online, at www.a-pac.tv. The channel is streamed 24 hours a day, free of charge. There is no pay-per-view model. We would like to make it widely available on digital television at some point in the future.

CHAIR—I would assume that the revenue model includes collecting all that content for later repackaging?

Mr Frangopoulos—There is no revenue model; it all goes out the other way.

CHAIR—It is a cost centre, a cost-rep model.

Mr Frangopoulos—It is. For example, covering community cabinet as a live event is an extremely costly and complicated affair. We have been to WA, to Tasmania—

Ms GEORGE—It would be fascinating.

Mr Frangopoulos—I have to say that the feedback is really quite extraordinary. To have the Prime Minister and cabinet in a school hall with members of the community asking questions makes for really quite compelling broadcasting.

CHAIR—A modern question time.

Mr Frangopoulos—Exactly right. We have a limited resource with A-PAC in terms of what we invest our funding in. We always look for events that have greater carriage in the community and open up that democratic process in a very apolitical way. If the opposition was to hold a similar event, then we would certainly be in a position to cover that as well.

CHAIR—Before I throw this open, I will say that the department does not have a lot of money, so when I talk about possibly funding more broadcasts I am talking very hypothetically.

Mr Frangopoulos—When we came up with the idea of the parliamentary channel in 2004 and then A-PAC, at no stage did we go to DPS and say, ‘Look, we’d like to do this, but we need money.’ I do not want this to be misunderstood to be some sort of suggestion.

CHAIR—I know that.

Mr Lomp—On the resources question, one of the difficulties that we face as an office is that at the moment we have 1½ media advisers in the sense of total time. When you are talking about 20 parliamentary committees that you have to look after, you have to work with secretariats. With four people, our capacity is limited. Yet we put together a television show, a magazine, a media advisory service, an email alert service and a webpage, so that is a reasonable achievement.

CHAIR—Absolutely.

Ms GEORGE—In our recommendations, we can chart future directions.

Mr Lomp—That would be good.

Ms GEORGE—We can say that when resources become available, these are what we think are the priorities for public engagement.

CHAIR—We put enormous amounts of resources into building a suitable public gallery. It is not that we do not have the resources when we want them for something.

Ms BIRD—I want to follow up on something, although not from a cost recovery unit point of view. Are you looking at podcasting and so forth? I notice that a lot of your feedback are questions like, ‘When are you running this again?’ and so forth. Are you looking at being more interactive? Sky News is interactive. You can go to six things that have played before. Are you looking at that sort of structure—something like that?

Mr Frangopoulos—We are going by the ‘crawl before you can walk’ principle. We are firstly investing a lot in our infrastructure for covering events. We have not made an announcement of this, but I am happy to share with the committee that we have this week liberated a second

channel on Sky News Active, so we are now concurrently broadcasting the Senate and the House of Representatives, whereas before we would only cover the House of Representatives. That is in response to public demand. There are people out there who want to watch the Senate in addition to having the choice of watching the House of Representatives. We have opportunities to expand the A-PAC service podcasting. There is significant cost involved in digitising particularly lengthy sessions of parliament. What we do actively on the A-PAC website is point our viewers to publications like *About the House*. We have a click through where you can subscribe to *About the House*. We also have links to the APH website.

Ms BIRD—This is online, not on your TV.

Mr Frangopoulos—If you are online, yes. But that is a very good point. We could easily run a promotional campaign—

Ms BIRD—I have to say that I have never watched you online but I watch you regularly on TV. For the record, it is a fantastic initiative—it really is.

CHAIR—It is great.

Ms GEORGE—To catch all the good lectures that we can never get to the Sydney Institute to hear is great. We get to hear Ross Garnaut or whoever.

Ms BIRD—It is just fantastic. But to have something on the television presence that also points people to the other services and where they could access—

Ms GEORGE—And links to the committee inquiries, so that if people want to follow them they can read the *Hansard*.

Ms Breen—That is easy enough to do.

Mr Frangopoulos—Via the APH website. We will give a commitment now to the committee that we will commence an on air campaign promoting—

Ms BIRD—It will tell people how to get more information and how to participate.

Mr SOMLYAY—Have you established a relationship with the Commonwealth archives?

Mr Frangopoulos—No, we have not.

Mr SOMLYAY—There are two parliamentary members who are representing parliament on the archives council. I am one of them. Some of the material that you produce would be absolutely valuable to the record of the Commonwealth archives. You really should contact Ross Gibbs, the director-general, and discuss the future value of some of the material that you gather to the archives of the Commonwealth.

Mr Frangopoulos—Sky News is already an active participant in the National Film and Sound Archives. We are on a roster, along with a number of other Australian media organisations, that has us submitting weeks and weeks of programming. We submit our midday news several weeks

a year. That goes into the National Film and Sound Archives. That is a very good point, and we will follow up on that. It would be particularly good for some of the lectures and the university debates and so on that are undertaken. They would be of great value, I would have thought.

CHAIR—On a completely off track issues, things like cabinet meetings that do not become publicly available for 30 years: do we get them on film?

Mr Frangopoulos—If someone was to film them and hold on to the—

CHAIR—It is just something that I am interested in. Cabinet records become public in 30 years.

Mr SOMLYAY—Yes. They are published every year.

CHAIR—Yes, but they are not—

Ms GEORGE—They are just documents.

Mr SOMLYAY—That is part of the function of the archives.

Ms Breen—A visual record of that would be very interesting.

CHAIR—It would, wouldn't it?

Ms BIRD—They have tapes in America. The presidential tapes are released after 30 years.

CHAIR—Do we have funny rules for you in your recording of committees like we have in parliament?

Mr Frangopoulos—Yes. We abide by the guidelines provided to us. They are published on our website so that our viewers know that we broadcast parliament under the guidelines. They are basically that there is to be no sponsorship or advertising associated with any programming relating to parliamentary coverage and that we will broadcast it in context—simple suggestions like that. I do not have a copy of them with me here. But they are available on the A-PAC website.

CHAIR—And they apply to everything?

Mr Frangopoulos—They do.

Mr SOMLYAY—Every January when the archives release the 30-year records they usually have a quite interesting media event, with a previous Prime Minister or someone from that era introducing and speaking about the nuances of the different things that they are releasing. That would be well worth having on your channel.

Mr Frangopoulos—We have carried that on Sky News. I understand that that happens on 1 January or thereabouts.

Mr SOMLYAY—Thereabouts.

Mr Frangopoulos—There is a session just before the new year.

Mr SOMLYAY—There is a pre-announcement or briefing for that.

Mr Frangopoulos—Under embargo.

Mr SOMLYAY—Under embargo, yes.

Mr Frangopoulos—We have carried that on Sky News. But I suppose that now we will be around on 1 January next year, which we were not this year, we will—

Mr SOMLYAY—It is big news for three or four days in the quiet period of the new year in newspapers.

CHAIR—In terms of the demand, it is probably still going. I did not even know it existed until I went digital so that I could watch the Tour de France or something about three months ago. There would still be lots of people who do not even know that it is there. How much more demand do you think that there is out there? How many channels will there be when it is—

Mr Frangopoulos—We have toyed around with the idea of A-PAC 2. It is a resources issue at that moment. We have taken a step towards that by carrying the Senate on our Sky News Active service. C-SPAN has four separate channels. They will cover various aspects. They might have a channel covering a committee all day. They will have the United States House of Representatives covered all day. Then they might have a session of the United Nations covered all day. How long is a piece of string? The reality is, that it is as long as our budget allows for. Sky News started in 1996 with one channel. We had no presence in Canberra at all. We have really grown to have a very strong commitment to the coverage of federal politics. I cannot see our commitment to A-PAC being any different. We have a very long-term commitment to this project, as does FoxTel and Austar. The channel is only 10 months old. We have come a long way. There might be A-PAC 3 before you know it.

Ms BIRD—I congratulate you on the admirable gender balance among your reporters and so forth. I particularly noticed that the channel does that quite well.

Mr Lomp—On the demand for information, what we are finding in the office is that there is a steady demand for parliamentary information. Sometimes people say that people are not interested in parliament, but we are finding that it is quite the opposite. There is not a week goes by that we do not get an email request for the magazine, a copy of the TV show and a subscription to the email alert service. What we are finding is that people are saying to us, ‘How come we didn’t know about this beforehand?’ I suppose that is just that the reach of our resources to be able to tell people about it is limited. I suppose that we are encouraging members of parliament to also advertise in their newsletters or on their websites the fact that people can get this material. The suggestion that people are not interested in parliament is not something that exists anymore. People are really interested.

Mr SOMLYAY—It is incredible the number of people who say, ‘You asked a question in parliament last week.’

CHAIR—I get texts.

Ms GEORGE—My mother does.

CHAIR—There is some editorialising in your role, but it is not political editorialising. Are there things from the committee process that would be good for you in your job?

Mr Lomp—We generally talk to committee secretariats and what we ask them for is information about good submissions or good hearings. As it is a very small office we obviously cannot attend a lot of the hearings, so we do rely on committee staff or committee members themselves telling us, ‘Look, we attended the hearing and it was really great evidence,’ or ‘There is an upcoming inspection.’ We have worked very closely with secretariats recently. We went to the Torres Strait to the inquiry on community stores and there were a lot of interesting stories there. We knew about that in advance. A recent one, when we went to the Otways, was in relation to the primary industries committee, where some farmers were doing some interesting activities with growing trees to increase agricultural production. We need to know about those in advance, and we tend to do so owing to the cooperation of committee secretariats. When you have 20 committees, getting that information about what a good submission is, and finding the stories behind the submissions, assists us.

One of the other limitations that exist at Parliament House at the moment is that only four committee rooms have access to TV cameras. Sometimes, when other committees book out those rooms for normal meetings, you cannot film a good hearing. So that is a bit of a limitation at the moment in terms of being able to film material. It is about getting that information from committees about what is coming up and what is interesting within the submissions themselves. And then it involves access to chairs and deputy chairs for interviews, but most chairs and deputy chairs are very accessible.

Ms BIRD—Andres, one of the things that I think we could do more effectively is cover the work of delegations. We get a lot of flack about overseas delegations and yet I think there is a real lack of understanding about what they involve—across both services, I suppose. For example, I recently went on a two-week delegation to the US and we were in the C-SPAN bureau—at the United States Capitol—which was quite interesting. I wonder whether there is some capacity to cover the work of delegations as well, because it is a fascinating activity.

Mr Lomp—We have recently introduced articles into the magazine where delegations have been away and they have come and told us there have been interesting stories. Again, what we have tried to do is get away from the fact that they are trips overseas, but if members have discovered something interesting for us we have run the story. We have also introduced that for incoming delegations. Where we have found that there have been delegations of interest—or speakers, presiding officers or committee members on particular delegations—we have interviewed them for the *About the House* TV show.

CHAIR—That’s great.

Mr Lomp—I agree. What it has added is an international dimension to the parliament's work and I think that is of interest. A number of articles in the magazine have covered foreign issues. We recently had an interview with a number of ambassadors in relation to a trade inquiry. It just gives it an extra depth, so we will continue to do that.

Ms BIRD—It is an educative role in the international responsibilities of the parliament.

Mr Frangopoulos—It is an interesting point. We have had some experience in this with the Sky News business channel. For some time now we have been providing coverage of trade delegations, in particular, and returning members of those trade delegations have been explaining what their trip to South America was all about and what opportunities there are for Australian industry and Australian business to engage in those markets. I think that is of great value. We have a program called *Viewpoint*, hosted by Laurie Wilson. It is a half-hour interview, and it is apolitical. It is really about looking at the issues of parliamentarians.

Ms BIRD—When is that one run? I am not familiar with it.

Mr Frangopoulos—It runs on a regular rotation basis. One of the things about A-PAC is that we run content several times—

Ms BIRD—So this is on A-PAC?

Mr Frangopoulos—Yes. I think that if there are opportunities to highlight some of the work that the delegations have done overseas—in a perfect world, if the leader of a delegation could take a Handycam and shoot some footage—that would be good. I say that quite seriously.

Mr Lomp—I had a very brief word to Angelos before the hearing. One of the thoughts we had in expanding the *About the House* television site was to perhaps introduce a Wednesday lunchtime chat show, where we would have committee chairs and deputies—or it could be delegation leaders—come to the Parliament House studio and just do a half-hour chat with some journalists, and possibly even have interactivity where people could send in questions beforehand. Again, it is just to give it a different profile by giving exposure to people, particularly if there has been a report tabled. Chairs can then talk about some of the responses to the report, just to keep the issue going in the community.

Ms BIRD—What that also does is create an interview that is based around policy, whereas, with all due respect, most of the interview-based shows that run at the moment on news channels are politics-of-the-day interviews with particular people of significance who discuss the issues of the day. What you are suggesting would provide an opportunity for an interview around policy areas.

Mr Lomp—It would also be based on backbenchers from all sides of politics. That is what we are also aiming for—to lift the profile of the broader membership of the parliament and not just particular people.

CHAIR—I cannot see that we can really do away with the current privilege rules which prevent us from discussing committee matters until after the report is tabled, but I sometimes

wonder about the extent of the unwillingness of chairs and committee members to talk openly about them.

Mr SOMLYAY—The only thing is that it is covered by privilege. If you have a private meeting—

CHAIR—The public meetings are covered. The public meetings are fine.

Mr SOMLYAY—Yes. But it is not a breach of privilege to talk about submissions which have been accepted by the committee.

CHAIR—No, but you still—

Mr SOMLYAY—The only real restriction is when you have report consideration: if you comment on a report that is being drafted—before it is tabled.

Ms GEORGE—But we do all tend to be circumspect until we have—

CHAIR—We are very circumspect, because you cannot talk about what you might be considering or what directions you might be taking. So in terms of, again, the narrative, we say that we are holding public hearings and this is what people have said. A debate does not go on around it.

Mr Lomp—Just recently, for example, the chair of the pay equity inquiry did an article for us. Without giving anything away about the report, she talked about the progress of the inquiry, the evidence that had been received to date and what evidence was considered particularly valuable by the committee. So there are opportunities, I think, for chairs and deputy chairs to do that. It is not something that people have tended to want to do, but I do not think there are any limitations on people—

Ms GEORGE—We were told we could not. I thought it was the convention.

CHAIR—Yes, it is the convention.

Mr Lomp—But this was very broad talk about how the inquiry was progressing.

CHAIR—There are only four committee rooms with cameras, is that correct?

Mr Frangopoulos—One of those is the main committee room.

Mr Lomp—Yes, I think one is the main committee room. Certainly not every committee room has a camera. As I said, it is mainly the fact that certain rooms are from time to time booked out by certain committees because of the nature of the booking system. It creates some issues, such as when a particular committee has a hearing with a good witness that you would like to film. We do have a camera now that we can bring in. We cannot do it for a full hearing—we do not have the resources for that—but cameras can be brought in. Again, that is a resource issue.

Mr Frangopoulos—We have a dedicated person here in Canberra to facilitate our coverage of parliament and other events, such as events at the National Press Club. On occasion he has physically brought in our camera to shoot the committee. It is difficult practically, particularly if there is only one camera—you tend to get very wide shots, which does not make for great television. This room today does not have one. Only four committee rooms have cameras, and that obviously is a limitation.

Mr Lomp—The other issue about privilege in terms of release of committee reports is the late-night release that currently exists.

Ms GEORGE—That is terrible.

Mr Lomp—The departmental submission draws attention to that because, in terms of media timing, if you are not able to get access to a report until eight o'clock at night, that is far too late.

Ms GEORGE—We tabled at nine o'clock.

Mr Lomp—The use of embargoed copy does help.

CHAIR—It is as though you were trying not to get attention. If you were trying not to get attention, you would schedule it for nine o'clock. I know that was not the reason, but I just noticed that.

Ms BIRD—I have a question on a broad issue which is something I am quite passionate about—engagement of young people. Do you have a strategy for engagement of young people? Have you looked at televising youth parliaments that occur, generally, in each state?

Mr Frangopoulos—We have in fact broadcast a couple of events. There was one at the National Press Club.

Ms Breen—Yes, the talking classroom. We have got 12 hours of the WA youth parliament waiting to be edited up.

Ms BIRD—Fantastic.

Ms Breen—So that will probably run, with all due respect to the WA youth parliament, around Christmas time when it is a bit quiet here. But, absolutely, we definitely do have commitment.

Mr Frangopoulos—Our commitment is first and foremost to coverage of the federal parliament but beyond that it is very, very broad. My wife and I found ourselves sitting on the couch on a Sunday afternoon watching, heaven help us, university debates on A-PAC. We were having our own debate, but that is perhaps a reflection on my household.

Ms BIRD—I have just given your commitment to the federal parliament. We should not just, I think, be reaching out to the voting public. In a broader educative role, we need to reach out to young people so they can understand their parliament and how it operates. Do you have something like a package that goes out to schools alerting them to A-PAC, or—

Mr Frangopoulos—We do. In the case of AUSTAR, for example, they provide their entire service free of charge to any school in regional and rural Australia. We actually have an education component as part of our website which, at our own cost, includes lesson plans for school teachers. We thought that was a very important part of that process. When A-PAC first went to air, we aired a series on how parliament works and the history of the new Parliament House. We would welcome working closer with the education office, which I understand is a separate unit, to develop ways of broadcasting material already available. And it could be that when parliament is not sitting that we make it eight o'clock or nine o'clock every morning, or some other time. If a committee is not sitting, we could air something educational and that would be a way of delivering it to the schools. We, Foxtel and AUSTAR are very committed to the public service aspects of this. It may seem odd that a pay TV group is doing this but it is a natural extension of our passion for politics. We have demonstrated that through our coverage of election campaigns and the work that the *Sky News* team does here in Canberra.

Ms GEORGE—They do a great job.

Mr SOMLYAY—I was on the committee that Kerry Packer appeared before back in the early nineties—

Ms GEORGE—This is being recorded, remember.

Mr SOMLYAY—That's all right. There was no shortage of cameras there that day.

Mr Lomp—On the youth participation side, one of the things we are finding about the magazine is the number of high schools that are ringing us because they would like to use the articles as ways of exploring parliament and the issues of parliament. The Parliamentary Education Office does a very good job on the processes but what we are finding is that people are picking up more on policy, particularly in years 11 and 12. The other thing that we found was in relation to one particular article, a cover story, and about 2,000 seniors wrote in to subscribe to the magazine. It showed to us that there is a bit of a gap in terms of seniors and parliament and that there is an audience out there that really wants to absorb parliamentary information. So that is at the other end of the spectrum, I suppose.

Mr SOMLYAY—You would be aware that a few years ago, on the economics committee, we started inviting economics classes from schools to come to the public hearings and to actually put two or three questions to the governor.

Ms BIRD—Yes, that is great.

CHAIR—I am just going to deviate slightly. Even though question time gets all the attention, there are a number of elements of parliament which tend to run into each other. The presentation of bills, for example, is very interesting. It happens every day and the speech is also part of the legal background to the bill. In a session there is one speech from the government and one from the opposition, and they tend to be more content based. So it is actually quite interesting, but no-one would know it was even happening because it just drifts from one segment to the next.

Mr Frangopoulos—It is partly a scheduling thing of knowing exactly when it is going to hit so that we can cut to it live but, that said, when we are sitting on the House of Representatives all

day you are getting the entire session in total context. So there will be periods of time when it is not as compelling and other periods of time when it is extremely compelling. A-PAC is very big about ensuring the parliamentary process is not just about question time. That said, we do rebroadcast question time at eight o'clock or nine o'clock at night—

Ms Breen—It depends what time parliament finishes, but—

Mr Frangopoulos—Yes, we do rebroadcast it at night.

CHAIR—So there is that inability for a person to say: 'I will listen to that. I am really interested in that bit of parliament.' To what extent does the fixed start time of question time rate, for example?

Mr Frangopoulos—The fixed time of question time is extremely helpful because we know that it is going to start on time.

CHAIR—I understand that.

Mr Frangopoulos—And we are fully supportive of question time starting on time.

CHAIR—I am not suggesting it should not. I am saying that if I, as a member of the public, wanted to tune in every day to the presentation of bills to find out what was coming up, I could not do that.

Mr Frangopoulos—At the moment that would probably be a resource thing. But if at some point in the future DPS were able to edit up the presentation of bills, that would be really helpful. The great challenge we have is being able to telegraph what is coming up—and you will see that, as you noted, in the emails we get from viewers. We have a good idea, but anything can happen. I had these conversations with C-SPAN in Washington. I said to them, 'How do you do this?' They said, 'Well, do you know what, we just launched more C-SPAN channels so that basically the viewer has the choice of watching two or three or four separate channels.' They know that they will get committees all day on one channel, the House of Representatives on another, congress there and so on.

CHAIR—It is accurate to say that parliament has not taken on a role in deciding how it is presented to the public. Other people have come in—in this case, you guys and the department also—and started to use technology to present parliament in ways that are clearly working. As a result of that, probably in 30 years time, you guys will have the modern version of *Hansard* because you will have the visuals and there will be speech recognition technology and all the rest of it and you will be able to search. You guys will have that, you guys will have set the patterns, if you like, and parliament is not involved in that. Is that an issue or not?

Mr Frangopoulos—I do not think it is, because if you go to the basic principle of what we are doing here, we view ourselves as a conduit. We are not here to provide any insight into how the parliament should conduct itself. Yes, there are already ways—members of parliament are actually twittering and so on. There are some quite some compelling twitters of question time that I follow on my twitter account. It is great how this whole new media world is evolving. There are countless things that could be done; captioning of parliament, I think, is really quite

critical, particularly for those who are hearing impaired who want to have an active role in parliament. There are many, many practical things that could be done. At the end of the day, channels like A-PAC are here to be a conduit. The form which parliament takes and the way it carries out its business is really for us to reflect back to our viewers. I think that separation is really quite important—it is vital.

Mr Lomp—In a sense, we take a similar attitude, that we are at the service of the committees to convey information out there. We can help guide them in terms of some of the interesting things that they are doing that might not otherwise get public attention, but we do not see ourselves as social commentators or social commentary. We see ourselves as putting forward what committees have said and what people have said to committees in a balanced way. Certainly the feedback we get from the public is that they appreciate the fact that they now have access to information about parliament in a much broader way, and in a bipartisan and a non-partisan way; they are getting information from committees and from people who are making submissions and it is not overridden by commentary.

Mr SOMLYAY—Do you handle the Senate as well?

Mr Lomp—No, just the House of Representatives.

Ms GEORGE—The Chair of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services, Bernie Ripoll, is due to present the committee's report on the inquiry of the collapse of Storm Financial and the consequences of all that. I think that report will be a humdinger.

Ms BIRD—I have noted that people out there completely understand the independence of your organisation. As a chair of a committee, I do not see my story run until it is in the magazine. To some extent people think it is a bit of an instrument of the parliamentary committees rather than a media reflection and view of the committees. Your approach is an excellent approach and I commend you for that, but I am just saying that you might want to bump it up. Chairs of committees will get people commenting on the article as if we wrote them.

CHAIR—Do you have any last comments before we close?

Mr Frangopoulos—Thank you very much for the opportunity.

CHAIR—It has been truly fascinating. Once again, thank you for meeting with the committee this afternoon and assisting the committee with this inquiry. In particular, thank you to the representatives of A-PAC for travelling to Canberra this afternoon. The committee appreciates your time.

Resolved (on motion by **Ms Bird**):

That this committee authorises publication of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 1.40 pm