

Introduction

- 1.1 Electronic voting for divisions has been a matter of discussion in the House of Representatives for many decades. As early as 1970 the Joint Select Committee on the New and Permanent Parliament House agreed that the new Parliament House should have the necessary conduits to provide for electronic voting at a future date.¹
- 1.2 Since that time there have been numerous reviews which examined the potential for electronic voting in the House:
 - In 1993 Speaker Martin inspected the electronic voting facilities in a number of international parliaments. He concluded that the speed of operation, accuracy and reliability was such that it should be implemented in the House.²
 - A 1996 Procedure Committee report on the conduct of divisions concluded that the costs precluded electronic voting as an option. Members dissenting to this report concluded that the benefits of electronic voting would outweigh the costs and recommended that it be implemented.³
 - A 2003 Procedure Committee report declined to recommend electronic voting be implemented recognising that there were wider issues than

1 *House of Representatives Practice*, p. 286. Clerk of the House, *Submission 1*, p. 4.

2 Delegation report, led by Speaker Martin. *Electronic voting: Report of inspection of equipment used in the parliaments of Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Sweden and the United States of America and in the European Parliament building in Brussels*, Misc Paper.

3 Standing Committee on Procedure, *Conduct of divisions*, November 1996, pp. 5, 16.

technological or procedural matters for the House to consider prior to any recommendation being made for its implementation.⁴

- A 2013 Procedure Committee report concluded that greater consideration needed to be given to procedural and contextual issues prior to any decision being made. It reiterated the view of the 2003 inquiry that the issues should be debated by the House and all Members be given the opportunity to express their views prior to any decision being made.⁵

Conduct of this inquiry and structure of the report

- 1.3 In late 2015 the Leader of the House wrote to the Committee asking it to consider whether electronic voting on divisions might assist the House in the efficient conduct of business. He requested that the Committee report as early as possible in 2016.
- 1.4 Accordingly the Committee has considered and issued this report at the earliest possible opportunity, giving due consideration to the views of Members.
- 1.5 All Members were invited to submit to the inquiry and to attend a roundtable to put their views to the Committee. The Committee thanks those Members who took the time to engage with it and this report draws on their views.
- 1.6 The Committee has reviewed but not repeated the discussion available in its predecessor's reports as listed above. Specifically, readers are referred to the Procedure Committee report of June 2013⁶ and the Clerk's comprehensive submission to this inquiry.⁷ Submissions to this inquiry are available on the Committee's website and are listed at Appendix A.⁸
- 1.7 Chapter 2 outlines the submissions to this inquiry and the possible technological options for electronic voting in the Chamber.
- 1.8 Chapter 3 puts forward the Committee's position on electronic voting in the Chamber.

4 Standing Committee on Procedure, *Review of the conduct of divisions*, August 2003, pp. 6-9.

5 Standing Committee on Procedure, *Electronic voting in the House of Representatives*, June 2013.

6 Standing Committee on Procedure, *Electronic voting in the House of Representatives*, June 2013, available at <www.aph.gov.au/e_voting>

7 Clerk of the House, *Submission 1*.

8 <http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Procedure>