

Committee conclusions

- 3.1 In much the same way as the advent of the internet and e-mail changed the way Members interacted with their constituents, ongoing advancements in technology and the growth of social media platforms have continued to shape the way in which Members communicate. They can now reach mass audiences instantaneously from their places in the Chamber. While many Members have adopted this new technology with enthusiasm and clearly value the opportunities to interact this way, they need to be mindful of the rights of other Members and the need to uphold the dignity of the House and its formal proceedings.
- 3.2 Notwithstanding the consistency of Speakers' rulings on the use of electronic devices in the Chamber, a number of Members strongly favoured the establishment of an authoritative source of guidance on the use of electronic devices in the Chambers. Currently, Members need to be aware of the statements made by successive Speakers, and the Committee agrees with suggestions that one set of guidelines would assist to remove any uncertainties about what is and what is not appropriate use of electronic devices.
- 3.3 The Committee accepts suggestions that Members should continue to be able to use devices for social media and other purposes in the Chamber, but that devices should not be used by Members:
- in any way that disrupts the House or Federation Chamber;
 - to display information to other Members; nor
 - to take photographs, record proceedings, or produce an audible signal.
- 3.4 These suggestions are largely consistent with rules governing the use of electronic devices in other legislatures. These emphasise the responsibility

on Members to be discreet and to maintain order and respect for proceedings.

- 3.5 All Members were informed of the draft resolution appended to the Clerk of the House's submission. Feedback to the Committee endorsed it as a sound and timely complement to the Standing Orders. Importantly, given some Members were unsure of the status of their public communications from electronic devices, the draft resolution confirms that such communications, whether transmitted from the Chambers or not, are unlikely to be protected by parliamentary privilege. The draft resolution also reminds Members that reflections on the Chair made by Members via social media may be treated as important matters of order, in just the same way as if they were made by remarks inside or outside the Chamber.
- 3.6 The Committee notes that the draft resolution includes a provision that communication on social media regarding private meetings of committees or *in camera* hearings will potentially be considered a breach of privilege. The Committee did not examine this issue in depth as it focused on the use of electronic devices in the Chamber and Federation Chamber. However, it is entirely appropriate that any resolution provides comprehensive coverage and reminds Members about their responsibilities in general, including during committee activities. The Committee recommends the House adopt the Resolution proposed by the Clerk, that it be published with the Standing Orders and that Members, especially new Members, be made aware of its provisions.

Recommendation 2

- 3.7 **The Committee recommends that:**
- **the House consider and adopt a resolution in the terms set out in the proposed resolution on the use of electronic devices extracted at Appendix B;**
 - **the terms of the resolution be included with published versions of the Standing Orders; and**
 - **the terms of the resolution be drawn to the attention of all Members, in particular to new Members as part of their orientation program.**
- 3.8 Should the House adopt this proposed resolution and, should the Committee of Privileges and Members' Interests add to its Guidelines for Members on the status and handling of their records and correspondence,

then Members will have the benefit of the straightforward, formal resolution on the use of electronic devices as well as practical guidance that addresses comprehensively the diverse nature of the communications they use in the course of their duties as Members of the House of Representatives.

DON RANDALL MP

Chair

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