

Introduction

- 1.1 In 2014 the Federation Chamber of the House of Representatives marked its 20th anniversary. In its 20 years of operation, it has become an integral part of the way the House manages its legislative program, offering additional government business time as well as private Members' business and committee and delegation business opportunities.
- 1.2 The Federation Chamber owes its genesis to the Standing Committee on Procedure. In recognition of the increasing pressure of legislative business, following the 1993 election, the Procedure Committee (37th Parliament) inquired into how to streamline legislative activity and provide additional time for Members to consider legislation – without increasing the hours of the House.
- 1.3 Its report: *About time: Bills, questions and working hours*, presented in October 1993, acknowledged that legislative processes had been a feature of reform proposals for two decades with various proposals trialled and abandoned. The demands on the House remained.¹
- 1.4 The Committee recommended the establishment of a standing 'committee of the whole', to be known as the Main Committee (Legislation), which would meet in its own venue, concurrently with the House.²
- 1.5 Summarising the benefits to the proposal, the Procedure Committee stated:

The proposals reorganise legislative business to allow Members to use their time more productively. The dual legislative streams should make a major contribution to minimising the need for

1 Standing Committee on Procedure (37th Parliament), *About time: Bills, questions and working hours*, October 1993, p. 5.

2 Standing Committee on Procedure (37th Parliament), *About time: Bills, questions and working hours*, October 1993, p. 12.

closures and the use of the guillotine. It gives the House more time (by putting more of its business into committee and removing committee proceedings from the Chamber). More legislation can be dealt with in a given number of days. At the same time it is possible to give additional time to individual bills. The additional legislative time would open up fuller opportunities, in the House, for debate on the major and controversial items of the Government's legislative agenda. It would also provide more opportunities for backbenchers to make speeches for the record ... on routine bills which are of special interest to them or of importance to their electorate.³

- 1.6 It is safe to say that the benefits articulated by the Committee in 1993 have been realised and the work undertaken in the Main Committee, now known as the Federation Chamber, has been integral to the effectiveness of the House.
- 1.7 Indeed, the Federation Chamber has become a testing ground for new procedures – such as the trialling of the intervention procedure as a sessional order, now adopted in the standing orders for use in the House.⁴ The nature of consensus operation means that new standing orders can be tested and considered fairly in the Federation Chamber before introduction to the House.
- 1.8 The Federation Chamber also continues to evolve in the business it conducts. There is now time for the consideration of private Members' business, grievance debate and statements by Members.
- 1.9 Nonetheless, despite the important role it plays in the work of the House of Representatives, the Federation Chamber has always been an alternative venue to the House for a restricted range of business. It remains a subordinate body: the House refers business to the Federation Chamber, receives reports from the Federation Chamber, and confirms decisions made on business referred to the Federation Chamber.
- 1.10 The ongoing role, as well as the operations, of the Federation Chamber, its venue and further options to enhance its effectiveness are considered in this report.

Previous Procedure Committee commentary

- 1.11 The Procedure Committee has carefully monitored the role and operations of the Federation Chamber since its inception. In addition to its ongoing

3 Standing Committee on Procedure (37th Parliament), *About time: Bills, questions and working hours*, October 1993, p. 12.

4 Standing Order 66A, 26 March 2015.

role in monitoring House procedures, the Committee has issued the following reports which have specifically addressed the operations of the Federation Chamber:

- 37th Parliament – *About time: Bills, questions and working hours*, October 1993;
- 37th Parliament – *Time for review: Bills, questions and working hours*, June 1995;
- 38th Parliament – *Provision for Members to make short speeches in the Main Committee*, September 1997;
- 39th Parliament – *The second chamber: Enhancing the Main Committee*, July 2000; and
- 40th Parliament – *Renaming the Main Committee: Celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Main Committee*, June 2004.

A note on terminology

- 1.12 The Main Committee was renamed the Federation Chamber of the House of Representatives in 2012 and Chapter 2 discusses the history and reason for this change. ‘Federation Chamber’ is used in this report unless a specific reference necessitates the use of ‘Main Committee’.
- 1.13 The Procedure Committee has reported frequently on the role and operations of the Federation Chamber. Committees are referenced by the relevant Parliament number⁵ and reports are referred to by short title.

Conduct of inquiry and structure of the report

- 1.14 On 23 October 2014 the Committee agreed to undertake an inquiry into the role and operations of the Federation Chamber.
- 1.15 The Committee sought comment from all Members and parliamentary officers. Five submissions were received and are listed at Appendix C. The Committee conducted a private roundtable to which all Members were invited in March 2015. This was invaluable for informing the Committee’s deliberations and the ideas discussed at the roundtable are reflected in this report.
- 1.16 Recognising the 20th anniversary of the Federation Chamber, chapter 2 provides a general history of its evolution from 1994 to present day.
- 1.17 Chapter 3 examines the current role and operations of the Federation Chamber and options to enhance its effectiveness.
- 1.18 Chapter 4 considers the suitability of the current venue for meetings of the Federation Chamber and associated support services.

5 See *House of Representatives Practice*, 6th edn, 2012, p. 800.

- 1.19 Appendix A lists selected statistics regarding the operations of the Federation Chamber and Appendix B provides proposed new standing orders as a result of the recommendations of this report.