
The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Role of the Federation Chamber

Celebrating 20 years of operation

**House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Procedure**

June 2015
Canberra

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ISBN 978-1-74366-326-4 (Printed version)

ISBN 978-1-74366-327-1 (HTML version)

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Foreword

In 2014 the Federation Chamber marked its 20th year as the second chamber of the House of Representatives. The Standing Committee on Procedure recommended the establishment of the Federation Chamber in 1993 and has issued numerous reports in the intervening years aimed at improving its operations.

The occasion of its 20th anniversary was again an opportunity for the Procedure Committee to review the operations of the Federation Chamber. Reflecting on the aims for the subordinate chamber expressed by the Procedure Committee in 1993 it is clear that the benefits envisioned by the Committee have been realised. Today, the Federation Chamber is a permanent and integral part of the House of Representatives.

The Federation Chamber was established to relieve the legislative pressure on the House and to give Members greater opportunity to speak on non-controversial legislation that was being routinely 'guillotined'. Since its first meeting in 1994, the role of the Federation Chamber has evolved and the type of business it considers expanded. In addition to consideration of government legislation, the Federation Chamber now provides time for private Members' bills and motions, debate on committee reports, statements by Members on constituency issues, a grievance debate and adjournment debate. The Federation Chamber has also proved to be a valuable 'training ground' for new Members, providing an intimate and supportive venue in which to develop their skills as parliamentarians.

Despite the clear value of the Federation Chamber, the business referred to it has declined during the 44th parliament. This report makes recommendations aimed at allowing more flexibility in the time allotted for Members' constituency statements and the grievance debate so that these debates may be extended to give Members more speaking opportunities. The report also recommends that committee chairs take better advantage of the opportunity to have committee reports debated in a timely manner in the Federation Chamber.

Despite the important, largely consensus, work that occurs in the subordinate chamber, its role is not well known and the report recommends that it be better

promoted in the materials available to visitors to Parliament House and on the parliamentary website.

Finally, recognising that the current venue is likely to be the permanent venue for the Federation Chamber, the Committee has recommended some minor enhancements aimed at improving the image and usability of the venue.

The Federation Chamber has met its original purpose of providing a parallel legislative stream, and has evolved in its role in ways that enhance the operations of the House as well as give Members valuable opportunities to speak on matters of importance to their electorates. Significantly, it allows Ministers, including Parliamentary Secretaries, an opportunity to speak on constituency issues that they are not otherwise afforded in the House.

The Federation Chamber continues to play an important role in the work of the House of Representatives and its unique character of consensus and cooperation enhances the quality of debate. The Federation Chamber has proven its ability to evolve to meet the needs of the House and its Members and the Procedure Committee hopes that it continues to be an important part of the House into the future.

Don Randall MP
Chair



Membership of the Committee

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Deputy Chair Michael Danby MP

Members Russell Broadbent MP

Scott Buchholz MP

Ian Goodenough MP

Jill Hall MP

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Terms of reference

To inquire into and report on the role and operations of the Federation Chamber including, but not limited to:

- a) its role in the work of the House of Representatives since 1994;
- b) its operations including relevant standing orders;
- c) its venue and support services; and
- d) options to enhance its effectiveness.



List of recommendations

3 The future of the Federation Chamber

Recommendation 1 (paragraph 3.16)

The Committee recommends that the Liaison Committee of Committee Chairs and Deputy Chairs consider the mechanisms available to committees to seek to have their reports presented and/or debated in the Federation Chamber.

Recommendation 2 (paragraph 3.23)

The Committee recommends that Standing Orders 1 and 192B be amended to allow for a grievance debate of up to two hours on Mondays if there is no government business before the Federation Chamber.

Recommendation 3 (paragraph 3.24)

The Committee recommends that Standing Orders 1 and 193 be amended to allow for up to 60 minutes of three minute constituency statements on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday meetings of the Federation Chamber.

Recommendation 4 (paragraph 3.27)

The Committee recommends that Standing Order 192, Figure 4 be amended to clarify the indicative nature of the order of business for the Federation Chamber.

4 Venue of the Federation Chamber and support services

Recommendation 5 (paragraph 4.8)

The Committee recommends that the Federation Chamber be further enhanced to:

- provide a room fitout that distinguishes it from committee rooms and marks the status of the venue; and
- ensure that speech timing clocks are the same as those in the Chamber.

Recommendation 6 (paragraph 4.15)

The Committee recommends that additional resources be provided to the government and opposition Federation Chamber Whips through the provision of additional staffing to support these duties.

Recommendation 7 (paragraph 4.26)

The Committee recommends that the role and work of the Federation Chamber be promoted on the House of Representatives section of the Parliament of Australia website and in the information given to visitors to Parliament House.

Recommendation 8 (paragraph 4.27)

The Committee recommends that glass panels be fitted to all doors that are normally closed during meetings of the Federation Chamber to allow proceedings to be observed from outside.

