

Inquiry: Inquiry into the practices and procedures relating to question time

Submitted by: Brad Cork

Submission

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Ministers should have to answer questions

It is apparent to any impartial observer that ministers in the house regularly do not answer the question that is asked and are given considerable leniency by the Speaker. This frustrates the parliamentary process and defeats the purpose of holding the government of the day accountable.

The Speaker needs to look at the intent of the question as they can best judge and ensure the relevant minister answers the central question, rather than just loosely links their answer to a related topic. The Speaker should be able to hold a Minister in contempt if they refuse to adequately answer a question of the parliament.

Question time to be respectful

The standing orders should require all members of parliament to be respectful at all times and this needs to be enforced.

All comments should be directed to the Speaker and where this doesn't occur the Speaker needs to warn the member speaking and if they continue to disregard the standing orders they should be ejected from the parliament.

I realise that parliamentary privilege is an important and necessary part of democracy. However, I believe it is frequently abused. Standing orders should prevent disparaging comments being made about a member of parliament. If there are concerns about the conduct of a member they can be articulated by addressing the behaviour without calling members names or making other defamatory comments.

Members should be warned once if they interject and then should be removed from the remainder of question time. The behaviour of MPs would not be tolerated in a kindergarten classroom, let alone a professional environment. This does nothing to improve the perception of the population of the parliament.

Speaker to be independent of the parliament

Consideration should be given to whether the speaker could be non-elected role, possibly a former judge that would be able to enforce the standards of the house in a non-partisan manner.

Time wasting should be prevented

Members who are going to attempt to suspend standing orders during question time, should move a motion to suspend standing orders with no talk time. If the government has the numbers and doesn't give leave, then there is no point in wasting time with the theatrics of pursuing the matter any further.

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In general, standing orders should only be allow divisions to be called where it is not clear that the government already has the numbers (which generally they do, unless it is a hung parliament). There is a lot of wasted time in divisions.

Dorothy Dixers

Questions from government MPs should not be allowed during question time. There are other avenues for a government MP to raise concerns, either through party avenues, or if these fail through members 90 second statements etc.