



The Hon Tony Burke MP

Shadow Minister for Finance
Manager of Opposition Business
Member for Watson

Mr Don Randall MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Procedure
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Randall

INQUIRY – THE FEDERATION CHAMBER – 20 YEARS OF OPERATION

Thank you for your letter inviting me to contribute on behalf of the Opposition to the Committee's inquiry into the role and operations of the Federation Chamber.


I also thank the Committee for its grant of an extension of time to allow me the benefit of reading the submission of the Clerk of the House of Representatives prior to providing a submission.

The Opposition's response to the Committee's terms of reference is as follows:

- The Federation Chamber was a great and innovative Labor reform to the Parliament. It is a credit to those who have contributed to the development of the Federation Chamber throughout its history that it is now largely regarded on both sides of the aisle as a reform which has improved the work of the House of Representatives.
- Principally, the Federation Chamber allows additional time for Members of Parliament to debate non-controversial legislation, freeing up time in the Main Chamber for debate on more contentious issues.
- The Federation Chamber also provides additional time for Members to raise matters in Parliament which might otherwise not be heard in the Main Chamber. For example, through private Members' motions, private Members' bills, grievance debates and constituency statements.

- Beyond these important practical considerations, the Federation Chamber also demonstrates the best spirit of bipartisanship both by its design and operation. It was designed to function by cooperation, with a requirement that a quorum only exists when both a government and non-government Member are present (in addition of course to the Deputy Speaker). The practical effect of this astute Standing Order is that the Federation Chamber only operates by agreement.
- This Standing Order, as well as the intimate physical space of the Federation Chamber has led to a collegial and informal debating style which encourages discussion.
- This atmosphere has in turn provided a valuable training ground for new Members of Parliament, new members of the Speaker's panel and staff of the House of Representatives to acquaint themselves with the practices of the Parliament.
- The Opposition trusts that the Federation Chamber will continue to play an important role in the work of the House of Representatives well into the future.

I look forward to the outcome of the Committee's inquiry.

Yours sincerely 

2 February 2015 