
The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

The Second Chamber

Enhancing the Main Committee

House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Procedure

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Canberra

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Membership of the Committee

Chair Mr C M Pyne MP

Deputy Chair Hon L R S Price MP

Members Mr R A Cameron MP
 Mr M J Ferguson AM MP
 Mr J A Forrest MP
 Mrs J Gash MP
 Ms J Gerick MP

Committee Secretariat

Secretary Robyn Webber

Research Officer John Craig

Administrative Officer Anna Gadzinski

House of Representatives

Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

Telephone: (02) 6277 4685

Email: Procedure.Committee.Reps@aph.gov.au

URL: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/proc/index.htm>



Terms of reference of the committee

To inquire into and report on the practices and procedures of the House generally with a view to making recommendations for their improvement or change and for the development of new procedures

Reference guide

<i>About time</i>	Standing Committee on Procedure, <i>About Time: Bills, questions and working hours</i> , October 1993
H. C. Deb.	(UK) House of Commons Debates (<i>Hansard</i>). References are to Session, volume and column, e.g. H. C. Deb. (1998-99) 332, c98*
H. R. Deb.	House of Representatives Debates (<i>Hansard</i>). References are to Date and page, e.g. H. R. Deb (31.5.2000) 1234
<i>H. R. Practice</i>	L. M. Barlin (ed), <i>House of Representatives Practice</i> , 3rd edition, AGPS Canberra, 1997
<i>It's your House</i>	Standing Committee on Procedure, <i>It's your House: Community involvement in the procedures and practices of the House of Representatives and its committees</i> , October 1999
<i>Parliamentary calendar</i>	House of Commons Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons, Session 1998-99, First report, <i>The parliamentary calendar: Initial proposals</i> , 2 December 1998*
<i>Reid and Forrest</i>	G. S. Reid and Martyn Forrest, <i>Australia's Commonwealth Parliament 1901-1988: Ten perspectives</i> , Melbourne University Press, 1989
<i>Short speeches</i>	Standing Committee on Procedure, <i>Provision for Members to make short speeches in the Main Committee</i> , September 1997
SO	House of Representatives standing order

<i>Time for review</i>	Standing Committee on Procedure, <i>Time for review: Bills, questions and working hours: Review of procedural changes operating since 21 February 1994</i> , June 1995
VP	House of Representatives <i>Votes and Proceedings</i> . References are to Session and page, e.g. VP 1998-1999-2000/1454
<i>Westminster Hall</i>	House of Commons Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons, Session 1998-99, Second report, <i>Sittings of the House in Westminster Hall</i> , 24 March 1999*

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List of recommendations

4—Recognition

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that the title ‘Main Committee’ be changed to ‘Second Chamber’.

Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that, subject to feasibility, the Main Committee be relocated to a position adjacent to the Chamber and immediately accessible to the public.

Recommendation 3

The committee recommends that the following sessional order be adopted for the remainder of the 39th Parliament:

Interventions in the Main Committee

84A During consideration of any order of the day in the Main Committee a Member may rise and, if given the call, ask the Chair whether the Member speaking is willing to give way. The Member speaking will either indicate his or her:

- (a) refusal and continue speaking, or
- (b) acceptance and allow the other Member to ask a short question immediately relevant to the Member’s speech—

Provided that, if, in the opinion of the Chair, it is an abuse of the orders or forms of the House, the intervention may be denied or curtailed.

5—Operation

Recommendation 4

The committee recommends that the provisions in the standing orders which restrict the occurrence of Members' statements and adjournment debate in the Main Committee to specific days and times be removed including amendments to the standing orders as follows:

- Standing order 81, paragraph (a) be amended to read '(a) on the question for the adjournment of the House or the Main Committee to terminate the sitting.'
- Standing order 274, omit the proviso in paragraph (e)
- Standing order 274A, omit the standing order, substitute 'The question—That the committee do now adjourn—shall be open to debate but no amendment may be moved to the question.'
- Standing order 275, add at the end 'or as specified in these standing orders.'
- Standing order 275A, omit the standing order, substitute 'With the agreement of the Committee, the Chair may call statements by Members. Members, other than Ministers, may be called to make statements, each not exceeding three minutes. For the purpose of this standing order a Minister does not include a Parliamentary Secretary.'

Recommendation 5

The committee recommends that standing order 282 be amended to read:

Chair to suspend or adjourn sitting when disorder arises

282 If any sudden disorder arises in the Main Committee the Chair may, or on motion without notice by any Member shall, forthwith suspend or adjourn the sitting and shall report the disorder to the House. If the sitting is adjourned, any business under discussion and not disposed of at the time of the adjournment shall be set down on the Notice Paper for the next sitting.

Recommendation 6

The committee recommends that the convention by which Members of the governing party sit on the right of the Chair and others elsewhere be relaxed in the Main Committee.

Recommendation 7

The committee recommends that, subject to feasibility and reasonable cost:

- the digital speech time clocks in the Main Committee be replaced with analogue clocks similar to those in the Chamber;
- camera angles be rearranged to improve the identification on the House Monitoring System of individual Members in the Main Committee;
- glass panels be fitted to all doors in the Main Committee which are normally closed during proceedings; and
- the provision of better facilities for ancillary staff be examined.

6—Business

Recommendation 8

The committee recommends that the following provision be added to standing order 331 (Selection Committee):

- (h) The committee may select orders of the day, committee and delegation reports, and private Members' business, for debate in the Main Committee and report its determinations to the House. If it does so the following provisions will apply:
- (i) Upon presentation of a report of the committee nominating items for debate in the Main Committee, the report will be deemed adopted by the House and the items shall be deemed to be referred to the Committee.
 - (ii) The business so referred will have priority in the Main Committee after 4.30 p.m. on the sitting Wednesday immediately following the presentation of the report of the Selection Committee until the adjournment of the committee on that day.
 - (iii) Any items referred to the Main Committee under these provisions will be deemed to be returned to the House for further consideration at the adjournment of the Main Committee on the relevant Wednesday.

Some minor alterations would also be required to other standing orders including 104A, 104B and 270.

