

## Introduction

- 1.1 The Procedure Committee's recent report on the history of the committee clearly demonstrates that the committee is strongly motivated to improve the procedures and practices of the House and its committees so that Members can more effectively and efficiently undertake their roles.<sup>1</sup> The Procedure Committee has addressed issues related to committees in a number of its earlier reports including a major review of the House of Representatives committee system completed in May 1998, that is, *Ten years on: A review of the House of Representatives committee system*<sup>2</sup>. Other Procedure Committee reports address particular aspects of the operation of the committee system, for example: dealing with witnesses; application of modern technology to committees; promoting community involvement in committees; whether there should be a House Estimates system; and media coverage of committee proceedings.<sup>3</sup>

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- 1 See House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure. Nov 2005. *A history of the Procedure Committee on its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary*. Canprint, Canberra, xxiv 164p.
- 2 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure. May 1998. *Ten years on: A review of the House of Representatives committee system*. Department of the House of Representatives, Canberra, xiii 61p.
- 3 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure. April 1989. *Committee procedures for dealing with witnesses*. Commonwealth Government Printer, Canberra, 11p.
- Nov 1994. *Application of modern technology to committee proceedings*. AGPS, Canberra, vii 16p.
- Oct 1999. *It's your House: Community involvement in the procedures and practices of the House of Representatives and its committees*. Department of the House of Representatives, Canberra, xviii 98p.

- 1.2 In March 2005 the Procedure Committee decided it was timely to look again at some critical committee procedure and practice matters, in particular, the time the House gave to debating committee reports. This was an issue which has been of continuing concern to the Procedure Committee and had been a recurring theme in a number of the committee's earlier reports.

## **Scope/ conduct of the inquiry and structure of this report**

- 1.3 More specifically, the Procedure Committee decided to consider standing order 39 relating to the presentation of reports of committees or delegations as well as other matters relating to committee practice and procedure.
- 1.4 As an initial step on 2 June 2005 the Procedure Committee held a round table meeting to discuss those issues with chairs and deputy chairs and other interested Members of House and joint committees administered by the Department of the House of Representatives.
- 1.5 The round table was successful and on 16 June 2005 in response to the matters raised the Procedure Committee resolved to undertake an inquiry into:
- Practices and procedures relating to committees including:
    - arrangements for presenting committee reports;
    - the amount of time allocated to committee work in the House and Main Committee; and
    - attendance at committee meetings by non-members of the committee.
- 1.6 The committee then wrote to the chairs and deputy chairs of all House committees and the Clerk of the House inviting each of them to make a submission to the inquiry. A detailed submission was received from the Clerk of the House and one member of the Procedure Committee, the Hon Roger Price MP, put forward a paper on the topic. A copy of those documents is at Appendix A and B respectively.

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Oct 2003. *House estimates: Consideration of the annual estimates by the House of Representatives*. Department of the House of Representatives, Canberra, xiv 55p.

Oct 2005. *Media coverage of House proceedings: Including the Chamber, Main Committee and committees: [Final report]*. Department of the House of Representatives, Canberra, xiv 95p.

- 1.7 The Procedure Committee also sent an email survey to all 150 Members of the House of Representatives seeking their views on the time available for committee business in the House and Main Committee. The survey was sent on 18 August 2005 with a return date of 9 September 2005. On 8 September 2005 a reminder email was distributed and the deadline for survey return extended to 14 September 2005. Thirty six responses were received (that is, a response rate of 24 per cent) and the responses to specific questions are presented in the relevant sections of the next chapter and the summary results are presented at Appendix C.
- 1.8 The rest of this report is structured according to the two issues the inquiry addresses, that is:
- Chapter 2 examines the presentation of committee reports and time allocated to committee work in the House and Main Committee; and
  - Chapter 3 addresses the attendance at committee meetings by visitors.

