Dear Procedures Committee,

I hope you will accept this email as my submission to your current group of inquiries.

Effectiveness of House Committees

Conduct of the business of the House

Maintenance of the Standing Orders

Sorry it's so late. I just found out about them. I had to read your members' maiden speeches and revise the committee's history in order to make sure that your member's aspirations are similar to your predecessors. I've followed previous Procedures committees over the years, so I understand how little progress we can expect. I don't have much to suggest. Most every idea, suggestion and recommendation has already been made over the years. So few have been acted upon. The problem of course is lack of time, interest and not being able to prioritize the all the ideas easily. Perhaps this tool might help. http://gov2taskforce.ideascale.com/

NAME

I'm sure Mr. Price's suggestion back in 2003 will have you thinking about your committee as a 'Procedure and Modernisation of Parliament Committee'. Not that a name change is that important. But it's good to be clear; although i would suggest that Australians might prefer 'Innovation committee' as it is the accepted terminology for what this committee is aiming at achieving. Those suggestions; to take on the NZ and Scottish approach to committees - classify them by subject while running them as Mr. Rozioli suggests - would also be helpful. It would be useful in helping different parliament's network managers and archivists to discover and share their common committee findings. Perhaps (in time) it may help them share their inquiries at the same time, as opposed to duplicating them at different times and places, as tradition insists.

MEDIA – NEW AND OLD

There are only two points I would like to make. The first is that 'media really is the message', like this informal email. Rather than considering the Web in isolation from the older forms of media, like newspapers and TV, the committee needs to consider ALL forms of media and experiment on how they can complement each other. For example, I had considered producing this submission as an audio or video, to save your eyes and time, and because I read that many submissions don't get read. This is not surprising as most Parliamentary institutions are still coming to terms with thinking and proceeding like a modern Open University. They have no way to accept what passes as the norm in the World Wide Web of media, some of which support lifelong learning and share research activities between remote communities.

There are lots of new media tools which would save your secretariat and members time, effort and money, while making their (and other citizens) lives a little more informative and entertaining. Many are being experimented with by various persons inside and near to this house. E.g. http://www.katelundy.com.au/2009/07/24/public-sphere-3-australian-ict-creative-industries-development/ The problem is not that there are enough tools, but too many. Finding a useful combination of them is what every committee (peer group) in any (educational) institution can never agree upon. This the way is has to be. No one size will fit every committee or community. So legislation is useless.

Let me make one suggestion. The members of parliament must choose between two pieces of hardware. Either they will feel comfortable with a mobile phone or a (laptop) computer. If they aren't comfortable with both then they will have to choose one. Things like a voting tool can be delivered on the web, via the House wireless network. In the same manner, so can most other 'applications' they might want to share. PowerPoint, as one example, might have been a useful tool ten years ago, when Mr. Harris's suggestion was first made. But if the House is to be included the DigitalEducationRevolution then it's lecturers and (committee) researchers will need to understand the processes which allow students to attend virtually and download lectures when they are needed, in an open format. They will also need to understand how to moderate feedback from, and between, interested parties.

As Mr. Harris says, "Accommodating such technology in the Chamber would also change the dynamics of the Chamber and present technical challenges in terms of the record and the telecast/broadcast. These would not be insurmountable but there would be obvious cost implications". It would certainly change the dynamics of the Chamber, hopefully for the better. The costs pale into insignificance, when one compares them to the money spent, and largely wasted, on technologies like NSW Connected Classrooms project, where the delivered solution is terrific, but is largely unused because of its (off net) bandwidth cost and the lack of understanding of how it may be utilized (like involving parliamentary inquiries with citizens). All a student citizen can do is role play. http://www.peo.gov.au/teachers/diy.html

Parliament, after all, is the peak institution for learning in any country. We learn by watching how others behave. (in the case of the Chamber, badly). But inquiries these days offer the opportunity to actually include global citizens in a Nation's learning.

Much of what I mean here can only be understood if you might have some experience of online social networks, which are always global. They revolve around people building media tools which compensate for National institutions that rarely collaborate or innovate, especially in their research funding. Wikipedia, as one example of what I mean, might have made an impact on your consciousness. But without experience of the communities which revolve around the Wikipedia domain, you will just consider it as a publication that replaced Encyclopaedia Britannica. It's not. It's an example of a what happens when a few simple media tools, and grand vision, are matched with the lightest governance. Each page (article) is a collaboration between a small group of (usually remote) people, just like the procedures committee's members meet in their travels around the country.

Success is still measured in terms of eyeballs on a domain. The main difference is that the eyeballs are also attached to fingers who contribute to improving a domain. Take all the good intentions from reports such as 'It's Your House' and apply it to a domain like committees.gov.au; accept that Canberra has very few creative industries and need encouragement; and that the 2020 summit was a welcome (if ostentatious) icebreaker. The challenge is to consider how the old (parochial) broadcast media, using channels like Channel 40, can be married with new (global) Internet based media, whose primary focus is on sharing a committee's inquiries, and understanding their research and findings.

CULTURE – OPEN AND CLOSED

Trying to describe culture is such a hard thing to do. All this writer can say is that my world is as alien to your procedures as yours are to my communities. They are simply irrelevant to one another. A correspondent in one of my communities, at a progressive inquiry about how government may be able to encourage creative industries, mentioned that is almost impossible to describe Innovation to those who prefer Tradition. "There is so much for them to believe, to ignore, and to forget". It's hardly worth us talking about modern ways in which things can be done – like sharing an inquiry instead of having its findings and recommendations delivered - when the processes, and tools, are so alien to any parliament's regular habits. Their inhabitant's imagination about improving procedures is so limited. It runs, for example, to increasing the number of tellers to count heads rather than installing a simple and cheap electronic tallying tool. And continually acting as if a debate hasn't taken place previously.

Most people understand that their old education institutions are as antiquated as the ones of their government. The architecture and processes of an industrial age no longer suffice in a globalizing world where, for example, the misunderstanding of what a mortgage means in the US (that a mortgagee can walk away in hard times) can cause Australian local councils and agencies to lose millions of dollars. Very little can be controlled by National regulation in a world of multinationals. Peculiarities, like watching the price of oil drop, but the price of petrol at an Australian

pump go up, simply can't be investigated in a National perspective. That is why many National research councils expect their resident researchers to form peer global groups. It explains why so much money is spent on developing things like the European Research Area and Global Research Networks.

Culture might explain why in Australia, talk about a National Broadband Network will always be about Bandwidth with no mention of what the pipes may be used for. i.e. what content may be produced and aggregated by what institutions, and how people may access and use it. We can make cultural comparisons by looking at National statistics in different countries but they will never fully explain why, for example, the Nederlands has such a high home birth rate while Australia has such a high intervention rates. I just can't explain how far away Australia appears from the progressive ideas I read about, and watch developing, in places like the Nederlands. Concepts like Open Education Resources and Lifelong Learning are never spoken about in this country (that I can discover). They just don't seem to be considered. The culture of Australian institutions seems so (comparatively) closed, and tied up with the interests of their inhabitants, not the communities whose welfare they pay lip service to working for.

So, to save your eyes and time, while attempting to describe a more open culture, here is just one video that might be useful. This video is (after the lengthy intro) an overview of a National strategy for Open Education (Resources) in the Nederlands that was presented at a recent conference. http://openedconference.org/archives/1069 Hopefully it may suggest some ideas that may one day lead to Open Government. Here is one more from Parliament's librarian which proves there is an interest by your inhabitants. http://vimeo.com/5331737

TECHNOLOGY - BROADCAST AND INTERACTIVE

Just a few notes about the old fashioned approach to using new technology. The first is that Roxanne speaks in terms of the aph.gov.au 'domain', and renovating 'parliament's web site'. But so far as committees (or researching peer groups) are concerned this stifles an open approach. This learning (network) architecture must be capable of being provided equally to all institutions in .gov.au and .edu.au domains. Aph's committees must be considered in their own right. With Web 2.0 we are no longer trying to bring communities to an institutional portal. We are attempting to bring inhabitants from the inside and outside of many institutions to an interactive space – a node - where they can share a learning about some subject, where the goings on can be streamed (perhaps to a broadcast station) and archived as an inquiry progresses, or is picked up again after halting for a time, or used as research material at any time.

There are some technical issues to talk through here. But Australia, in my experience, has probably the best technicians in the world. They just don't have a parliament, or institutions, which asks them to do what the untrained will consider impossible things. And you can't outsource your learning. My suggestion is that you 'just do it'. I mentioned to Kate Lundy's press secretary (pia) that running a half day workshop as the Creative Industries report is handed to Minister Carr, linking up between those centres who attended previous sessions virtually, and streaming and recording, might begin to professionalize what Pia has strapped together on a shoestring. It might be a nice icebreaker into Open Government.

All the best.
Sincerely,
Simon Fenton – Jones
Ardleigh. Berrima.
Monday, 14 September 2009