

Background

- 1.1 During the week beginning 25 May 2009, articles were displayed by Members in the Chamber on numerous occasions, particularly during Question Time. The Prime Minister and other Ministers displayed photographs and folders containing details of funding under various government programs.¹ Members of the Opposition also displayed articles, such as an oversized picture of a credit card and a very large graph.²
- 1.2 The Speaker subsequently wrote to the Standing Committee on Procedure on 1 June 2009. In his letter, the Speaker asked the Committee to consider the practice of Members displaying articles in the House. He also referred to the broader issue of technological developments in the broadcasting of parliamentary proceedings, which had changed the way the public interacts with the House of Representatives.

Scope

- 1.3 The Committee recognises that changes in technology have resulted in images of House proceedings being more immediately accessible to the public. The practices of the House have not necessarily been wholly responsive to, or taken full advantage of, these changes.

1 H. R. Deb. (25.5.2009) 4073–4; H. R. Deb. (26.5.2009) 4261–3; H. R. Deb. (27.5.2009) 4504–6.

2 H. R. Deb. (27.5.2009) 4506–7; H. R. Deb. (28.5.2009) 4761–2.

- 1.4 One of the Committee's other inquiries – into the conduct of the business of the House – will, to a limited extent, consider changes in technology and their impact on the way the House operates. In the context of that inquiry, the Committee has received evidence from the Speaker, the Leader of the House, the Manager of Opposition Business, other Members and the Clerk of the House of Representatives. The discussions reinforced the need to address changes in the public's engagement with the Parliament as a result of changes in technology.
- 1.5 Improvements in technology are, however, a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they have the potential to improve communication between the Parliament and the community. On the other, they can provide a more powerful platform for people who choose to stretch the boundaries of the rules of the House.
- 1.6 In the longer term, a separate, wide-ranging inquiry would be appropriate to ensure adequate scope to investigate a range of matters in relation to the more sophisticated use of visual material in the House. These issues might include the use of visual presentations and how such material used in the Chamber and Main Committee might be recorded and made available to the public.
- 1.7 The immediate concern with 'stunts' distracts from the broader debate about the potential to use more sophisticated visual material in the House. The Committee would not wish its comments in relation to 'stunts' to limit debate on the broader issue. The Committee therefore considers it appropriate to limit its comment, for the present time, to the events that took place in the Chamber during the week of 25 May 2009 and the related rulings and media attention.