
The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Encouraging an interactive Chamber

House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Procedure

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Canberra

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Foreword

It is often said that debates in the House of Representatives can be dull, characterised by lengthy speeches to an almost empty chamber. This inquiry by the Procedure Committee has looked at ways of enlivening debates on legislation and other methods of encouraging an interactive chamber. It builds on the committee's 2003 report titled "Arrangements for second reading speeches".

In that report the committee supported a proposal by the former Speaker, the Hon. Neil Andrew, that second reading speeches on bills be reduced from 20 minutes to 15 minutes, with 5 minutes at the end for a question and answer period. In the light of the success of the intervention procedure in the Main Committee, the committee believes an extension of interventions to the chamber, to allow for interventions after 15 minutes of a second reading speech have passed, would provide for a similar outcome as the earlier proposal.

The committee encourages the trial of new arrangements in the broader context of encouraging a more interactive House of Representatives chamber.

Margaret May MP
Chair



Membership of the Committee

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Terms of reference

General terms of reference

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

Terms of reference of the inquiry

Arrangements for second reading speeches and other methods of encouraging an interactive chamber.

List of recommendations

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that standing orders be amended to allow interventions after the first 15 minutes of each second reading speech in the Chamber (other than the speeches of the mover and lead speaker in response). This should be implemented on a trial basis from the start of sittings in 2007, and reviewed by the Procedure Committee after 6 months of operation.

Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that Members should have the right to opt out of answering questions on their second reading speeches in the Chamber, either by indicating at the beginning of the speech that he/she would not be taking questions after the first 15 minutes of the speech, or by listening to a question before deciding whether to answer it.

Recommendation 3

The committee recommends that interventions should be brief and directly relevant to the second reading speech, and that the Speaker should have the discretion to rule out of order any intervention that abuses the orders or forms of the House.

