



# ANTHONY ALBANESE MP

FEDERAL MEMBER FOR GRAYNDLER

SHADOW MINISTER FOR INFRASTRUCTURE AND WATER

MANAGER OF OPPOSITION BUSINESS



14 February 2007

Mrs Margaret May  
Chair  
Procedure Committee

Received 15/2/2007 gm.

Dear Margaret,

My attention has been drawn to an additional submission by the Clerk, Mr Harris. I would like to make some comments in response.

The Opposition welcomes the introduction of new technology and its utilisation to enable Members and, for that matter, Presiding Officers to more readily perform their duties. However, care needs to be taken to ensure that there are not incremental or significant changes to roles that are well understood and elaborated in House Practice.

The provision of a computer in the Main Committee for the Deputy Speaker and Speakers Panel has been for their personal use and as I understand it has not been for the transmission of a constant stream of rulings from the Clerk to the Deputy Speakers in real time.

The computer provided to the Speaker doesn't appear to be available in the House to Presiding Officers or the Speakers Panel. Nor does the advice from the Clerk to other Presiding Officers or other members of the Speakers Panel appear to depart from that laid out in House Practice on page 272.

*"while sitting at the table the Clerk must always keep an ear to the debate as he or she may be called upon to give immediate advice to the Chair or others in relation to a procedural or technical matter suddenly arising".*

Traditionally the Clerk is invited to provide advice to the Speaker by pushing a buzzer. Alternatively the Clerk may make a judgement call and choose to offer advice but the Clerk would have to exercise discretion as to how frequently he/she chooses to do this.

The present arrangement, with the laptop on the Speaker's chair, seems to provide for a constant stream of real time rulings from the Clerk to the Speaker. As a consequence the role of the Speaker appears to be reduced. For this reason the Opposition has reservations about the apparent reduced role of the Speaker which could result in a diminution of the Speaker's authority and apparent elevation of the role of the Clerk. Moreover, any changes of roles have occurred without the authority of the House.

The Opposition is uneasy with what appears to be a significant diminution of the traditional role and authority of the Speaker and is unable to accept how such changes could be justified.

I would be happy to discuss these matters with the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

  
ANTHONY ALBANESE MP  
Manager of Opposition Business

Real Solutions