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The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

# **Procedures relating to House committees**

House of Representatives  
Standing Committee on Procedure

November 2005

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## Foreword

One of the great bipartisan strengths of the House of Representatives is its committee work. Backbench members put an enormous amount of effort into this work and on most occasions it is undertaken in association with the community. Important topics of the day that directly impact on the lives of many Australians are considered and addressed. In their committee work we see backbench Members at their parliamentary best, working together to bring about change for the betterment of Australian society.

In this report the Procedure Committee addresses two important issues that impact on the work of House of Representatives committees.

First, for many years the Procedure Committee has been disappointed that the amount of time for statements and debate in the House of Representatives on the output of committee work – their reports – is in no way commensurate with the importance of that work and the contributions made to it by Members and the community. The Procedure Committee has sought to redress this situation in the past with some success. However, the disparity persists.

In this report the Procedure Committee re-examines this issue. With the second Chamber – the Main Committee – now operating successfully the scope for easily achieving additional time for debate of committee reports is readily available. Accordingly, the committee recommends some minor changes to procedures and practices and the associated standing orders of the House of Representatives to expand the time available to Members for debating committee reports.

The second issue the committee addresses is that the revised House of Representatives standing orders introduced on 16 November 2004 (amended on

8 February 2005) may have inadvertently created some uncertainty about whether committees can admit visitors to some private meetings. This issue is examined with a view to resolving the uncertainty by a further minor amendment to the standing orders.

The Procedure Committee is always keen to improve the procedures and practices of the House to assist Members in undertaking their roles in the Parliament. We know that the amendments recommended in this report will achieve this end.

**Margaret May MP**  
**Chair**



## **Membership of the Committee**

**Chair** Mrs M A May MP

**Deputy Chair** Mr D Melham MP

**Members** Hon B K Bishop MP

Mrs P Draper MP

Mr L Hartsuyker MP (from 31.5.05)

Ms K Hoare MP

Mr P Neville (to 31.5.05)

Hon L R S Price MP

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# **Terms of reference**

## **General terms of reference**

To inquire into and report on the practices and procedures of the House and its committees

## **Inquiry terms of reference**

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.





# List of recommendations

## Time allocated to committee work in the House and Main Committee

### Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that:

- the practice of presenting committee and delegation reports in the House on sitting Mondays continue;
- standing order 192 be amended on a trial basis during 2006 to extend the order of business of the Main Committee to have a dedicated weekly period of 4.00pm-6.00pm on sitting Mondays for the debate of committee and delegation reports if required;
- in the unlikely event that there are no committee or delegation reports to be debated, the period 4.00pm-6.00pm not be scheduled in the Main Committee by the Deputy Speaker; and
- the Procedure Committee review the trial in late 2006 so that if the arrangements are successful their operation would be ongoing.  
*(paragraph 2.49)*

### Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that standing orders 1, 39(c), 40(b) and (c), 190(e) and 192(a) and (b) be amended (as indicated by underlining) by sessional orders for 2006, as follows:

- 1 Maximum speaking times

The maximum time limits that apply to debates, speeches and statements are as follows.

*section of table to be replaced on page 3 of the standing orders:*

<i>subject</i>	<i>time (max)</i>
<p><i>Committee and delegation reports on Mondays</i></p> <p><i>in the House</i></p> <p>Each Member</p>	<p>10 mins</p> <p>maximum, as allotted by the Selection Committee</p>
<p><i>in the Main Committee</i></p> <p>Each Member</p> <p><i>(standing orders 39, 40, 192(b))</i></p>	<p>10 mins</p>

### 39 Presentation of reports

(c) The Member presenting a report may move without notice, a specific motion in relation to the report. When a report has been presented on Monday under paragraph (a)(i) debate on the question shall be adjourned to a later hour and a motion may be moved that the report be referred to the Main Committee. In other cases debate shall be adjourned to a future day.

### 40 Resumption of debate on reports

(b) For debate in accordance with paragraph (a) the Selection Committee shall set:

- (i) the order in which motions are to be considered;
- (ii) time limits for the whole debate; and

(iii) time limits for each Member speaking, of not more than 10 minutes.

(c) During the period provided by *standing order 192* proceedings may be resumed in the Main Committee on motions in relation to committee and delegation reports referred that day or on an earlier day.

#### 190 General rules for suspensions and adjournments of the Main Committee

The following general rules apply to meetings of the Main Committee:

(e) The Committee shall stand adjourned at 6 pm when the committee meets on Mondays in accordance with *standing order 192(b)*, or on completion of all matters referred to it, or may be adjourned on motion moved without notice by any Member –

*That the Committee do now adjourn.*

#### 192 Main Committee's order of business

(a) If the Committee meets on a Wednesday or Thursday the normal order of business is set out in figure 4.

(b) On sitting Mondays the Committee shall meet from 4 pm to 6 pm if required to consider orders of the day relating to committee and delegation reports in accordance with *standing order 40 (resumption of debate on reports)*. (paragraph 2.50)

### Attendance at committee meetings by visitors

#### Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that standing orders 240 and 241 be amended (as indicated by underlining) as follows:

#### 240 Admission of visitors

- (a) A committee or a subcommittee may admit visitors when it is examining a witness or gathering information in other proceedings.
- (b) All visitors must leave if:

- (i) the Chair asks them to;
- (ii) the committee or subcommittee resolves that they leave; or
- (iii) the committee or subcommittee is deliberating or hearing witnesses in private.

#### 241 Admission of other Members

Other Members, who are not Members of the committee, may be admitted when a committee or subcommittee is examining a witness, or gathering information in other proceedings. Other Members must leave when the committee or subcommittee is deliberating or hearing witnesses in private, or if the committee or subcommittee resolves that they leave. (*paragraph 3.14*)



## **List of abbreviations**

JCPAA	Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit
MPI	Matter of public importance
PWC	Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works
SO	standing order

