
The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

The work of the Petitions Committee: 2013-2016

House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Petitions

May 2016
Canberra

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Foreword


This report records the work of the third Petitions Committee, the Committee of the 44th Parliament. The petitioning framework it oversees is now in its ninth year.

During the Parliament, in February 2015, the Government responded to the first Committee's report on e-petitioning, supporting in-principal the introduction of an electronic petitioning system in the House. Eight months later the Speaker of the House, The Hon Tony Smith MP, made an announcement in the House about the development of such a system, within existing resources. I am pleased to say that this development is currently underway.

I would like to thank the Deputy Chair and my Committee colleagues for their commitment to the work of the Petitions Committee and the important stewardship of the House's petitioning system. The Committee has strived to maintain the principles of petitioning which were foundations developed by the Procedure Committee in 2007 when it recommended reinvigoration of the House's petitions process.

This is a role where Members must leave their political and personal opinions aside and make compliance assessments of petitions based solely on the procedural requirements of the House. I can attest that Members of this Committee completely adhere to this obligation and it is rewarding to be a part of such a democratic process.

Dr Dennis Jensen MP
Chair



Membership of the Committee

Chair Dr Dennis Jensen MP

Deputy Chair Hon Justine Elliot MP

Members Mr Russell Broadbent MP

Mr Scott Buchholz MP

Hon Anthony Byrne MP

Ms Lisa Chesters MP

Mrs Natasha Griggs MP

Ms Jill Hall MP

Mr Kevin Hogan MP

Mrs Jane Prentice MP

Committee Secretariat

Secretary	Ms Catherine Cornish (to October 2014)
	Ms Samantha Mannette (from October 2014 to August 2015)
	Ms Pauline Cullen (from September 2015)
Inquiry Secretary	Ms Sharon Bryant (to January 2014) (from July 2015)
	Ms Samantha Mannette (from January 2014 to May 2014)
	Mr James Bunce (from May 2014 to July 2015)
Senior Research Officer	Mr Chris Gahan (from September 2015 to May 2016)
Administrative Officer	Ms Jessica Butler (from January 2014 to July 2015)
	Ms Natasha Petrovic (from July 2015)



Terms of reference

To inquire into and report on the work of the Standing Committee on Petitions in the 44th Parliament, with particular reference to:

- (a) the role and operations of the Standing Committee on Petitions; and
- (b) the development of an e-petitioning system.

Introduction

The Petitions Committee of the 44th Parliament

- 1.1 The Standing Committee on Petitions of the 44th Parliament was established on 12 November 2013, and the ten Members were appointed to the Committee on 4 December 2013.¹ The Committee held its first meeting on 11 December 2013.
- 1.2 With one exception, the petitioning standing orders have remained unchanged since the Committee's establishment in 2013.² The Committee will have conducted 47 meetings, including public hearings, since its first meeting and the end of the first session of the 44th Parliament.³

The petitioning principles

- 1.3 The Committee reiterates its belief in the underlying principles of petitioning, as enunciated by the Procedure Committee in 2007⁴. The Committee's view is that these fundamental foundations of petitioning the House of Representatives should be borne in mind in future developments of the petitioning process. It is necessary to maintain these principles to ensure the act of petitioning the House has meaning and relevance to the Australian people now, and in the future, and to the importance of the House's engagement with Australians.

1 Refer *Votes and Proceedings*, No. 10, 4 December 2013, p. 162.

2 The one standing order amendment, which occurred 19 March 2014, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. The standing orders have changed little since the end of the 42nd Parliament.

3 The first session of the 44th Parliament was prorogued on 15 April 2016.

4 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, *Making a difference: petitioning the House of Representatives*, August 2007

- 1.4 The six petitioning principles the Procedure Committee formulated in 2007 include:

That petitions belong to the public

- 1.5 Underpinning this is the belief that petitions are the most direct form of communication between the public and the House.

Petitions sent to the House should be addressed by the House

- 1.6 That establishing a Committee to facilitate the tabling of petitions complying with House requirements – and to communicate with petitioners about the status of their petitions – was an effective way for the House to address petitions it received.

Governments should respond

- 1.7 That strengthening the process of responses to petitions by Ministers would ensure petitions were seen as a worthwhile democratic tool.

Members' involvement should be enhanced and streamlined

- 1.8 The Committee recognised the important role Members play in liaising with citizens, raising petition issues in the House, and tabling petitions.

Rules should be relevant and fair; and

- 1.9 Preparing a petition should not be excessively difficult and the rules governing petitions should not prove unnecessarily onerous.

Information technologies should be used more effectively.

- 1.10 It is important to embrace new information technologies to provide people with different means of obtaining information about the petitioning process – and providing alternatives to paper-based petitioning. The Committee recommended the introduction of electronic petitioning.

The inquiry

- 1.11 On 16 March 2016 the Petitions Committee resolved to conduct an inquiry into its work throughout the 44th Parliament.
- 1.12 Terms of Reference for the inquiry were: to inquire into and report on the work of the Standing Committee on Petitions, with particular reference to:
- a) the role and operations of the Standing Committee on Petitions; and
 - b) the development of an e-petitioning system.

The Committee's primary objective for the inquiry was to provide an overview of its operations during the 44th Parliament and the planned introduction of an electronic petitioning ('e-petitioning') system for the House of Representatives.

- 1.13 The Committee did not investigate any particular area of petitioning, nor did it call for submissions – much of the information about its operations is on the public record via regular Chair’s statements and publications to the Committee website. It did, however, ask for feedback from principal petitioners at its roundtable meetings into selected petitions, to gather views and perceptions about the House’s current petitioning system.

The report

- 1.14 The report addresses the terms of reference in the following two chapters. Chapter 2 considers the work of the Committee of the 44th Parliament – its role and operations – and details the standing order amendment implemented in March 2014 and some trends and items of interest during this parliament.
- 1.15 Chapter 3 outlines the Committee’s formal operating framework (including recent direct and indirect changes), feedback from petitioners and an update on the introduction of an electronic petitioning system in the House.
- 1.16 Appendices to the report include current Standing Orders and former Standing and Sessional Orders (Appendix A), non-inquiry public roundtable meetings held (Appendix B) and petitioning statistics of the 44th Parliament (Appendix C).



Role and operations of the Standing Committee on Petitions

Introduction

- 2.1 The Petitions Committee’s fundamental role is to receive and process petitions to the House of Representatives and act as a conduit to the House for the presentation of petitions that meet Standing Order requirements. It may also inquire into petitions matters and the petitions system.
- 2.2 The Committee’s role and responsibilities are defined formally by Standing Order 220:
 - (a) A Standing Committee on Petitions shall be appointed to receive and process petitions, and to inquire into and report to the House on any matter relating to petitions and the petitions system.
 - (b) The committee shall consist of ten members: six government and four non-government members.

The Petitions Committee

Principles and expectations of the Committee’s role

- 2.3 The most significant part of the current Committee’s work is its primary role of receiving and processing petitions for consideration. Most private meeting time is devoted to assessing petitions for compliance with the House’s procedures and deliberating over correspondence on petitions.
- 2.4 Standing order 220 also provides the Committee the ability to “inquire into and report on matters relating to petitions and the petitions system”. This has enabled the Committee to review and report on its activities this

parliament through roundtable hearings, Chair's statements in the House and including through this report.

- 2.5 This parliament the Committee has not sought to inquire into any particular aspects of the petitioning system or process. However, the Chair's statement every sitting Monday provides a regular informal mechanism to report to the House on significant issues and activities.¹
- 2.6 The Commonwealth Constitution and the House Standing Orders and practices provide some unalterable aspects of the House's petitioning process. These lay-out specific powers, boundaries and foundations at the core of the House's petitioning process. These rules governing the House's petitioning process are not only important for practical reasons² but also to manage the expectations of the Australian public – increasingly globally interconnected, well-informed and technologically savvy.
- 2.7 As such, it is evident that the Committee cannot:
- Receive petitions on matters outside the federal jurisdiction, that is, State or Local Government or entirely private matters;
 - Resolve or follow-up matters raised in petitions;³
 - Intervene in Government policy or administration;
 - Oblige a Minister to respond to a petition or to follow-up an outstanding response for a petitioner;
 - Present petitions which do not comply with standing orders; or
 - Limit freedom of speech by obstructing the presentation of petitions which clearly comply with Standing Orders and other practices of the House merely because the Committee disagrees with the request or subject matter.
- 2.8 Standing Order 206 (b) gives the Committee little discretion in assessing petitions – “The Standing Committee on Petitions must check that each petition lodged for presentation complies with the standing orders, and if the petition complies it shall be approved for presentation to the House.”⁴

1 There was a 50 per cent increase in the number of statements delivered in the 2015 calendar year on the frequency of the statements delivered in each of the non-election years of the 43rd Parliament. For example, there were 18 sitting Mondays in 2015 as opposed to 12 in each of 2014 and 2105.

2 For example, because the House has no power to act on State governance matters there is little point making a request of the House about a matter which falls within State legislation.

3 The Committee Chair regularly advises witnesses at roundtable meetings and the House that this is beyond the role of the Committee.

4 House of Representatives, *Standing Orders as at 26 March 2015*, SO 206 (b), p. 83.

Similarly, the Committee does not determine petitions to be heard at public hearings on the basis of individual beliefs or opinions.⁵

- 2.9 This neutral approach to assessment and public meetings is very similar to the manner in which Members present petitions in the House. Unlike the Senate, Members do not need to sponsor/support a petition they present but they can choose to have the petition presented by the Chair of the Committee because there is an alternative procedural mechanism for presenting petitions in the House – through the Chair.
- 2.10 Likewise, the Petitions Committee may or may not agree with the content of a petition it approves for presentation – and, when the Chair of the Committee presents petitions he may or may not agree with the content, but this is irrelevant in his independent role as Committee Chair.⁶

Operations of the Petitions Committee

Considering petitions and receiving ministerial responses

- 2.11 Standing Orders require that a petition must be certified by the Petitions Committee as meeting House requirements before it can be recognised as a petition when presented in the House. Petitions intended for presentation in the House are received and processed by the Committee's secretariat in preparation for the Committee's deliberations at private meetings each sitting week.
- 2.12 Standing Order 206 (b) requires the Committee to 'check that each petition lodged complies with the standing orders...'. Standing Orders 204 and 205 detail the form and content of petitions, and rules for signatures. The Committee's primary role is to determine whether the petitions received comply with these requirements. Of the Standing Order and procedural requirements the most significant are:
- a petition must be addressed to the House of Representatives *only*;
 - it must contain a request for action by the House *only* and the House must be capable of performing the action requested;⁷
 - the terms of the petition must not contain alterations and must be no more than 250 words;

5 This will be discussed later in this Chapter under *Public hearing activities with petitioners and public servants*, at 2.35, page 13.

6 *House of Representatives Practice*, 6th Edition, pp. 634-635.

7 For example, it can't be a State or Local Government matter or asking for intervention in an action that a private organisation or individual can legally undertake.

- the petition is written in moderate language and the terms can't be illegal or promote illegal acts;
 - the petition must either be written in English or, if in another language, be accompanied by a certified translation ;
 - the full terms of the petition must be at the top of the first page and, as a minimum, the identically worded request of the petition must be at the top of other signature pages;
 - the full name, address and handwritten original signature of a principal petitioner must appear on the first page;
 - House Members can't be a principal petitioner, nor can they sign their support for a petition;
 - the signature of each petitioner must be in his or her own hand writing (unless the petitioner is incapable of signing⁸) and be provided on original hard-copy (not copied, pasted or transferred).⁹
- 2.13 Petitions are assessed by the Committee against the format and content criteria of Standing Orders 204 – 205 and considering more general procedural criteria. Those which meet the requirements are found to be 'in order' and are certified as such. In-order petitions are subsequently presented in the House, either by the Committee Chair at the next available time, currently scheduled on sitting Mondays at 10am,¹⁰ or by other Members of the House who have indicated – and principal petitioners who have consented – that they will present the petition.
- 2.14 The Committee first considers compliance with Standing Orders 204 and 205, and then may resolve to refer the petition terms to a Minister or Ministers with relevant portfolio responsibility, indicating that a written ministerial response is being sought. Following presentation of petitions – whether by the Committee Chair or a Member – the terms of referred petitions are forwarded in writing by the Chair of the Committee to the appropriate members of the Executive for a written response.¹¹
- 2.15 Only in-order petitions can be presented in the House, published in Hansard, recorded as a formal petition in the official minutes of the House, and be referred to the Executive for comment.
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8 This is in the case of physical incapacity to sign, not for convenience.

9 House of Representatives, *Standing Orders as at 26 March 2015*, Standing Orders 204–205, pp. 82-83.

10 House of Representatives, *Standing Orders as at 26 March 2015*, Standing Order 34, (Order of Business) pp. 26-27. Note that in the 42nd Parliament the Chair's presentation timeslot was established on 24 June 2008 via Sessional Order 207 to enable these presentations on Mondays at 8.30 pm-8.40 pm. This replaced the Standing Orders of 13 February 2008 which provided for the Speaker's presentation of in-order petitions.

11 House of Representatives, *Standing Orders as at 26 March 2015*, SO 209 (a) and (b), p. 84.

- 2.16 One of the more significant incentives of petitioning in this formal and very traditional way is the potential for the matter to be put directly before the Executive, to be considered and have an opportunity for a written response to be prepared and made public. The ability to have an issue brought directly before a Minister provides petitioners with a significant incentive to ensure that their petition meets standing order requirements.
- 2.17 The Committee refers to the appropriate Minister/s most petitions it approves for presentation in the House. Those not referred are minimal and occur mostly when the House has received multiple petitions on the same subject matter or the petitions request identical or similar action. In these cases the matter is not repeatedly referred for a response and the petitioner is advised of the recent publicly available response. All responses are made public – published in Hansard after presentation by the Chair and then to the Committee’s website. It is a very transparent process where there are clear links marrying responses received to petitions presented.
- 2.18 Under Standing Order 209 (b) it is expected that Ministers will respond to a referred petition within 90 days of a petition being presented in the House. The response is received by the Committee which then acknowledges the Chair will formally present the response to the House during the next opportunity (the next sitting Monday). As such, the Committee provides the link between the petitioner and the Executive, via the House.
- 2.19 A key success of the establishment of a Petitions Committee in the House, and the standing orders it oversees, is the ongoing, timely and well-considered written responses which ministerial referrals have produced. The 44th Parliament is no exception, with 191 ministerial response letters responding to 226 petitions in a parliament with 255 petitions presented.¹² This equates to an average 44th Parliament letter response rate of 75 per cent, with an actual petition response rate of 89 per cent.¹³ In the calendar years of 2014, 2015 and 2016 (to 15 April 2016) the letter response rates were 64 per cent; 76 per cent and 82 per cent respectively – with actual responses approximating, or limited¹⁴ to, 74 per cent; 92 per cent and 100 per cent respectively.

12 Source: House of Representatives, Chamber Research Office.

13 Note the number of documents tabled is counted for statistical purposes. One response letter may address more than one referred petition. Refer to Appendix C for comparison rates in calendar years of previous parliaments.

14 On occasion, there is a lengthy delay between petition referrals and responses received. After a long recess a backlog of responses can be presented to the House. This will result in a mismatch of statistical time periods where petitions were presented in one period (say calendar year) but not responded to until the following period. The 2016 year to prorogation is

- 2.20 The Committee regards the operation of the written response system from the Executive to continue to be an important success of the House petitioning process. Petitioners now have an expectation that they will receive a ministerial response within a certain time frame – and this public expectation provides a level of accountability by the Government to petitioners, and also to the House.
- 2.21 By comparison, prior to the strengthened petitions system, in 2007 there was only one ministerial response, with only 15 received between 1992 and 2007, inclusive. By the end of the first year of the Committee’s operations, 2008, the figure was 56, representing a 51 per cent letter response rate. By 2015 the response figure had climbed to 79 letter responses received and with 104 petition presentations in the same period this equated to a 76 per cent letter response rate (the real rate of response, that is, the number of petitions responded to in letters received, was 92 per cent).¹⁵
- 2.22 It is important to recognise that most responses received do not ‘grant petitioner wishes’ nor deny them; nor do they express agreement or disagreement with the petitioner’s viewpoint. The response provides up-to-date information on the legislation, policy, and administrative background applicable to the subject matter; and why certain decisions have been made. Response letters are often comprehensive and may include the outcome of past reviews or details of future considerations.¹⁶ This was highlighted by the Chair in one of his statements to the House about a roundtable exercise at a secondary girls school regarding a petition prepared by the students:

Olivia and Avanti also mentioned that they were happy with the fact their petition received a response from the Minister, in their case the Minister for Education. While ministers are often not able to grant the requests made in petitions, the response is an important part of the petitioning process. In the case of Olivia and Avanti, it gave them a clear statement of government policy on the issue of tertiary education reform, a statement which they can now use to engage in a discussion about the nature of these reforms with their fellow students.¹⁷

an example of this, with some lags in ministerial responses received following the summer recess, but fewer petitions presented in the same period. As such, the actual response rate was *limited* to a reporting of 100 per cent.

15 Refer Appendix C.

16 An example of a response, from the Minister for Communications regarding the petition on ‘Rollout of the NBN in Maleny, Queensland’, presented 1 June 2015: HR *Debates* (01.06.2015) 5 141

17 Chair, HR *Debates* (25.05.2015) 4 256.

2.23 The Committee notes that the relatively short timeframe suggested for written responses is a reflection of the intended purpose of these responses. The 90 day timeframe would not, in the majority of cases, allow investigations or review, or consideration of alternatives – let alone implementation – to occur. However, there are occasions when petitions, which have previously received a response which did not contain an acceptance, have later had their request fulfilled. This does not necessarily mean that a single referred petition request has directly led to the petitioner’s desired outcome. For example, a representative of the Pharmacy Guild noted at a hearing in June 2015 that even though changes were afoot to address the concerns raised in their petition presented in early 2014, he noted that:

The petition was tabled in February 2014. ... I think it would be a stretch for me to suggest that the petition had an effect. But it is cumulative, I think.¹⁸

2.24 Most Australians who participate in petitioning do not anticipate that a single petition will lead to direct resolution of the issue raised. They view petitions as a well-respected vehicle to raise awareness in the community and with Parliament. However, experienced campaigners will also employ additional engagement tools. The Pharmacy Guild, for example, which organised a petition on funding for community pharmacies, presented on 26 February 2014, did not solely rely on their petition. Mr Greg Turnbull, representing the Guild at a public hearing in Canberra, explained that a primary consideration of using the petition was to spread the word in the community directly:

It was not the only aspect of the campaign; pharmacists were, of course, visiting members of parliament around the country at the time, as some of you may be aware. We decided, though, that a petition was something that the Pharmacy Guild has the wherewithal to acquire, that some other organisations might not – by which I mean that there are 5,450 community pharmacies in Australia and they are, at times like that, branch offices of a headquarters advocacy campaign.¹⁹

Communication methods used by the Committee

2.25 A significant component of the Committee’s role includes communicating advice of petitioning decisions and presentations and forwarding copies of responses to petitions. This is fulfilled by direct means, with

18 Mr G Turnbull, *Transcript*, 17 June 2015, p. 4.

19 Mr Turnbull, *Transcript*, 17 June 2015, p. 1.

correspondence to principal petitioners and Members who have been involved in the presentation or assisted delivery, and indirectly, through publication, by Hansard, and on the Committee's website.

- 2.26 The Committee continues to support a website visible from the home page of the Department of the House of Representatives.²⁰ This provides public access to the terms of tabled petitions and to associated Ministerial Responses. It also lists any public meetings conducted by the Committee and the transcripts of evidence. Petitions and responses are publicly available in the Hansard of the day of presentation to the House. Publication on the Committee's website – where petitions presented are linked to responses received, and are in subject matter areas – increases transparency and accessibility. And it assists prospective petitioners to formulate suitable petition wording for petitions in their subject matter area by viewing terms of in-order petitions which have already been presented.
- 2.27 Improved access to information about petitioning and the Committee's web pages (and advice from the secretariat) reduces the likelihood of out-of-order petitions and any consequential disappointment for petitioners who prepare out-of-order petitions due to minor omissions or incorrect assumptions.
- 2.28 The absolute number of out-of-order petitions received in the 44th Parliament was 96, which equates to 27 per cent of petitions received.²¹ In the course of the 44th Parliament the out-of-order rate was 27 per cent in the 2014 year; 25 per cent in the 2015 year and 21 per cent to date in 2016 to prorogation. These relatively low and steady rates appear to reflect more care and research undertaken before petitioners launch and submit petitions. The Committee is pleased to see that the percentage of out-of-order petitions received is not on the increase.²²

Private meetings during sitting weeks

- 2.29 The Committee meets privately at least weekly during sitting weeks, the main function being to consider proposed petitions and ministerial responses to petitions. At times public hearings with public servants on
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20 The Committee's webpage is at <<http://www.aph.gov.au/petitions>>, viewed 28 April 2016.

21 Figures provided by the Chamber Research Office.

22 This is despite the popularity of the US, profit-based 'petitions' website <<http://www.change.org/petition>>, launched in 2007. This site accommodates on-line requests from individuals to any jurisdiction or private organisation, and hosts the collection of electronic signatures. The Senate's broader acceptance of 'change.org' petitions could partially account for the House maintaining a relatively low and steady out-of-order rate. However, petition numbers in the Senate have been on the decline, with only 25 petitions presented in 2015 (Business of the Senate – April 2016).

certain petitions have been conducted immediately following these private meetings.²³

- 2.30 Since it first met in December 2013 to prorogation on 15 April 2016 the Committee of the 44th Parliament held 43 private meetings.

Presentations and announcements by the Committee Chair

- 2.31 In accordance with Standing Order 34 the Chair of the Petitions Committee presents certified petitions to the House from 10.00am to 10.10am on sitting Mondays.²⁴
- 2.32 Since December 2013 to 15 April 2016 the Committee Chair has made 37 announcements of petitions found to be in-order and of ministerial responses considered by the Committee at its private meetings.²⁵ The Chair presents in-order petitions which petitioners have not made arrangements with a Member to present. In this parliament the Chair's presentations included 164 petitions and 191 ministerial responses.²⁶
- 2.33 Standing Order 207(a) enables the Chair's announcement and a statement by the Chair – and also a statement by another Member of the Committee. The Chair's statement is a general statement about the Committee's work to the House at that time, time permitting. It mainly discusses aspects of the petitioning process, reports on hearings conducted and provides statistical updates. The statements continue to serve an important accountability measure and a means of reporting orally to the House about the Committee's hearings activity. During the 44th Parliament no other Member of the Committee has utilised the Chair's petitions statement timeslot to discuss general petitioning matters.²⁷

Public hearing activities with petitioners and public servants

- 2.34 Standing Order 220, which outlines the Committee's role, states that 'the Committee may inquire into, and report to the House, on any matter relating to petitions and the petitions system'. This enables the Committee to conduct its roundtable hearings with principal petitioners and/or senior officers of relevant Government agencies.

23 For example, this occurred on 17 June 2015.

24 This was one of the changes to Standing Order 34, Order of Business on 20 October 2010.

25 Announcements to 29 February 2016. The following announcement occurred on 2 May 2016 in the second session of the 44th Parliament.

26 Chamber Research Office, Department of the House of Representatives, 15 April 2016.

27 This occurred once in the 43rd Parliament by a continuing Member of the Committee, Mr R Broadbent MP, following the Chair's statement. HR *Debates* (22.08.13) 8 706.

- 2.35 Public hearings are not conducted to investigate petition matters with a view to resolving or following-up any individual petition concern – merely, yet importantly, to facilitate a public dialogue on the petition issue raised. In addition, the official transcript of the evidence of the hearing is forwarded to the relevant Minister or Ministers of the portfolio area for their additional information.
- 2.36 During this Parliament the Committee conducted hearings with petitioners, and or their representatives, to discuss petitions and any ministerial response to their petition in an official forum. The Committee conducted 5 formal hearings with principal petitioners, representatives, and relevant public servants, during the first session of the 44th Parliament.²⁸ In addition, the Committee held a petition round-table exercise at a secondary school in Sydney on the morning before a public hearing in the CBD. Three public hearings were held interstate, solely with principal petitioners or their representatives. The two public meetings which included public servants were held at Parliament House.
- 2.37 Unlike general purpose committees the Committee does not accept submissions or exhibits with petitions,²⁹ nor at public hearings. Its role is not to investigate petitions with the view to concluding, recommending any action, or of resolving matters. The basis for holding such public discussions is twofold – to enable explanation and exploration of issues beyond that allowed by the petition’s 250 word limit and to enable feedback from petitioners on the House’s petitioning process.³⁰ The Chair emphasised that the Committee does not adopt an advocacy role when conducting public hearings:
- While there will be certain topics that will resonate with some members of the Committee, the Committee’s role is to facilitate the presentation of petitions to the House and their referral to ministers. The Committee does not investigate details of petitions, grant petitioners’ requests, make recommendations to the Government on the topic, or advocate for petition outcomes.³¹
- 2.38 Similarly, in one of his regular statements to the House the Chair explained that non-compliance of a petition does not mean subject matter condemnation:

28 Refer to Appendix B for the full list of public roundtable hearings held in the 44th Parliament.

29 House of Representatives, *Standing Orders as at 26 March 2015*, Standing Order 204 (e), p. 82.

30 Feedback on this process is discussed briefly in Chapter 3.

31 Chair, HR Debates (24.11.2014) 12 736.

...from time to time the Committee finds that a petition does not comply. This is not a comment on the content – it signifies that the House’s formal requirements have not been met.³²

- 2.39 Following the traditions of the former Petitions Committees the Committee conducted a round-table hearing exercise at a secondary school in Sydney, Hornsby Girls High, on 29 April 2015. The Committee informally discussed a petition prepared by students at the school and about petitioning generally. The Chair observed:
- Both Olivia and Avanti displayed a keen insight into the benefits of petitioning the House, and the value that the House derives from receiving petitions. Their passion for the subject of their petition demonstrated a deep concern for their future, and for the future of their country.³³
- 2.40 This kind of engagement with young Australians interested and involved in traditional petitioning activity – petitioning directly to the institution/body they seek action from, is something the Committee continues to value.
- 2.41 In line with past engagement processes, petitions to be discussed at public hearings are mostly selected because of sustained or broad interest in an issue, a unique petition matter or for localised current issues where further public discussion may be beneficial. As such, not all petitions which are presented in the House are discussed at a public hearing. However, when the Committee travels interstate it makes every effort to meet with as many petitioners on these sort of issues from that geographic location.
- 2.42 The final chapter in this report considers the Committee’s formal framework – the House Standing Orders; procedural changes affecting the Committee this Parliament, and the development of electronic petitioning in the House.

32 Chair, HR Debates (24.02.2014) 496.

33 Chair, HR Debates (25.05.2015) 4 255.

The Committee's formal framework and future directions

Introduction

- 3.1 At the beginning of the 44th Parliament a number of changes were made to House Standing Orders. There were, however, no substantive changes to the House's petitioning arrangements until 19 March 2014.¹ The change, which related to Standing Order 207, covering Members' presentation of petitions, added an additional opportunity for Members to present petitions in the Federation Chamber.
- 3.2 The Standing Orders governing petitioning have been relatively static since the establishment of the first Committee on 24 June 2008, with only changes to the times when petitions could be presented. Standing Orders governing the form and content of petitions have been unchanged. There was a machinery change on 8 February 2012 which replaced references to the 'Main Committee' with 'Federation Chamber' when it was established on 27 February 2012; and also indirect effects on the process from changes to presentation opportunities in the Order of Business.²
- 3.3 The following House Standing Orders relate specifically to petitions:
- Standing Order 34 – order of business, Chair's presentation timeslot;
 - Standing Order 204 – rules for the form and content of petitions;
 - Standing Order 205 – rules for signatures;
 - Standing Order 206 – lodging a petition for presentation;

1 Refer Appendix A of this report.

2 For example, the opportunities available for adjournment debate presentations increased when the sitting calendars of the 44th Parliament were scheduled with more sitting weeks and the House sat on most sitting Mondays.

- Standing Order 207 – presenting a petition;³
 - Standing Order 208 – action by the House;
 - Standing Order 209 – a petition may be referred to a Minister for response; and
 - Standing Order 220 – creation of the Standing Committee on Petitions.⁴
- 3.4 Given the Standing Orders have remained largely unchanged, the Committee will not re-examine the unchanged Standing Orders applying to petitions as documented in detail in the first Committee’s report: *The work of the first Petitions Committee: 2008 – 2010*.⁵

Petition presentation opportunities

Expanding Members’ presentation opportunities

- 3.5 The only substantive change in the first session of the 44th Parliament to the Standing Orders covering petitioning was an amendment to Standing Order 207. This amendment directly increased the available opportunities for Members to present petitions. There were also indirect influences which increased the available times Members could present petitions, but these did not require a direct change to the petitioning standing orders. Both direct and indirect changes appear to have had flow-on effects on petition presentation behaviour.
- 3.6 In the 43rd Parliament Members were indirectly given expanded opportunities to present petitions in the House. Standing Order 207⁶ included changes to the opportunities available to Members to present petitions in the House and the then Main Committee. These changes reflected changes to the Order of Business. They enabled presentation of a petition during the newly introduced Members’ 90 second statements in the House, per Standing Order 43; and also presentation of a petition during the period of Members’ 3 minute constituency statements in the former Main Committee, in accordance with Standing Order 193.

3 This was amended on 19 March 2014 and followed changes to Standing Order 43 on Members’ statements, made on 13 February 2014.

4 The text of the current Standing Orders covering petitions is at Appendix A of this report. The former Standing and Sessional Orders, and their revisions, are also detailed in Appendix A.

5 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions, *The work of the first Petitions Committee: 2008 – 2010*, Chapter 3, pp. 19-25. (Provides a full examination of Standing Orders 204-209). Also refer to Appendix A for details of former Standing and Sessional Orders.

6 Standing Order 207 superseded Sessional Order 207.

- 3.7 The introduction of Members' 90 second statements in the House replaced presentations during 90 second statements in the Main Committee, per former Standing Order 192A and 193. And, at the same time, Members' 3 minute constituency statements were added to the opportunities for petition presentation, in accordance with revised Standing Order 193.
- 3.8 These changes in the 43rd parliament greatly increased and spread Members' petition presentation opportunities across the sitting week, and offered more variety in times and duration.

Presentation opportunities in the 44th Parliament

- 3.9 The trend of enhancing Members' presentation opportunities has continued in the 44th Parliament, ironically, with the return of, and opportunity for petition presentation, during Members' 90 second statements in the Federation Chamber. On 19 March 2014 Standing Order 207 was amended to allow petition presentations during the new total allocation of 45 minutes in the Federation Chamber Order of Business on Mondays at 4 pm. There was no accompanying reduction in existing presentation opportunities. This is consistent with the Procedure Committee's fourth principle of enhancing the role of Members in the petitions process.⁷
- 3.10 The increased sitting weeks scheduled in each calendar year of the 44th Parliament⁸ – and the House sitting most Mondays – offered even greater opportunities for the use of the existing 90 second statements in the House, initially covering Monday, Wednesday and Thursday most weeks.⁹ From 13 February 2014 these opportunities expanded with another change to Standing Order 34. The duration of this item of business doubled from 15 minutes total from 1.45 pm to 2 pm, to 30 minutes, commencing at 1.30 pm to 2 pm. In addition, the 90 second statements were scheduled Monday to Thursday, for half an hour before Question Time.
- 3.11 The timeslot for House 90 second statements at 1.30 pm to 2 pm on every sitting day enables a Member to expediently present a petition in a highly visible time. The Chamber is filling and a robust public and press gallery await Question Time. In the 43rd Parliament the opportunity to present petitions in such a way, and during a prominent part of the day's

7 Chapter 1, p. 2.

8 For example the 2014 and 2015 years each had 19 sitting weeks compared to 17 in 2011 and 2012.

9 House of Representatives, *Standing Orders as at 14 November 2013*, Standing Order 34 (Order of Business), pp. 26-27

business, appeared to account for a preference to present petitions during that particular speaking opportunity.

- 3.12 With the expansion of the 90 second statement presentation opportunities in the 44th Parliament there has been an even greater take-up of petitions presented at that time – the combined presentations during House and Federation Chamber 90 second statements has increased by 64 per cent on the number of 90 second statement presentations in the previous parliament. Given that the overall numbers of petitions presented by Members has decreased by 20 per cent and yet presentations during 90 second statements has increased by 64 per cent, it appears there has been a shift from presentations occurring during the adjournment debates, formerly the most popular presentation choice.¹⁰ Whilst presentations during the adjournment debate in the Federation Chamber were of similar frequency, those in the House fell by 65 per cent, from 34 to 12.¹¹
- 3.13 It is worth noting that despite the fact that Members must seek the call to present petitions during 90 second statements, and the popularity of the speaking opportunity more broadly, more Members are choosing to utilise this presentation arrangement. So, in some ways, and irrespective of the slightly fewer petitions presented by Members in the 44th Parliament, the greater opportunities and flexibility to present petitions may have actually contributed to a reduction in the overall speaking time devoted to petitions presentations.
- 3.14 Interestingly, despite the increased variety of presentation opportunities in the 44th Parliament some Members sought leave of the House to present certified petitions at alternative times. One occasion was the presentation of a certified paper petition which was affixed to a decorative bark panel containing indigenous artwork. It was sought to be presented immediately after prayers and the acknowledgment of country on Thursday, 20 August 2015.¹² The petition was written in English and duplicated in an Australian indigenous language. Apart from its archival considerations, the petition itself was otherwise unremarkable in terms of format and content criteria,

10 Refer to Appendix C, an increase in 90 second statement presentations, from 28 presentations in the 43rd Parliament to 46 (combined Chambers) in the 44th. Sixteen of the 46 presentations made during 90 second statements occurred in the Federation Chamber. Note that Members are reliant on receiving the call to present a petition during 90 second statements.

11 Refer Appendix C.

12 Leave was granted and the Hon K Wyatt AM, MP presented the petition before Government Business was before the House. This enabled the petition to be presented whilst interstate petitioners were present in the gallery. Refer *HR Debates* (20.08.2016) 8 983.

similar to many petitions received on the same subject matter, that of retaining the traditional definition of marriage.¹³

Discussions with principal petitioners about the petitioning framework

- 3.15 In addition to discussing petition related matters the Committee has taken the opportunity to ask petitioners their views on the current petitions arrangements. Some of these included why they chose the formal avenue of petitioning the House; what their experiences engaging with the community were; their signature collection experience, and what they expected of the process and whether these expectations were met.
- 3.16 The Committee received thoughtful and constructive comments, often pre-prepared. Such was the case with Mr Clugg, a petitioner who appeared at the Melbourne hearing in 2015 on the petition on the National Partnership Agreements for kindergartens; who commented in some detail about the process, before discussing his actual petition. He commended the process and also made a number of suggestions.¹⁴
- 3.17 Comments considering the petitioning framework, both positive and negative, were not unique. The feedback indicated people valued being able to petition the House – even if they had not yet achieved their desired result. Ms Crooks, a representative of the Victorian Women's Trust petition on climate change spoke warmly of the paper petitions process. She reflected during the Melbourne hearing on the relatively fast turnaround for signature collection, the parallels to the Victorian suffrage petition over 120 years ago, and the satisfaction the process offered:

...women led that petition in 1891 in Victoria and within five weeks collected over 30,000 signatures, which at the time was about 10 per cent of the adult female cohort in the colony. So, across the state, or the colony, it was a massive effort. We collected most of our signatures by women's energy. Women brought men into the process, so it was a great act of female leadership across

13 This was an often petitioned subject during the 43rd Parliament and a contributor to the 71 per cent difference in total petitions received by the House in the 44th Parliament. There were greater numbers of small signature petitions presented on similar topics in the 43rd Parliament, including petitions on live exports and recognising Easter Sunday as a public holiday. The 44th Parliament was notable for a higher total signature count of 1 731 057 compared with 1 217 900 in the 43rd.

14 Mr T Clugg, *Transcript*, 22 September 2015, p. 6.

the country. We collected those 72,000 signatures in about eight or nine weeks, effectively...¹⁵

- 3.18 Others, despite their request being realised, and seeing value in the process, were motivated enough to attend the hearing to give their considered feedback on improvements and concerns. For example, the request of Mr Clugg's petition, that of securing 15 hours a week of publicly funded pre-school education, had come to fruition (whether directly through his petition or not) – yet he travelled to attend the hearing to impart his concerns about informal petitioning for 'data-harvesting' and lack of integrity on third party petitioning websites:

How could anyone trust them to change their fundamental reason for existence from being marketing driven to being representatives of the public on important issues?¹⁶

- 3.19 In addition, he commented on his experiences collecting signatures being 'enlightening' not because he had difficulties attracting signatures but because he experienced difficulties with local authorities opposing his petitioning activity. Mr Clugg stated:

However, my experience was sullied by 'move along' attitudes from local authorities. My conclusion was that I would have afforded legal protection from move on orders if I was staging a protest.¹⁷

- 3.20 Ms Horner, the principal petitioner on a petition calling for funding for the Hume Freeway interchange in Epping North, Victoria said in collecting signatures she spent time educating people about their rights to petition, and of our democratic process:

It was getting people to understand that it was their democratic right to do this and you are allowed to, and also explaining to them the difference between an online petition and a hard-copy petition. We ran a Senate petition at the same time as the hard-copy one, and people were saying, 'I have already signed this online.' And we would say that the Senate is the upper house and we have a lower house as well, and they are actually two separate petitions.¹⁸

- 3.21 Petitioners stated that they saw the mechanism as an important method of raising community awareness, getting the community engaged or mobilised – or simply as a catalyst for publicity. Many petitioners see the
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15 Ms M Crooks, *Transcript*, 22 September 2015, p. 1.

16 Mr T Clugg, *Transcript*, 22 September 2015, p. 6.

17 Mr T Clugg, *Transcript*, 22 September 2015, p. 6.

18 Ms C Horner, *Transcript*, 22 September 2015, p. 11.

formal petitioning process as a useful way to focus efforts towards their desired resolution, in a very noticeable – and quantifiable way – whilst also engaging in other awareness or lobbying activities.

- 3.22 One petitioner at the Melbourne hearing, Mr Marlow, noted that the activity of petitioning provided an outlet for the community to express their grief over the kidnapping of Israeli teenagers on the West Bank, and to support one another by bring people together:

We have a lot of parents and grandparents in the community who took it very emotionally, and I have kids the same sort of age. [...] That is why I sent the signatures that would not be counted as well. Then people could feel they were doing something, even though some of us felt it would not likely achieve anything...¹⁹

- 3.23 Interestingly, despite being an advocate of the direct physical engagement and healing benefits of the paper petition, Mr Marlow also supported electronic petitioning, saying that:

We have a lot who are over 50 who might not be social media users necessarily, but I think we definitely would have gotten a lot more signatures. It would have been easier to get kosher signatures because I would have had a lot less of the blank sheets.²⁰

- 3.24 In support of the petitions process as a morale booster, at the Brisbane hearing the principal petitioner of a petition on Christians in Syria, Mr Johnson, identified the petitions process as a mechanism to allow people who had few financial resources to provide support for a cause through their time and or commitment:

A lot of them cannot give – a lot of them are pensioners; they are on restricted income – but here is a way: 'Sign up and you can contribute.' It is very, very positive.²¹

- 3.25 He also commented favourably about the ministerial response process:

As I said, this time we got a formal committee response only six months after it was presented. That is a lot quicker than previous episodes. Yes, we get a formal response from the minister after it has been processed, so the process is good.²²

19 Mr D Marlow, *Transcript*, 22 September 2015, p. 18.

20 Mr D Marlow, *Transcript*, 22 September 2015, p.19.

21 Mr C Johnson, *Transcript*, 19 November 2014, p. 16.

22 Mr C Johnson, *Transcript*, 19 November 2014, p. 15.

Future operations of the Petitions Committee

Receiving and processing petitions—electronic and paper systems

- 3.26 Currently, standing order 205(b) dictates that all petitions for presentation in the House must be prepared with only hand written original signatures. Transferred or copied signatures or signatures made electronically, do not meet the standing order requirements.
- 3.27 These requirements are not unique to this jurisdiction. They represent the practice of maintaining the authenticity and value of petitions, and of fostering community engagement, by keeping petitions physical and original. This was particularly relevant during the period of rapid telecommunications change when access, uptake and security was initially at the margin.²³
- 3.28 A number of parliamentary jurisdictions around the world now manage electronic petitioning processes.²⁴ Many of these have had e-petitioning systems in operation for over 10 years. This corresponds with the increasingly tech-savvy global population and the demand to use these tools to engage with parliaments and through social networks online.

Government response to the 2009 inquiry into electronic petitioning

- 3.29 The Procedure Committee's 2007 inquiry into petitioning recommended the introduction of the current framework for petitioning the House and also recommended the adoption of electronic petitioning. Following on from that recommendation, in 2009 the Petitions Committee conducted an inquiry into electronic petitioning to the House.²⁵ It made ten recommendations regarding the introduction of what it considered to be an appropriate electronic petitioning system.²⁶
- 3.30 On 23 February 2014 the Government responded to the report. The response is available on the Committee's website.²⁷

23 Telecommunications technology has advanced at a rapid pace in the last 10 years, including since the recommendations of the Petitions Committee into electronic petitioning in 2009. For example, that report pre-dates the release of the Apple iPad by five months.

24 For example, The House of Commons, Scotland, Wales, Germany, Queensland, Tasmania all have electronic petitioning systems, administered in-house.

25 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions, *Electronic petitioning to the House of Representatives*, November 2009.

26 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions, *Electronic petitioning to the House of Representatives*, November 2009, pp. xii-xiii.

27 The Government response on the Committee's website <http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House_of_Representatives/Committees?url=petitions/reports.htm>, viewed 28 April 2016.

- 3.31 Importantly, the response supported in-principle the Committee's recommendation that the House establish an electronic petitions website and system under the administration of the House; but noted "that there may be resource implications". The response stated: "The Government requests that the Speaker and the Department of the House of Representatives work towards implementation of electronic petitioning within the constraints of current resources."²⁸

Speaker's statement in the House on electronic petitioning

- 3.32 On 22 October 2015 the Speaker of the House, the Hon Tony Smith MP made a formal statement to the House regarding electronic petitioning, as follows:

I inform the House that the Department of the House of Representatives is to work with the Department of Parliamentary Services to develop an electronic petitions website and system for the House.

This follows the recent Government response to the recommendation of the Standing Committee on Petitions that the House establish an electronic petitions website and system under the administration of the House. In its response, the Government supported the Committee's recommendation and requested that the Speaker and the Department of the House of Representatives work towards implementing electronic petitioning within existing resources.

I anticipate that the electronic petitions system will be available early in the new year. The work will be done within existing resources, and will involve consultation with the Petitions Committee and secretariat to ensure that the system meets requirements.

Once the system is developed, I will update the House. The House will need to consider amendments to the standing orders to establish an e-petitions system for the House.²⁹

- 3.33 An electronic petitions system is currently being developed for use in the House in accordance with the Speaker's announcement.

Traditional paper petitioning

- 3.34 Traditional style paper-based petitioning is a well-respected mechanism for active community engagement. It is a direct and physical method of

28 The Government response is published on the Committee's website.

29 *HR Debates* (22.10.2015) 12 145.

engaging the community, encouraging information dissemination, challenging views, uniting communities and creating networks.

- 3.35 The Committee endorses the development of an electronic petitions system in the House, operating alongside the traditional paper system.

Patterns of work and Committee activities

- 3.36 The Committee's central purpose is to ensure that petitions to the House comply with House requirements. Along with this review and authorisation role, the Committee also acts as a conduit for the presentation of in-order petitions and ministerial responses to the House.
- 3.37 The Committee is supported by a small secretariat. The cyclical pattern of private meetings to assess petitions; note responses and other correspondence, delivering the Chair's presentation on the following sitting Monday and corresponding with petitioners and Members, is the Committee's core business.
- 3.38 In contrast to the 43rd Parliament, where the volume of petitions received, (that is, registered in-order, plus registered out-of-order petitions) increased on the total received in the 42nd Parliament;³⁰ the total number of petitions received in the 44th Parliament to the end of the first session, declined by 41 per cent³¹ on the 43rd Parliament statistic. This decline is not a negative, nor does the submitted petition statistic approximate declining workloads.
- 3.39 Firstly, part of the decline in volume is represented by a 39 per cent reduction in out-of-order petitions received (down from 158 to 96); which is positive. Any out-of-order petition received represents disappointment and frustration and is equally resource intensive for the Committee and secretariat, as is a small signature count in-order petition. Secondly, it reflects the shift from the Committee receiving many 'cold call' petitions to where the majority of petitioners have previously sought feedback on their petition's content and format requirements, via email, before signature collection.
- 3.40 This Parliament also saw a significant change to the pattern of petitions being received – fewer small signature count petitions of a repeated nature on similar subject matter, to more mid-range signature count petitions on a variety of issues. Some ministerial portfolios received proportionately more referrals than others, like Communications and Immigration,

30 A total of 434 petitions received in the 42nd parliament; 595 in the 43rd parliament.

31 A total 351 petitions received in the 44th Parliament; 595 in the 43rd. Of these, 96 were out-of-order in the 44th Parliament with 158 in the 43rd. Source: Chamber Research Office, Department of the House of Representatives, 15 April 2006.

reflecting localised issues on one hand and global concerns of this period on the other. This then led to a commensurate receipt of ministerial responses.

- 3.41 The total signature count of all petitions presented in the 44th Parliament increased by 42 per cent on the 43rd parliament count (from 1 217 900 signatures to 1 731 057). This figure was mostly composed of the largest signature count petition on record (since 1988 when signature counts were first officially recorded). The total tally was 1 210 471 which filled 22 archive boxes and as such the manual signature count was particularly resource intensive.³²
- 3.42 Decreases in the number of out-of-order petitions received, higher signature counts and greater pre-consultation on the House's requirements before petitions are formally lodged are encouraging, as they represent the regard Australians have for the House's petition's system. However, this pattern of work does translate to resourcing being necessarily focussed on the Committee's oversight and stewardship roles. As such, and following the pattern of the 43rd Parliament, the Committee's public hearings activity this parliament was less frequent.

Conclusions

- 3.43 The Committee considered its work, with particular reference to its role and operations, trends, items of note and future petitions framework – in particular providing an update on electronic petitioning developments in the House. The Committee is satisfied the current process maintains the six fundamental principles of petitioning which the Procedure Committee outlined as essential foundations of the House's petitions process. It reiterates its commitment to the House introducing an e-petitioning system administered by the Committee, in tandem with the traditional paper-based method.
- 3.44 The Committee is grateful for the cooperation of petitioners and public servants attending roundtable hearings on petitions during this parliament, participating in discussions openly and thoughtfully.

32 The signature count for a petition calling for improved funding for community pharmacies exceeded the previous record count of signatures by approximately 500 000, presented by the Member for Ryan on 26 February 2014. *HR Debates* (26.02.14).

- 3.45 The current arrangements, now in their ninth year, have strengthened transparency, accountability, information and advice – and a future electronic petitioning system should also strengthen accessibility.

Dr Dennis Jensen MP

Chair



Appendix A: 44th Parliament relevant Standing Orders¹

Preparing a petition

204 Rules for the form and content of petitions

- (a) A petition must:
 - (i) be addressed to the House of Representatives;
 - (ii) refer to a matter on which the House has the power to act;
 - (iii) state the reasons for petitioning the House; and
 - (iv) contain a request for action by the House.
- (b) The terms of the petition must not contain any alterations and must not exceed 250 words. The terms must be placed at the top of the first page of the petition and the request of the petition must be at the top of every other page.
- (c) The terms of the petition must not be illegal or promote illegal acts. The language used must be moderate.
- (d) The petition must be in English or be accompanied by a translation certified to be correct. The person certifying the translation must place his or her name and address on the translation.
- (e) No letters, affidavits or other documents should be attached to the petition. Any such attachments will be removed before presentation to the House.
- (f) A petition from a corporation must be made under its common seal. Otherwise it will be received as the petition of the individuals who signed it.

¹ House of Representatives, *Standing and Sessional Orders as at 26 March 2015*.

205 Rules for signatures

- (a) Every petition must contain the signature and full name and address of a principal petitioner on the first page of the petition.
- (b) All the signatures on a petition must meet the following requirements:
 - (i) Each signature must be made by the person signing in his or her own handwriting. Only a petitioner incapable of signing may ask another person to sign on his or her behalf.
 - (ii) Signatures must not be copied, pasted or transferred on to the petition or placed on a blank page on the reverse of a sheet containing the terms of the petition.
- (c) A Member must not be a principal petitioner or signatory to a petition.

Presentation of petitions**206 Lodging a petition for presentation**

- (a) Petitions may be sent directly to the Standing Committee on Petitions or via a Member.
- (b) The Standing Committee on Petitions must check that each petition lodged for presentation complies with the standing orders, and if the petition complies it shall be approved for presentation to the House.

207 Presenting a petition²

A petition may be presented in one of two ways:

- (a) The Chair of the Standing Committee on Petitions shall present petitions and/or reports of that committee, and the Chair and one other Member of the Committee may make statements concerning petitions and/or such reports presented, in accordance with *standing order 34 (order of business)*. The time provided may extend for no more than 10 minutes.
- (b) A Member may present a petition during:
 - (i) the period of Members' statements in the House or in the Federation Chamber, in accordance with *standing order 43*;
 - (ii) the period of Members' constituency statements in the Federation Chamber, in accordance with *standing order 193*;
 - (iii) adjournment debate in the House in accordance with *standing order 31*, and in the Federation Chamber* in accordance with *standing order 191*; and
 - (iv) grievance debate in accordance with *standing order 192B*.

2 SO 207(b)(i) was amended on 19 March 2014 to allow petition presentations by Members during Members' 90 second statements in the Federation Chamber on Mondays at 4pm.

Chair's presentation time

34 Order of business³

Petition presentation by Chair scheduled in the House at 10.00am-10.10am on sitting Mondays.

Action on petitions

208 Action by the House

- (a) Discussion on the subject matter of a petition shall only be allowed at the time of presentation as provided for under *standing order 207(b)*.
- (b) Each petition presented shall be received by the House, unless a motion that it not be received is moved immediately and agreed to.
- (c) The only other motion relating to a petition that may be moved is a motion on notice that the petition be referred to a particular committee.
- (d) The terms of petitions shall be printed in Hansard.
- (e) The Standing Committee on Petitions shall respond to petitions on behalf of the House and report to the House.

209 Petition may be referred to a Minister for response⁴

- (a) After a petition is presented to the House, the Standing Committee on Petitions may refer a copy of the petition to the Minister responsible for the administration of the matter raised in the petition.
- (b) The Minister shall be expected to respond to a referred petition within 90 days of presentation by lodging a written response with the Committee.
- (c) The Chair of the Petitions Committee shall announce any ministerial responses to petitions. After the announcement, ministerial responses shall be printed in Hansard and published on the House's website.

220 Standing Committee on Petitions

- (a) A Standing Committee on Petitions shall be appointed to receive and process petitions, and to inquire into and report to the House on any matter relating to petitions and the petitions system.
- (b) The committee shall consist of ten members: six government and four non-government members.

3 In the 42nd Parliament the Chair's presentation timeslot was scheduled at 8.30pm – 8.40pm in the Chamber.

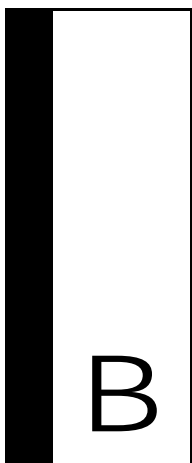
4 Formerly a Sessional Order in the 42nd Parliament with no substantive change to text.

History of amendments to the relevant standing orders

Standing order and date amended⁵

- 34** Amended 24.6.08 (at 10.00am – 10.10am sitting Mondays); Amended 1.12.08; Amended 29.9.10 (at 8.30pm – 8.40pm sitting Mondays). (Between 13.2.08 and 14.6.08 – presentations made by the Speaker.)
- 204** Amended 13.2.08.
- 205** Amended 13.2.08.
- 206** Amended 13.2.08.
- 207** Amended 13.2.08; amended 12.3.08; amended sessional order 24.6.08 (for the remainder of 2008); sessional order extended 1.12.08 for the life of the 42nd Parliament; amended 20.10.10 and became a Standing Order in the 43rd Parliament; amended 8.2.12, the words 'Main Committee', wherever occurring, were replaced by 'Federation Chamber'; amended 19.3.14 to include presentations during Members' 90 second statements in the Federation Chamber.
- 208** Amended 13.2.08; amended 12.3.08.
- 209** Amended 13.2.08; amended sessional order 24.6.08 (for the remainder of 2008); sessional order extended 1.12.08 for the life of the 42nd Parliament; amended 20.10.10 and became a standing order in the 43rd Parliament.
- 220** Amended 13.2.08.

⁵ House of Representatives, *Standing and Sessional Orders as at 26 March 2016* (and amendments made 13 October and 2 February 2016), and the history of amendments are available online at: <http://www.aph.gov.au/standingorders>, viewed 18 April 2016.



Appendix B: Public hearings and round table meetings (non-inquiry related)

Wednesday, 29 October 2014: Parliament House, Canberra

Department of Defence and Assistant Minister for Defence

- Reclassification of military service of Rifle Company Butterworth

Wednesday, 19 November 2014: Selected petitions from Queensland, Cliftons, Edward Street, Brisbane

Principal Petitioner and representatives

- Reclassification of military service of Rifle Company Butterworth

Principal Petitioner

- Zone A tax allowance

Principal Petitioner

- Christians in Syria

Principal Petitioner

- Awareness and support for sufferers of dyslexia

Wednesday, 29 April 2015: Petition round-table exercise, Hornsby Girls High, Hornsby, NSW

Principal Petitioner

- Tertiary education reforms

Wednesday, 29 April 2015: Selected petitions from Sydney metropolitan, Parliament of NSW, Sydney

Principal Petitioner

- Australian Defence Force Pay

Representative of Principal Petitioner

- The Governance of Norfolk Island

Principal Petitioner

- The sale of energy drinks to children under 18 years

Principal Petitioner

- Proposed development of a residential aged care facility at Middle Head, Sydney

Principal Petitioner

- The Unicorn Foundation's neuroendocrine cancer nurse specialist telephone support service

Principal Petitioner

- China's actions in the South China Sea

Petitioners

- Holroyd Community Aid

Wednesday, 17 June 2015: Parliament House, Canberra

Principal Petitioner

- Funding support for community pharmacies

Department of Health

- Funding support for community pharmacies

Tuesday, 22 September 2015: Selected petitions from Melbourne metropolitan, Victorian Parliamentary Offices, East Melbourne

Representatives of Principal Petitioner

- National and international action on climate change

Principal Petitioner

- Federal funding for the National Partnership Agreement for kindergartens

Principal Petitioner

- Funding for Hume Freeway interchange in Epping North

Principal Petitioner

- Age pension rates and indexation

Principal Petitioner

- The kidnapping of Israeli teenagers

Principal Petitioner

- The use of Bio-fuels

C

Appendix C: Statistics on petitions to the House of Representatives

Petitions presented 1973-2016¹ House of Representatives and Senate

Year	House			% Ministerial responses#	Senate Number of petitions^
	Number of petitions	Signatures	Ministerial response letters		
1973	1677				119
1974	883				477
1975	2043				677
1976	1987				558
1977	1420				470
1978	1340				578
1979	2366				742
1980	1923				701
1981	2900				669
1982	2094				1014
1983	1885				860
1984	2315				870
1985	2955				1093
1986	5528				1262
1987	3622				1291
1988	1289				780
1989	1690				882
1990	564				404
1991	824				779
1992	843	365155		0.4%	607

¹ To the end of the first session of the 44th Parliament which was prorogued on 15 April 2016

Year	House			% Ministerial responses#	Senate Number of petitions^
	Number of petitions	Signatures	Ministerial response letters		
1993	547	734785		0.0%	539
1994	540	360462		0.0%	464
1995	431	456923	3	0.7%	589
1996	430	283163	5	1.2%	464
1997	633	322085	1	0.2%	476
1998	336	251466	0	0.0%	218
1999	232	139741	0	0.0%	194
2000	289	1411278	0	0.0%	102
2001	250	168226	0	0.0%	103
2002	319	362599	0	0.0%	99
2003	369	381083	1	0.3%	129
2004	471	214315	0	0.0%	180
2005	235	230190	1	0.4%	86
2006	276	250091	0	0.0%	161
2007	250	118596	1	0.4%	77
2008	109	96769	56	51.4%	53
2009	150	281600	94	62.7%	48
2010	136	253476	80	58.8%	27
2011	195	704954	136	69.7%	54
2012	120	241587	83	69.2%	40
2013 ²	104	237020	73	70.1%#	24
2014	104	1440270	67	64.4%#	34
2015	104	205387	79	75.9%#	25
2016 ³	22	51952	18 ⁴	81.8%#	10

The actual ministerial response rate is higher as one tabled letter may respond to more than one petition on the same subject matter. The actual number of petitions represented by responses was 84; 77; 96 and 24 in 2013; 2014; 2015; and 2016 respectively. This equates to a response rate of 80.7%; 74.0%; 92.3% and 100% in 2013; 2014; 2015 and 2016 respectively.

Source: Chamber Research Office, Department of the House of Representatives, 15 April 2016.

^ Senate statistics – Source: Business of the Senate – April 2016.

2 Petitions presented: 437 and 255 in the 43rd Parliament and 44th Parliament (First Session) respectively. Signatures: 1 217 900 and 1 731 057 in the 43rd Parliament and 44th Parliament (First Session) respectively.

3 There were five sitting weeks in 2016 to prorogation of the first session, with three Chair's presentations in February (by comparison, 21 and 19 sitting weeks in 2014 and 2015 respectively). As at 15 April 2016 five certified petitions with a total signature count of 2,358 awaited presentation by the Chair on 2 May 2016.

4 As at 15 April 2016 two ministerial response letters awaited the Chair's presentation on 2 May 2016.

Petitions presented 2005-2016
House of Representatives

Year	Number of petitions	Signatures	Ministerial response letters ¹	%	Number presented by Members [^]	%	Out of order petitions
2005	235	230190	1	0.4%	7	3.0%	50
2006	276	250091	0	0.0%	11	4.0%	80
2007	250	118596	1	0.4%	8	3.2%	51
2008	109	96769	56	51.4%	20	18.3%	39
2009	150	281600	94	62.7%	51	34.0%	20
2010	136	253476	80	58.8%	26	19.1%	34
2011	195	704954	136	69.7%	52	26.7%	80
2012	120	241587	83	69.2%	29	24.2%	52
2013	104	237020	73	70.1%	26	25.0%	31
2014	104	1440270	67	64.4%	40	38.4%	39
2015	104	205387	79	75.9%	39	37.7%	34
2016	22	51952	18	81.8%	7#	31.8%	6

1 Ministerial response letters may respond to more than one petition.
Ministerial response letters may respond to petitions presented in the previous year.

^ Does not include Member presentations of petition-type documents which are subsequently certified as in-order petitions and presented by the Chair of the Committee.

There were two further petitions presented as documents prior to Committee consideration, but not presented until 2 May 2016 in the second session of the 44th Parliament, during the Chair's presentation.

Source: Chamber Research Office, Department of the House of Representatives, 15 April 2016.

Petitions presented by Members[^]
House of Representatives and Federation Chamber*
43rd Parliament

Year	Grievance debate	Adj. debate-House	Adj. debate-Federation Chamber	90 second statements ¹	3 minute statements	Other	Total
2010	0	1	2	0	4	0	7
2011	1	15	8	13	15	0	52
2012	0	9	4	10	6	0	29
2013	1	9	0	5	6	0	21
Total	2	34	14	28	31	0	109

[^] Only counts approved by the Petitions Committee

^{*} Formerly known as the Main Committee before 8 February 2013.

¹ 90 second statements were scheduled in the House on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday afternoons, before question time.

Petitions presented by Members[^]
House of Representatives and Federation Chamber
44th Parliament

Year	Grievance debate	Adj. debate-House	Adj. debate-Federation Chamber	90 second statements ¹	3 minute statements	Other	Total
2013	0	1	0	3 [#]	1	0	5
2014	0	5	7	19	9	0	40
2015	3	5	4	19	7	1 [*]	39
2016	0	1	0	5	1	0	7
Total	3	12	11	46	18	1	91

[^] Only counts approved by the Petitions Committee

[#] Petition presentations during 90 second statements in the Federation Chamber were introduced on 19 March 2014

¹ Figures include presentations in both the House and Federation Chamber. Ninety second statements are scheduled in the House on Monday; Tuesday; Wednesday and Thursday before question time; and, as of 13 February 2014, SO 43, on Monday in the Federation Chamber. There were 3 and 13 petitions presented during 90 second statements in the Federation Chamber in 2014 and 2015 respectively. No petitions were presented during 90 second statements in the Federation Chamber in 2016. Two documents presented by Members during this time in 2016 were subsequently certified as meeting requirements for Chair presentations. They are recorded in the second session of Parliament 2016 after Committee authorisation and the subsequent presentation of a certified petition.

^{*} Other (2015): Presented by leave of the House after acknowledgement of country and prayers.

Source: Chamber Research Office, Department of the House of Representatives, 15 April 2016.