



COMMITTEE SYSTEM REVIEW COMMITTEE

Members:

Hon. J.C. Spence MP (Chair)
Mr S.D. Finn MP
Mr M.J. Horan MP
Ms C.T. Male MP
Mrs D.R. Pratt MP
Hon. R.E. Swarten MP
Mr J.W. Seeney MP
Mr L.J. Springborg MP

REVIEW OF THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE SYSTEM

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

FRIDAY, 20 AUGUST 2010

Brisbane

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Committee met at 8.36 am

ROZZOLI, Mr Kevin, Private capacity

CHAIR: Good morning, Mr Rozzoli. I am Judy Spence, the chair of the committee. I officially declare open this hearing as part of the committee's review of the parliamentary committee system. Thank you, Mr Rozzoli, for your interest in providing us with a submission and your willingness to be part of the public hearings today. I would like to introduce you to the members of the committee who are present. Mr Lawrence Springborg, who is the member for Southern Downs, is the deputy chair of the committee.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Good morning.

Mr Rozzoli: Good morning.

CHAIR: We also have Mr Mike Horan, the member for Toowoomba South; Ms Carolyn Male, the member for Pine Rivers; Mrs Dorothy Pratt, the member for Nanango; the Hon. Robert Schwarten, the member for Rockhampton and also Minister for Public Works and ICT; and Mr Jeff Seeney, the member for Callide.

Mr Rozzoli: Good morning. You have a pretty wide representation there.

CHAIR: We do. Mr Evan Moorhead sends his apologies. We are waiting for Mr Simon Finn, but we thought we would start without him. He will be coming along. Because we are formally starting, I would like to say that, although the committee is not swearing witnesses, I remind all present that these hearings are a formal process of the parliament and ask that they be respected as such. I also remind witnesses that Hansard will be making a transcript of proceedings. Therefore, we are going to be asking people to identify themselves when they speak. Mr Rozzoli, do you want to start by making an opening statement or would you rather us ask you questions?

Mr Rozzoli: My submission is probably fairly self-explanatory. The only thing I would like to say is that the thrust of my submission was to return power to the parliament, to give the parliament an increased capacity to represent and be accountable to the people who elect it. That is the underlying premise of all that I do in the parliamentary field, because I am a great believer in parliamentary sovereignty and the right of the ordinary member of parliament or a backbencher—any member of parliament—to bring forward, as strongly as they can, the views that they believe reflect the opinions of their electorate or a combination of factors that they think, from their experience, should be brought forward to the parliament and have that articulated in parliamentary debate in some form or other. That is the underlying premise of what I do. I think we can move straight into questions on particular matters, if that is what you want me to elucidate.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. I found your submission very interesting. Obviously you raised a lot of issues. I am interested in your idea about the budget committee. We also are very interested in revamping our estimates committees that look at the budget. Do you see the budget committee, as you have proposed it, replacing the Public Accounts Committee?

Mr Rozzoli: I do not say replacing the Public Accounts Committee but in addition to the Public Accounts Committee. To me the roles are quite different, because the Public Accounts Committee is more an ongoing review of financial accountability or financial issues throughout the life of a parliament. The budget committee really focuses on the veracity of the manner in which the fiscal program has been put forward for the year ahead, although it can compare with the year past and perhaps where it might lead to in the future. But it much more specifically hones in on income and expenditure and the validity of the framework that the government of the day has put around its fiscal program. There are actually two processes. They can be complementary but they are distinctly different.

CHAIR: I also notice that you have suggested—and I think most people would agree with you—that the opposition does not have much time to respond to the budget in this modern political environment and that it would be better adjourning for a week until the opposition responds. I wonder how practical that would be, given the demands of the media for people to have quick responses to things these days.

Mr Rozzoli: Let me say, you have touched a raw point with me. I think the way we pander to the requirements of the media is deplorable. I think, in fact, the current federal election campaign has been completely hijacked by the media for their own purposes and that has been very much to the detriment of the Australian people in clouding issues that might otherwise have emerged during the campaign. It is much more important that the public get a measured response to the budget from the Leader of the Opposition and the opposition team. Indeed, even government members may want more time in which to examine the implications of the budget in the context of their own particular electorates. I have seen I suppose 30 budgets in my parliamentary career. You just cannot look at a budget quickly and grasp much more than the most obvious things in the budget. You need time to go into it in detail to understand what the budget is saying in terms of how it stands as a document. Members need the opportunity to say, 'I disagree. This what I think is needed and this is what I would do differently,' that takes time. You cannot

possibly do it in the space of a few hours or a day. A couple of years ago in New South Wales it reached the appalling situation where the budget was brought in at, say, 2 o'clock in the afternoon and the Leader of the Opposition responded at 4.30. I don't remember the exact time, but that is the general thing.

CHAIR: He responded formally in the parliament?

Mr Rozzoli: Then I think the National Party had the chance to have a talk and that was it: the budget was passed and put through. That is the absolute extreme of the outrageous way that this has gone. I think it is absolutely essential that the budget lie on the table for a week while everyone has a chance to absorb it and analyse it and form whatever opinion they want to. I do not think that is too much to expect. If it in fact delivers a much better goal of fiscal responsibility to the public then it is well worth the extra time you are taking. If the budget debate goes on for five weeks after that—that is not exclusive of all other legislation—so that everyone who wants to has a chance to speak on the budget, that is good. That is democratic. That is good parliamentary practice. I feel very strongly about that one.

CHAIR: Thank you for that. I will pass it over to the deputy chair.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Kevin, what we are talking about here—your proposal and other submissions we have—would involve a significant cultural shift in the way that parliament has operated in recent years and the way it has evolved. I think it is fair to say that in recent decades parliament has basically ended up becoming an extension of the executive in many ways, because of the timeframes involved and the way things operate. The same goes for committees in some ways, I suppose. If we are to make major reforms, how do you practically go about making that cultural change to ensure this operates so that the parliament regains its supremacy as the scrutiniser of the executive and make sure that its principal role is legislator and oversight body?

Mr Rozzoli: I think the actual mechanical process is fairly simple. You are a sovereign parliament; you can do what you want to do. Clearly you have to get the numbers to do it, but to make the change, say, that you would go back to the old practice of allowing the budget to sit on the table for a week and allowing the debate to go on for four or five weeks after that, is just a matter of making the procedural decision to do that and you can do it. I suppose what you then have to do is wear the criticism that somehow or other you are not meeting the requirements of modern media practice, whatever it is. To me that is a pretty flimsy reason for hurrying up the process. I think it is a matter of just saying, over and over again, 'This is more democratic, this is more open, this is more transparent, this is in the interests of the people.' The people out there—and I still talk to lots of people in the community, perhaps more freely than I used to when I was tagged with being a member of a party—are desperate to see a more responsible, more measured, more calculated, more thoughtful approach from their parliamentary representatives. I think if you play it right in terms of the battle and people hold their courage to do things properly, that argument is a very telling argument in the long run. That is the way I would go about it. I would be happy to come up some time, if you want to have a seminar or something on ways and means of doing this, and talk through some of the issues. Basically, it is a matter of making up your mind to do it and then sticking to your guns about it and stressing the benefits to the people at large.

Mr HORAN: Kevin, I am interested to hear your comments about the worth of splitting up the committees to cover each and every portfolio. In that regard, do you think that if there is, say, a Treasury portfolio that that committee would be more or less monitoring Treasury matters throughout the year and they would be the ones that would do the work at budget estimates time? Should they have any pre budget involvement? Finally—I have three things—I think it is really important to elevate the status in the public eye and therefore in members' eyes of committees so that they are not just seen as something that meets part time when parliament is sitting but they actually are a really formal part of the whole parliamentary process all week so they have true relevance. They were my three matters. How would you see us doing that?

Mr Rozzoli: I got two of those and I must have missed the third one. I will go through the two that I got.

Mr HORAN: Okay.

Mr Rozzoli: First of all, I would not necessarily see the Treasury committee in the portfolio sense covering the estimates because I think that is a time to bring in some people from outside the committee who might bring a different angle. There is a tendency in public life for people who work closely in an area to become continually more attuned to the philosophy and the culture of that particular thing they are monitoring. It just seems to be an inevitable consequence. Every now and again you have to leaven it by bringing someone in from outside. So I would not necessarily see the Treasury portfolio committee as doing budget estimates, but I would see them of course having an ongoing role to consider matters of a financial nature and certainly any legislation which was of a financial nature would go through them. So they would become the financial experts. In terms of the budget committee process, there is a need to spread the numbers a bit wider.

Depending on how many numbers you have on each committee—which is based really on a balance between the number of people you have eligible to sit on the committees and the number of committees you have—then there is this once-a-year opportunity to bring in double the number by bringing in some extra people. You would probably have the Treasury committee on it, but you would add to it by having additional people from other key portfolio areas—ones which figured prominently in the budget

such as transport or education or health or something like that. They might come in because they have a significant impact on the budget and their specialist knowledge of their portfolio area could well assist the budget process. With regard to the formal process, that is very much where I think I am initially unique in bringing up this suggestion—that is, that committee work be considered to be part of the day-by-day parliamentary work. I am offended that we are told we sit X number of days and this should resonate in Queensland, where there is some criticism that your sitting days are certainly even less than the national average.

CHAIR: But longer, Kevin, than the national average.

Mr Rozzoli: They are longer, are they?

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Rozzoli: I understand someone the other day suggested that they were not, so I apologise if that is the case.

Mr SCHWARTEN: We have been through that one.

Mr Rozzoli: Even so, the amount of time spent by parliamentarians on committee work where a committee system is working properly amounts to many days a year of formal parliamentary proceedings, so that should be clearly recognised as part of the parliamentary workload of a member of parliament. By the time you add the committee hours and days to the formal sitting days and plenary session, you might get another 60 per cent or 70 per cent of days on top of what is recognised as your sitting days. We have all heard people say, 'They sat 55 days last year and it cost X million dollars to run the parliament. Therefore, you divide one by the other and each sitting day cost an absolute squillion.' That is just crazy stuff. It leads to misleading statistics.

If in fact the numbers of days sitting were considerably increased by a recognition of the days spent in committee proceedings, then the public would have a much more accurate indication of how hard the parliament was working as a parliament. That would be expected from the community. Because committees give the public a much better chance to input themselves, it would be seen as strengthening the whole democratic process considerably. What I have suggested is that committees should formally be seen as sitting days of parliament with each committee sitting at virtually the same time so that they continue to be clearly distinct sitting days. Whether you do it that way or you do it another way, that would be up for consideration. It is vital that we recognise the committee process for what it is worth, because that is where some of the best work is now done in parliaments, throughout our jurisdiction anyway. So we need to build that up. Mike, does that cover most of the things you wanted, or was there one that I left out?

Mr HORAN: The only other one was do you think that we should have a system of committees where each committee covers a portfolio and then any others on top of that, because it would be getting to a fair number by then? Do you think the committees should each cover a portfolio, or should they be grouped into, say, a committee to cover three portfolios?

Mr Rozzoli: They need to be grouped because if you have them covering each portfolio that is just too many committees and you find physically you cannot do that. If you look at the New Zealand process, which I do refer to, they have what they call subject committees. That means that they have committees which have some sort of connection. You might have five—perhaps the health committee might only deal with health—but in a lot of the others when you get down into the smaller portfolios they can be grouped together in a like-minded fashion. So you would really determine the number of committees that you could handle—perhaps 12 or 15 depending on the numbers of members you have and how the spread works—and then you split up the portfolios as they are created amongst those subject committees or those particular committees, because today there is a tendency also to set up portfolios for all sorts of things. If you add up the actual number of portfolios—I am not sure what it is in Queensland—in New South Wales we have probably got 45 portfolios, although some of them are linked.

We have a Minister for Western Sydney, a minister for the south coast, a minister for the north coast and that sort of thing and each of those becomes an additional portfolio. I think it is a bit unwieldy, so you would put all of those three in New South Wales in with regional development and infrastructure or something like that because they all have a bearing on each other. So you would group them up into something that was feasible and practical to work with.

Mrs PRATT: You mentioned the New Zealand model and we have been over to have a look at that. In New Zealand before legislation is debated in the House it goes out to each of these committees and then it goes out to the public and they have that six-month delay in bringing it back. Would you find any issues with that?

Mr Rozzoli: No. I have always been a believer in the saying more haste, less speed.

Mrs PRATT: I would agree with that.

Mr Rozzoli: Legislation that goes through quickly inevitably is flawed legislation. It takes time to understand all of the ramifications of a piece of legislation, unless it is very simple. Certainly, what I refer to in my submission as major legislation—benchmark legislation, call it what you will—takes time to mature. That is where parliaments with two houses—I do not particularly want to get into this argument with you—gives the public a chance to react to what happens when the legislation is introduced in the first House and gives the media, God bless them, a chance to promote it and to get it out there so that people can actually

comment. By the time it gets to the second House there has actually been some feedback from the community. You do not have to have a separate House to do that and you do not have that in New Zealand, but you do need time to articulate the legislation and to let it get out there. We have to remember that members of the public are not just sitting around waiting for us to shove a little legislation under their noses so they can get back to us in the next week or even in the next few days. It takes time to percolate, but the more time and care you spend on getting it right in the first place the more likely it is to work and the less likely it is to have to come back and be amended later on.

I think we need to slow the whole process down, because I could point to numerous pieces of legislation in New South Wales over the years that have just stumbled and fumbled along at great cost to the community because you had legislation out there that really was not working. It would have been much better for the parliament to have taken the time to get it right in the first place, to get that feedback from the community and actually get legislation that was workable. I just think that we need to slow the process down, take more time, take more care and try to get it right the first time around so that we are as right as we possibly can. In New Zealand they are forced to do that. Whether an event has been forced on them by the particular style of voting they have and the fact that the government never has a majority, it does work very well. Irrespective of what has triggered it, it does work very well and the public feel they have been consulted. They feel happier with it. It is more in accord with their wishes and therefore they accept it much more readily.

Mrs PRATT: Just to follow on with that, we have had instances in the past where it has almost been a race to see how much legislation you can pass in a year so that it looks like you did more than you did the term before or the year before, which is detrimental to the whole process as far as I am concerned. Community engagement is pretty important and it should be more electronically available so that people from far away can come and talk to us as committees, as you are. Would you advocate that everybody who puts a submission in should be spoken to, or just community groups?

Mr Rozzoli: No. You could not draw a strict rule with that. What you would do is what we are doing now. You have looked at a submission. If the submission only said what everyone else had said and did not add anything new or there was nothing controversial about it or anything like that, I do not think you need to go back to each of those people who have said exactly the same thing. But if we really feel that there might be some value in pushing further, people could be contacted to clarify something or give some additional information, or they could be invited to give further evidence as a witness. In New Zealand that is what they do. Not everyone comes forward as a witness, but quite often they will go back and they will ask for further information and of course they will knock out frivolous and vexatious submissions or defamatory submissions. All of that sort of thing gets culled out straightaway. It is a matter of looking at each submission, but I think in a state like Queensland the need for remote contact through new electronic media or that sort of thing would be very good. I would see that there is considerable value in building interactive websites to enable people to make comments on things as they go through because, really, over a period of time one idea stimulates another idea and, in turn, that stimulates a variation on the two ideas and that gradually builds an outcome.

I do not care how smart you are, you cannot think up the perfect solution on your own; you need to put it up to a sounding-board. The broad spectrum of the community is a fantastic sounding-board for ideas. I have often found in my career that even people who were not very educated would cut to the chase on what was wrong with something very quickly because they were very practically minded. They might not be able to articulate it very well, but they home in on the problem and then those people who are more educated can refine it. They were great assets to me as a member of parliament in assessing the value of things.

So outreach to the community, which also takes time, is very important and, I think more importantly where you have long distances and people who would never get the chance to come to Brisbane today, it is important to engage them—or people who otherwise feel isolated within their community and within cities there are people who feel isolated at times—and they would use electronic media where they would not use any other form of communication. So that sort of engagement, I think, is very important. The bit of money that might be involved in doing it is negligible in comparison with the benefits that would flow from it.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Rozzoli. I think we could probably sit here and chat to you all day about these topics, because you obviously have a wealth of experience and you have thought deeply about them. Thank you for your willingness to come to Queensland and talk further about these matters. I am cognisant of the time, though, and our agenda this morning. So we are going to have to say goodbye. Have a good day. I know that you have a busy day planned in Sydney. I hope the weather is good for you there. Thank you very much.

Mr Rozzoli: Thank you. It is my pleasure. If I can be of any further assistance, do not hesitate to give me a call.

CHAIR: We will. Thank you.

Mr Rozzoli: Thank you very much.

CHAIR: The Speaker is running a couple of minutes late, so I propose that we have a little break and wait for him. Thank you.

Proceedings suspended from 9.02 am to 9.10 am

MICKEL, John, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly

CHAIR: We will formally convene the meeting again now that the Speaker has arrived. Good morning and welcome, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

CHAIR: Thank you for your submission to the committee and the time you have taken today to come before us. Would you like to begin by making an opening statement?

Mr SPEAKER: Yes. What motivated me to present a submission to you is a long-held belief I have had that there is a dislocation in the process in the parliament. The committee work is done, the committees report and, effectively, unless it is an ethics committee where an action is demanded, that is the end of that report. People have spent weeks, sometimes months, delivering a report and it just simply disappears onto the shelves up there with other great chronicles. What I think should happen, what I think would be better to happen, is that there should be a greater intersection between the work done by the committees and the parliament.

I do not expect a minister on the day a committee report is delivered to give a full and frank reply, but I think the current system whereby that is the end of the report is dysfunctional. What I would like to see is the government forced to reply to that committee report and, indeed, that there be a debate on that report, perhaps when the government has had time to consider it. In that way, the report of the committee may well form the basis of some legislation down the track or it may help enlighten all members of parliament as to the issue that was being discussed. That is the first point: a committee report and an intersection with the parliament.

The second thing is, as I have noted in a report that I gave to parliament earlier in the year after my visit to Westminster, the Deputy Clerk of the House of Commons made the observation that members of parliament increasingly see themselves as local members first and legislators second. What has been said in this parliament many times is that there is not adequate scope for members of parliament to raise their issues of specific local concern in the parliament. What I think would aid that process is this: we need to bring back the idea that a local member should be a local member of parliament—absolutely—and they should have the chance to distil those views in the parliament. But also they are elected here to be legislators. If you are going to carry out that second arm—namely a legislative role—adequately and appropriately, then I think having the committee stage of a bill treated in exactly the same format that the estimates stage of a bill is treated is quite appropriate. In my view, there is no need for the detailed committee stage of a bill to be dealt with in the House.

What I think would be a far better forum is the forum that you have indeed got here today—where the minister, perhaps with the panel of people who advise, could be there and the members of parliament who are interested in getting to the finer detail of a bill could be there to scrutinise that bill. In other words, the business of the House can run concurrently with a committee stage or, if the committee does not like that view, then perhaps you could have an entire afternoon where various sections of this Assembly could be given over to study different bills in a committee stage. What I have said in my submission is that the trade-off for that would be that instead of having 20 minutes for a bill now—and I might say in my current position you struggle to find the relevance of what the member is saying because they are trying to make a constituency point as well as a legislative point—more time should be given over to local matters.

So if you wanted a trade-off, you would give 10 minutes for a discussion on the bill at hand, knowing that that bill is going to be considered in considerable detail later on in a committee stage, and the time that you save could be given over to private members' discussions on matters concerning their electorate. I operate in the hope, therefore, that those twin responsibilities—one as a local member and one as a legislator—will come back. My fear at the moment is that the role of legislator is giving way at a time when it should not give way. All of you had paid attention this week to the legislation that was before us in connection with emerging technologies. These are highly complex matters and they are highly complex matters that need detailed discussion. So they are my opening comments.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. In your view of the committee stage of the bill being discussed somewhere else, how does the opposition make the point and vote against the bill then?

Mr SPEAKER: They could have a statement of reservations, perhaps. I would leave the detail of that to your committee to come up with. You could have a list of reservations. Currently the Scrutiny of Legislation report comes up with a list of reservations. I think the minister in charge of the bill would need to explain to the House why he or she is rejecting the recommendations of the committee, if that is the way they find it.

CHAIR: I take the point that you make quite forcefully in your submission—and you have said it again this morning—that members are using a debate about bills to talk about local electorate issues because they do not have enough forum in the House. I wonder whether just speaking about these local issues in adjournment type debates actually gets any action for those local members. Is there another way that we could do it so that ministers could be in the House and answer questions from backbenchers about their own local issues?

Mr SPEAKER: So you are suggesting another question time type of forum where the local issue would be discussed?

CHAIR: Exactly. Members stand up and make a point about their electorate quite validly, but they do not get a response and it can easily be ignored by the government of the day.

Mr SPEAKER: This is a situation in the House of Commons—and I am not sure what the mechanism is for reporting back. I would hate to have a situation where you are getting a plethora of concerns—let us say it is the health minister—and they are all being treated with a generality. I would want something more specific than that in a private members' time. To be honest, I would need to study what the report-back mechanism is for the House of Commons with that.

CHAIR: Yes. We will definitely look at that as well. You made mention today in your submission about the duration of sitting days and sitting times and the time given over to private members' statements and ministerial statements. What is your view in terms of the future of ministerial statements?

Mr SPEAKER: I have a very strong view of ministerial statements—that they are an important part of the executive arm of government reporting back to parliament. This week I made a suggestion to ministers that they should be of a less combative nature. The person under attack, or the parties under attack, under the current format are at a singular disadvantage, because there is no compunction on the minister to note that paper. Once the paper is noted, there is a chance for any member of parliament to engage in a rebuttal of what the minister has said.

What I feel is emerging is that increasingly too much time is given over in a combative sense rather than in a reporting sense. As a chair, it leaves me to try to give justice for the person under attack, and the person under attack by responding is creating a disorder. For me to squash that person because they are responding is as unfair as the attack upon that person.

CHAIR: Fair enough.

Mr SPRINGBORG: What seems to be a consistent thread coming through from the submissions—and it is certainly apparent in yours, Mr Speaker—is this view that particular specialist committees of the parliament should look at particular portfolio related areas and scrutinise bills and take public submissions and report back to the House and improve that legislation. Do you have a view on what sort of time frame would be appropriate for a bill to be under public scrutiny and for the committee to take submissions, consider them and report back to parliament? Do you think it is two months? Three months? Four, five, or six months?

Mr SPEAKER: I do not have a view on it, because it depends, again, on the complexity of the legislation. All I know is that in the current system that we have, it is perfectly possible, using your 10-minute time frame, to filibuster in the committee stage for no great purpose. What I am trying to do is bring a sharper focus to a detailed discussion by members of the bill under consideration.

I will give you my experience as a minister. At times, particularly if it was something that was very technical—some of the matters raised, for example in energy, can be quite technical—you were struggling to understand the question because, in all fairness, I think the question had perhaps been given by somebody, the member had written it down as best they understood it and you were trying to interpret as best you understood it. Under the current system, you have to wander off to the side and get a scribbled note, hoping that that scribbled note is going to provide the answer that those people need. I think a far better system is one where there is more interplay between the questioner and those being questioned and you can get the detailed response.

If what I am suggesting sounds like heresy or, as *The Courier-Mail* incorrectly described it, as child-minding ministers, that is precisely what happens at estimates. Nobody has criticised the format of estimates. They might criticise other aspects of it, but when you are dealing with more and more complex legislation it is only fair that the member doing the questioning gets the detailed response.

As for time frames on that, obviously it will depend on whether the matter is urgent and how soon government can get the legislation into the House. The format that I am proposing enables the legislation at the very least to get to a committee stage fairly promptly. In my view, it is not beyond the scope of members of parliament to have simultaneous meetings of committees. It may well be that the Leader of the House determines that you give over part of an afternoon where the House will break into different committees.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is apparent to me that, whilst we have particular terms of reference as a committee to look at the committee structure and the way that it can function better to ensure the process of scrutiny of legislation and advance that particular legislative process, we are dealing with a far broader issue. It is not only how committees operate but also the way the entire parliament operates and the role of MPs in parliament to ensure that there is appropriate oversight and scrutiny of government. Basically, I take it from what you are saying that it is not only about reform of the committee but also about reform of the entire way the parliament operates to ensure that it goes back to its roots of what it is supposed to do.

Mr SPEAKER: To be fair to the Queensland parliament, this is not going back. Please do not ever think—

Mr SPRINGBORG: Go forward, or whatever you want to say—

Mr SPEAKER: Going forward. Even from where we are—and I will refrain from being political; moving forward, going forward, or whatever we are doing—this is part of the evolution of the Queensland parliament. If you doubt what I have said, have a look at the book yesterday. Even today, with the criticisms
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or the suggestions that we are making for improvement, if you go back to when the honourable the minister on my right, the member for Toowoomba South and you, Madam Chair and Deputy Chair, came into this place, it was quite archaic what went on then. We are light years in front of what happened then. But in terms of where we are with complex legislation, where we are in terms of what I think the public expects of this parliament, they expect that the legislation will be scrutinised, they expect that their taxpayer dollars will be questioned: 'Is this the most effective way?' Currently, the only thing they see that we do is a 1½-minute grab of question time and I am afraid that is never going to show us at our edifying best.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I suppose what I am saying is that if you go back to parliament and the 1688 bill of rights and the way the parliament has historically operated with regard to a very strong oversight role, a check on what the executive may have been at that time, the highest court in the land—all of those sorts of things—there has been a significant departure from that to where we are today. It seems to be related to the increasing role of the executive—basically the dominance of the executive and how a lot of the parliamentary process is now a reflection and an extension of the executive, right back through the way that it operates. I know that a number of people who have made submissions talk about the parliament being about members making set pieces, not necessarily scrutinising. That is what I am saying—the way that it has actually gone and departed from its original establishment principles.

Mr SPEAKER: That is correct, but that process started in Queensland in about 1915. I hope I have said—and I know I have said it in other forums—that we have evolved from that. But if you want to go back to the purist system of the UK where the executive is called to account, yes, that is what we are moving towards. But we are doing it Queensland style.

Mrs PRATT: I know when I go into a committee and I am working in parliament at the same time, it is very fractured. You have members going in and out of the committee rooms, because they are meant to be in parliament, or they have a speaking spot. They are conscious of the time all the time and, therefore, not concentrating on the committee. So would you support, as in the New Zealand system, part of the day being purely for the committee system so that there is no interruption in any way, shape or form and that way you get the best outcomes?

Mr SPEAKER: That is what I would be saying. You would just deem that a portion of the day will be given over to detailed discussion of legislation in committee.

Mrs PRATT: Would you envisage an extension of parliamentary time, as in going from Monday to Friday rather than just Tuesday to Thursday night?

Mr SPEAKER: What I am proposing is that you can shorten the second reading speeches, except for the shadow minister and the ministerial reply. I think it would be banal to squib that. But I cannot see what is wrong with giving over a couple of hours for it. What you are doing is substituting, but you are saving time in the speeches at the second reading stage. All I have advocated is that the time saved could be given over to private members to discuss issues in their electorates.

I think the chair of the committee has come up with an excellent suggestion that is worth following, and that is this business of having a minister present so that you might have the discussion around a particular portfolio. That is my understanding of what you were saying. This is, I think, an excellent suggestion—if you want to have a process for reporting back.

Mrs PRATT: Okay.

Mr HORAN: Mr Speaker, I think one of the important things that seems to be arising is the status and the relevance of the committees and in a sharing of power or legislative involvement and probably harnessing whatever ability or talent resides in the backbenchers on the government side or on the opposition benches into the process. We have asked you about time. I think time is important because, in our system currently, they are lunchtime meetings or they are meetings that happen while parliament is sitting. Bells ring, divisions happen. I think that is probably an important thing that we have to look at.

In giving elevated status and relevance, what are your views on who should be able to come to speak to a committee or to make a submission, even in person, and should that include MPs, and that might get over this problem of MPs wanting to speak to every clause in that they could speak to that during the committee stage? Finally, how does that fit with the intersection that you talked about? All of that work is done for six months on a bill and in New Zealand the status of committees is such that ministers virtually have to take notice of it and, in some cases, accept some of the proposed all-party amendments and so forth because the public trust of the committee system is so high.

Mr SPEAKER: There are two aspects. In terms of intersections, at the moment there are committee reports, and I wish I had a better memory for what was tabled as committee reports this week. It seems to me that a lot of work was done by the committee Evan Moorhead chaired, for example, and the committee Barbara Stone chaired into alcohol related violence. It seems to me that there is a lot of work done, people travel everywhere and all that happened in the parliament was that somebody got up and said, 'Mr Speaker, here's our report.' There was no compulsion for that report ever to be debated. If there was a minority report, there was not even the prospect that the minority report or the minority point of view had to be debated. That is a failing in that aspect of committee work. So my intersection point, in answer to the honourable member, is that there should be an intersection with that—that is, the minister should come back to the House at some point, having studied that, and there should be a debate about that report. So, if you like, that is that reporting or committee process.

The second aspect is what I am calling the committee stage of the bill that we have now where one of you gets up and asks the minister questions. You all know that there are ways of frustrating the time of a bill by getting up for 10 minutes and five minutes. It does not happen in this parliament? It must have been another parliament that I observed then! What I am saying is that that part of a committee stage can be done in a detailed way. As for getting outside people into that stage, my observation is that it would be far better if the members continued to question the minister. In terms of getting outside experts, it may well be that the House has determined that that should happen for a particular issue—surrogacy, for example, where you want to get a range of experts and cross-examine those people—and then I think if the process for that exists it is okay. My objection is the lack of debate of that committee work. You have sent somebody around the place for months on end and what happens to it? At the very best you might get a chance to look at the foreword and a couple of recommendations.

CHAIR: Of course you would get debate on it if legislation comes before the House and those members have the opportunity, but I take your point that not every committee's report results in legislation.

Mr SPEAKER: Maybe too—I think I have said this in other reports—there is a compulsion now because of the 24-hour news cycle to rush something in because legislation is going to resolve the issue when oftentimes a debate on the issue might help a further understanding of the complexities of the issue, and it may well be that legislation is not the answer—perhaps a widening of powers or whatever it might be on a particular issue.

CHAIR: Mr Speaker, I am very aware of the time, so we are going to have to conclude there.

Mr SPEAKER: Again, Madam Chair, I am sorry I was late.

CHAIR: I understand. It is very tough some days out there. Thank you very much for your time this morning.

Mr SPEAKER: Thank you very much indeed. Thanks for the opportunity.

LAURIE, Mr Neil, Clerk of the Queensland Parliament

CHAIR: We now welcome the Clerk of the Parliament, Mr Neil Laurie, who has made an extensive submission to the committee. Thanks for your time this morning, Mr Laurie. Would you like to begin by making an opening statement?

Mr Laurie: Madam Chair, thank you. I do not think I will take up too much of the committee's time with an opening statement but rather be available for questions. I do, however, have some additional documents that I thought may be of assistance to the committee if, by the leave of the committee, I could present them. I have copies for every member.

CHAIR: Yes, absolutely. Thank you. We would appreciate that.

Mr Laurie: The document that I am handing out essentially is some analysis that has been done further to the submission that I have made in relation to the sitting hours of the Legislative Assembly. I have had my officers in the chamber services department look at sitting patterns and issues arising out of sitting patterns from as early as 1979. My purpose in doing this was that when compiling the submission we looked at the intersection between the House and committees and the sitting patterns of the House and the hours spent by the House on things and I thought that there were some quite interesting trends that had been arising from just the snapshot that we had taken predominantly in the 2000s and the late 1990s. I then resolved to have my people go back and look at the situation since 1979 in order to get some overall trends.

To put matters very simply, because there is a lot of data there and some of it repeats itself, what the data is actually demonstrating is that over the period since 1979 a number of things have happened. First of all, the total number of days that the House is sitting is actually declining each year on average over the period, but of course the average duration of each sitting day is actually increasing and so is the number of sitting hours. It makes perfect sense that if you sit fewer days in order to get business through, assuming that most things are fairly constant in terms of the amount of business that the House has to do, you have to sit longer hours.

This emphasises one point that I made in the submission and I would emphasise again—that is, the possibility of utilising committees to actually better distribute the workload of the House. I see the importance of committees not only in the fact that they can undertake more detailed investigations in, I would suggest, probably a more bipartisan manner in most instances but also because by breaking the work of the House up into committees and sending the committees out there to do some of the work that is currently being done in the House you can better distribute the workload of the House.

The final point I would make from the statistics I have shown is that there was a period in the second Goss government from 1993 through to 1995 which members may find interesting if they look at those in particular where the sitting hours of the House actually changed and so did the number of days upon which the House was sitting—that is, instead of sitting just Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday the House started sitting on Friday. Wednesdays was always a 2.30 start, but the House was also sitting on Friday. That is the only three-year period during that entire period that we have looked at—almost 30 years—where Fridays were regular sitting days. I suppose the thing that stands out to me is that the House sat more days obviously, because it was sitting Friday every sitting week and it was also sitting less hours every day because they were able to distribute it over those four days as well.

I would put to the committee that I appreciate that the regional nature of Queensland makes it very difficult for us to sit too many weeks per year, because it is very hard and difficult on those members who are from regional areas. But we are here for Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday and it seems to me that rather than increasing the number of sitting weeks if we were to start sitting on Fridays, for at least part of the Friday even, then we actually increase the number of hours that we can sit in the week. I think longer term it is a good thing for the House not to be sitting, on average, 12 hours a day. I think it is a good thing for the House to sit eight or nine hours a day to do the work that is necessary. If you can spread it over four days, I think that is important. So I would suggest to the committee that four-day sitting weeks be very seriously looked at.

That needs to be taken in conjunction with the fact that if a committee system that I propose or Mr Speaker proposes and the models that operate in some of the jurisdictions that the committee has been looking at like New Zealand is adopted we will have to find time for committees to meet, and I take the member for Nanango's earlier point that I think it is very important that when committees meet they not be distracted by the operations of the House and vice versa. So I would suggest that at least a couple of half days in that sitting week be just devoted to committee work where the House itself is not sitting.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for those very interesting figures which I am sure we will have a good look at. Just to your submission before the committee, I note on the fourth page you say that the composition of the parliament does not represent the diversity of political opinion in the state and I was just wondering what you meant by that.

Mr Laurie: I think what I mean by that—I am putting my neck out here—is essentially the voting system we have does mean that there are large proportions of people who vote different ways to what is represented in the House. We do not necessarily have the variance of opinion as a House like the Senate does, which does have a different voting system of course.

CHAIR: Fair enough. In terms of your suggestion that the public works and the public accounts committee be amalgamated into a different form, would you like to outline that a bit more?

Mr Laurie: The essential point that I tried to make in the submission—and it has always been my essential view—is that really the committee system needs to reflect, in a way, how government itself operates. I suppose the House should be able to utilise committees to scrutinise not only the actions of government but also the legislation of government, in the same way that government itself undertakes those mechanisms. When it comes to estimates committees, since 1994 when the appropriation bills come in we have broken consideration of those expenditures into portfolio areas. They have always changed from year to year, but we have taken the view of breaking them up into areas and we oftentimes try to break them up into areas that have a lot of synergy with each other. Social service type portfolios are usually put together and Treasury and Premier's Department are usually together. We take the view in estimates that we should break them up into synergistic areas and consider them.

My strong issue is that I think we should start it almost with a blank page in the sense that every time the committee system has been reviewed and altered in the last 25 years, or thereabouts, we have essentially started with this system and we have tinkered with it. I think we have outgrown that. That is my view. I think that there has been a lot of good work done over the last 20 years since committees were introduced, but the current system has really outgrown itself and does not necessarily give the parliament what I think it now needs. We need to evolve into the next stage, which is this portfolio based system.

CHAIR: And you would see them having a policy and a scrutiny role, then?

Mr Laurie: Yes. I often give a talk to public servants, and the topic of the talk that I give them—it is a standard talk that I give at some public servant seminars and so on—is that the parliament is not just a legislature. I think it is important to really re-emphasise to ourselves that parliament undertakes a whole range of procedures, a whole range of functions for our society. Yes, it considers legislation—and legislation is a very important role of parliament—but the parliament is also there to be a forum for debate and grievance. It is also there to scrutinise the actions of the executive. When I say 'the executive', I do not necessarily mean government ministers; I am actually talking about the actions of government officers, too. I do not believe that in our current system we scrutinise the actions of government officers enough.

CHAIR: I am sure some ministers would agree with you.

Mr Laurie: I think that is a big missing link in our system. In 1995 we actually trialled something very different in estimates committees. That is, we allowed estimates committees to ask questions of senior advisers directly. There was a lot of jitteriness about that. The Public Service was very averse to it and I think there was a lot of pressure to reverse that decision. But I think that is important. I am a public officer, I get paid very well and I think I should be accountable for the actions that I take directly. I do not think I should necessarily be able to hide behind Mr Speaker's skirt at estimates. I should be responsible for some of the decisions that I take directly. I think all senior public officers should be in that situation. Senior public servants who are paid at senior Public Service rates have to take the responsibility that goes with that. If that is turning up to an estimates committee or if that is turning up to a committee like this and answering questions directly—not about the policy that the government has made; that is something for the minister to defend—about decisions that are made then I think they should be accountable to it.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I concur with your view on that and I always have, but I believe that it ought to be limited to the director-general of the department. I regard him as the chief accountable officer. Over a long period of time—this has occurred in Public Works estimates—I have flicked something over to him and he has flicked it to the relevant officer. But I think in the first instance, if someone wants to ask a question of a public servant, it should be confined to the director-general to determine whether he is going to answer it on behalf of his troops or whether he wants to flick it to one of them because, at the end of the day, he is the accountable officer. I think it would be undermining a DG to have an agenda at an estimates hearing whereby a particular public servant was picked out and could be perhaps used in a political sense against the director-general. My view is that the accountable officer to me, and to the parliament by extension, is the director-general. I have always held that view. If Lawrence asks a question, he asks me and I will flick it to the DG, because I regard, as you do, that the estimates are about the estimates of that department. I am but one person accountable for that—there are others who are accountable—but the second most accountable person is the director-general. I think they should have equal opportunity to be questioned directly, but not so the rest of the department.

Mr Laurie: I think I will agree with you that at the very least the director-general should be questioned by those committees. I would still take the view that there is obviously a line you would have to draw as to who is accountable directly. I think your deputy directors-general, particularly in some of your larger departments who are probably making—

Mr SCHWARTEN: I have no problem with the associate director, Natalie MacDonald—those two people. I have no problem with that. I have a problem with an AO5.

Mr Laurie: No. For a start, I would not even contemplate that anyone who is not paid an SES salary and above would be there, quite frankly. That is a different issue altogether.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Even though I have at times said, 'I know who is in charge of that program.' That might be an asbestos program. They come forward and answer that question.

Mr Laurie: I think it is somewhat ironic, though, that a lot of the people at those estimates committees who sit behind the minister are getting paid three times more than the minister.

Mr SCHWARTEN: That is exactly the view I have, and I have been criticised for taking that opportunity to make sure the department is on its mettle, as it were, because I see the estimates process as a very good spring-cleaning exercise to get people focused on what they are supposed to be doing.

Mr SEENEY: I wanted to explore with you the issue that you touched on earlier about spreading the workload of the parliament and put to you an entirely different view from the one that was put by the member for Nanango for your response. Having sat in the chamber for quite an extensive period of time, I see no reason that the second reading debate on a particular bill could not continue in the parliament while the consideration in detail of another bill was being carried out in the red chamber, or in this room, in front of whatever committee structure we eventually adopt. Even given the processes that we have at the moment, I see no reason two chambers could not be used, or this room as well, to take the logic to the next step. I do not think there are that many members involved in either the second reading debates or the consideration in detail of any extensive bills. There is always the minister and the shadow minister and the government members who are required to make the quorum. Is there an issue from your perspective—of staffing, of resources—that would prevent that from happening? I certainly am not convinced that it should be restricted because it would place an extraordinary workload on members. I do not think there is any evidence to support that view.

Mr Laurie: I certainly would not try to advocate contrary to that. I do think you would have to very closely consider what portions of the day, though, were going to run concurrently. You could probably run concurrently some things. For example, you could get rid of the adjournment debates and instead have a set time each week for private members' statements in the House that runs for two hours. There would be no difficulty in running that process concurrently with a number of committees operating elsewhere in the building. But I think you would have to give some serious thought to the ability to run those committees concurrently when they are doing proper hearing work and taking evidence and things of that nature when there is a risk of division bells ringing all the time. It is in the main divisions.

It is also a logistical issue for parties, particularly the government party or parties of the day that have to maintain the quorum in the House in terms of rostering of members. I know that currently rosters are oftentimes worked out according to membership of committees and when committees are meeting and things of that nature. I would point you back towards the period 1993 to 1995, when the House sat four days a week and on Wednesday mornings. Members here will probably know this better than I would, but I am fairly certain that Wednesday mornings were put aside for party meetings and caucus. So I would suggest that if caucus and party meetings were maintained on Mondays, like they are at the moment, you could still have a Wednesday morning, for example, when the committees held their hearings and things of that nature.

My personal preference, if I were designing a system, would be to have Wednesday afternoon from one o'clock. Parliament adjourns and Wednesday afternoon, for example, is when committees actually do all of their work. I think one of the problems that we may run into—and as those graphs demonstrate—is that over time there would be a bit of creep in the sense that you redesign a system and you have the Wednesday mornings off, but then Wednesday nights end up going until midnight. If you have the discipline of sitting on a Wednesday morning and the House adjourns at 1, 1.30 or whatever the case may be, that afternoon is dedicated to committee work or the committees can work as late as they like in terms of hearings. But then everyone knows that the House is not coming back, per se. At the end of the day, this issue is one of detail that is not critical to the overall idea of having some of that work done by committees, I do not think.

Mr SEENEY: I think the issue of whether or not the committees are going to sit concurrently with other activities in the House—and I take your point that some of the activities in the House may be better suited than others to operating concurrently with committees—is one of the first decisions this committee will have to make in relation to the system we design around that. If you take the view, that has already been expressed, that there should be no concurrent activities between the committee system and the House then we are faced with the prospect of either seriously lengthening the amount of time that members are required to spend here or curtailing the type of committee system that we eventually recommend. I think it is one of the fundamental first decisions that we need to make—whether or not the House can continue to operate concurrently with committees—and then we can design a committee system that takes a lot of that work out of the House.

I think the point you make about attending divisions is very valid. I take the point you make about ensuring that when the House is sitting concurrently with committees the work of the House is such that it does not require members to break the committee meeting. That probably fits very well with some of the points that the Speaker made in regard to allowing members to fulfil their local representation responsibilities in the parliament to a greater extent than they do at the moment.

Mr Laurie: I noticed earlier that Mr Speaker was asked a question about grievances being put to ministers. I did make a little note at the time that I am aware that in some jurisdictions they have a debate that is a true grievance debate. We used to call our last adjournment debate on Thursday night our grievance debate, but it was not really a grievance debate in the classic sense of the word. I know that some jurisdictions have a grievance debate whereby they will allocate a time each few sitting weeks for a

portfolio. So they will put in a grievance debate and they will have it for the portfolio of the Minister for Health, for example. Members will then make statements about issues that they have concerning health. Health is probably not a good example, but they will make statements about issues that they have in relation to their electorate and constituents. Oftentimes the minister will respond, if not then then at a later time. But the minister for that area, always pretty well by convention, is in the House during that debate to take on board people's grievances.

I strongly support the Speaker's view that at the moment legislation is used as a Trojan horse for many other things. I have never quite understood the logic of not just giving people that other time where they can say what they need to say about their constituency issues or other issues of concern to them in order to release that pressure and have legislation flow through a lot easier.

It is all about time. I think, with all due respect to the minister on the committee, the amount of time that is allocated for ministerial statements compared to the amount of time allocated to individual members is disproportionate. Ministerial statements are important, but three hours a week is probably too much when you compare it to the amount of time that is there for the remaining 71 members of the House, or thereabouts.

So part of the difficulty that your committee has is striking a balance between a lot of competing interests—striking a balance between the operations of the House and the operations of committees, striking a balance between the ability of ministers to make important statements about matters affecting the state and allowing private members to make statements about matters that they feel strongly about.

I think it is unlikely that in the first try we are going to get it right. I think what is going to be very important and what I would recommend for your committee is that, whatever recommendations are made, there be another review set in place about a year down the track to see how it has worked, because some things will need modification; there is no doubt about it. No matter what the committee comes up with, there will be practical difficulties down the track. But that is okay; it is an evolving process. But having that review down the track is important as well.

Ms MALE: Part of our terms of reference is to look at timely and cost-effective ways of looking at legislation. From what I am hearing from a number of witnesses it would involve possibly doubling up your staff. I am concerned about access to rooms. If every committee were to have a room where they are all going to meet on Wednesday mornings, that is eight rooms with all the resultant staff who would need to be there. I am just wondering whether you or Mr Speaker have thought about the cost implications of expanding the committee system.

Mr Laurie: I think I touched upon it in my submission in the sense of, obviously, we cannot predicate what things are going to cost until we actually have some sort of model, if you like, beforehand. I am of the view that, in a practical sense, from a Hansard point of view, for example, I am not going to go out and basically hire another 10 or 20 Hansard reporters in order to be concurrently do the work of the committees and the work of the House. We will have to work into the system some sort of delayed transcripts and things of that nature for committees, which I think is how this one is being done today, where the Hansard staff will transcribe it later, effectively. But the more the committees work, the more they will hold hearings and there will be some sort of cost.

In terms of the building here, I think that is a real issue. But I think that is a real issue going forward whether or not there is a major change to the committee system. As members on this committee who are also members of the Speaker's Advisory Committee know, and as I think the Minister for Public Works would know, we have significant issues here in terms of the building's fitness for purpose anyway. I think going forward the state is going to have to make a decision as to whether or not there is funding put into this building in order to increase its facilities for modern committee work. We have already sketched up plans for that whether or not this review recommends that. I think that part of that is having better, modern committee rooms for committees whether this review goes ahead or not, or makes significant changes or not, because even the existing committees need better facilities than what they have currently.

The competition here in this precinct during sitting weeks for things like meeting rooms and the suitability of the rooms that we have are real issues anyway. What I would say to the issue of cost full stop is this: in terms of the state budget, in terms of the expenditure that this parliament is responsible for, bringing this parliament up to a sufficient standard to be able to do its job properly is a minute cost in terms of the state budget overall.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I also thank the Clerk for the very well-considered nature of his submission. I have two or three questions. I will ask them all and you might want to write them down. You mentioned before the creeping nature of ministerial statements and you have provided us with some very significant data here. I think it is very helpful to the committee. Is it possible for either you or for our committee people to give a comparison of the time that has been allocated or traditionally used for ministerial statements over the same period of time to where we are today? I think that could also assist us.

Mr Laurie: We have that. In some of the documents I handed out today I think there are—

Mr SPRINGBORG: I am sorry if I have not—

Mr Laurie: Not back to 1979.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I think it would be interesting to see historically over a similar period of time.

Mr Laurie: We will certainly do that.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Just going back to what you indicated beforehand with regard to senior public servants appearing before the estimates committee and answering questions—obviously on their responsibility, not on policy matters—would you have the same view with regard to statutory office holders of government? We have the likes of the CMC chairman, the commissioner for children and young people—a whole range of other statutory positions as well which are absolutely crucial with regard to oversight and the administration of the government's various arms.

My final question relates to what you have put forward with regard to the structure of the committees. I note that at the moment in some way or another we have 12 committees. You are proposing to condense it to 10, I understand. We have 89 members of parliament: 18 are cabinet ministers, 11 are in what is almost the extended executive, which are parliamentary secretaries—and we have parliamentary secretaries who are participating here, which is fair enough—which basically leaves 60 MPs outside of that. If we are going to extend the role of parliamentary committees, which I strongly support, and they are going to have more work to do, I would like to explore a bit more how we go about ensuring that they have the resources and the appropriate time frames to be able to do that job. Do you see this as an impediment when we have so few members with such a significant committee process which would need to be adopted under what is being proposed here?

Mr Laurie: In relation to ministerial statements, if we do not have that information we will certainly get that for you. My understanding from what I have read about ministerial statements in terms of the past is that they were certainly done. There were probably one or two ministerial statements a day on average in the earlier years. Some of them were noted, but they were usually fairly significant issues that there was a ministerial statement in respect of. I would like to emphasise here that I think there is an important place for ministerial statements. I am not saying that they should be disposed of or that there is anything wrong with them; I think it is about balance. I think that at the moment we have too many ministerial statements that could easily be press releases rather than ministerial statements and we could free up the time of the House to have a better balance of what goes on.

In relation to senior public servants, and particularly statutory office holders, I think I have mentioned in my submission the statutory officers committee. I think the answer to that question is, yes, statutory officers should be accountable directly to the parliament. I am also very strongly in favour of altering our appointment processes for statutory officers and having some consistency in the appointment method of those statutory office holders as well, because with every statutory office holder at the moment there is a different method of appointment for them. Literally every one of them is different. I think that there is a real need to have a synergy—a sameness—about how statutory office holders are appointed and how they are accountable, because officers like the Auditor-General, the Ombudsman and the head of the CMC play a vitally important role in our system of government. I think that, yes, they should be. That is one of the reasons we have specifically recommended the statutory office holders committee, because we think that is dreadfully important.

In terms of the structure of committees and the number of members, this is my old bugbear. We do not have enough members. If you want to look at it in base terms—and no-one wants to hear it out there—we do not. The population has grown. The workload on members has grown out in their electorates and the complexity of legislation has changed. There is a whole lot of other pressure on members these days. We do not have enough members and we are starting to see some really strange aberrations in our electoral system as a result of that. I point out the electorate of Mount Isa as a demonstration of what happens when you do not increase the size of your parliament but try to maintain the one vote, one value principle. Ultimately, we are going to have five electorates covering 90 per cent of the state and everyone else down here in Brisbane or on the Gold Coast. So the number of members is an issue.

As a practical step in the medium term, I would suggest a number of things. It is difficult. When I was conceptually working through a new committee system with my staff and workshops in this very room the number of members was an issue and being able to split them up, because once you take out all the office holders you do not have many members left to divvy up among committees. It is a real issue. I have been a critic of the office of parliamentary secretary. I apologise to the two parliamentary secretaries on the committee. It is not about the individuals; it is about the nature of the office. I think that something dreadful happened to us somewhere around the turn of the century. The parliamentary committee chairmanship positions were very prestigious positions around this parliament and they have been superseded by the office of parliamentary secretary. As I said in my submission, I think that the status of the position of chair of these committees needs to be lifted. It is a government decision ultimately, but I think that the number of parliamentary secretaries should be readjusted in light of that as well. Once again, the balance just gets out of sync.

CHAIR: Thank you. We have one final question from Mike Horan.

Mr HORAN: Neil, a lot of the discussions have been about committees looking at legislation. What other tasks do you see would be relevant for these committees, particularly in making backbenchers or opposition members of parliament more relevant or using their particular abilities?

Mr Laurie: I think it is a very good question and I think it goes to my argument before that we have to remember that the parliament is not just a legislature. There are other activities, including having a forum for people out there in the public to express their grievances with government policy, or with Brisbane

government action, or whatever the case may be. I think too often when we are criticising government, people automatically are thinking that we are actually criticising the government of the day, if you know what I mean. But we are not. I am not. I am talking about government full stop. The state government operates out there and every decision and every mistake and every matter that happens out there is not necessarily the responsibility of the minister or the party in power at the particular time. The government operates out there and government services operate out there and there are problems from time to time that develop. Sometimes—oftentimes—they are systematic problems that are not necessarily uncovered first off.

So I think that these committees all of a sudden have the opportunity to be out there consulting with the public and hearing grievances and putting some puzzles together about what is wrong with things out there at times. It is also there to be hearing about what is right—what is working well—which is also important. So the committees do more than legislation and should do more than legislation. They get a feel for those portfolio areas that they are overseeing and, hopefully, ministers will work very cooperatively with the committees as well to inform the members on the committees about what is going on out there and what are the problems, what are the issues. I am sure that there will be ministers who will have good relationships with these committees and who will take on board suggestions coming from the committees as well.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Laurie. I think some members of the committee would probably like to talk to you further about these issues and we will have to do that at a later date. I am cognisant of the time. So I am sure that you are happy to meet with us again if we request that.

Mr Laurie: Absolutely.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. We will now break for 15 minutes for morning tea.

Proceedings suspended from 10.13 am to 10.35 am

REYNOLDS, Dr Paul, Honorary Research Fellow, Queensland Parliament

CHAIR: I welcome Dr Paul Reynolds. Thank you for your submission to the committee and your appearance here today. Would you like to begin with an opening statement?

Dr Reynolds: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I thank the committee for considering my submission. I want to make some general background observations. I recall giving evidence before the PCJC in 1990 where I was advocating the adoption of the New Zealand system. I also ran a conference for ASPG in 2000 specifically on the parliamentary committee system. The two keynote speakers there were two former Premiers, Mike Ahern and Wayne Goss. Mr Ahern made a very interesting observation—that the reason the committee system was so late in coming to Queensland was because of long periods of one-party rule. With Labor in power almost continuously from 1915 to 1957 and the coalition and National Party continuously from 1957 to 1989, governments just had no reason to want a committee system. Of course the parliament, being a sovereign body, can only reform itself. No other outside organisation can force it down a path of reform.

I think one of the things about the committee system is that it has been a kind of work in progress since the early 1990s. To that extent, I think the Clerk's evidence is well taken—that this is an evolving process. I always used to make the point to my students that no parliament is the same as any other parliament. Parliament itself is a flexible institution and the political culture of any jurisdiction will be reflected in the nature of the parliament. To that extent there is no true model. There is a basic structure but there are infinite variations. The corollary point I used to make is that there is no golden age of parliament, with apologies to the late Jim Killen. There was no golden age of parliament; parliament is always a work in progress.

Finally, in terms of my opening submission I would like to firmly support the Clerk in his contention that the size of the House should be increased. When the electoral districts act was promulgated in 1992, the quota was 20,000. It is now 30,000. The House was last increased in 1985 as a result of the 1985 redistribution for the 1986 election. I remember in the early nineties talking to Emeritus Professor Colin Hughes, who was one of the commissioners, and asking him about the size of the House and whether EARC considered increasing the numbers. He said that, no, at that time they took the size of the House as a given. Of course, at that stage the House had been increased only seven years previously, so they probably did not think it was opportune at that time to advocate an increase. So I would certainly suggest that that be the case.

I just make a final observation about that. Again, Professor Hughes told me that they specifically designated the five remote seats in order to avoid what has now happened—an electorate which goes from the New South Wales border to the Gulf of Carpentaria. It was very much in EARC's mind that that should not happen. Well, we are two further redistributions down the track and it has happened. I think that is worthy of at least a footnote's consideration.

CHAIR: Do you think committees can successfully perform the policy role and the scrutiny role?

Dr Reynolds: Yes. I do not see any reason that should not be the case. The configuration of the committees and their terms of reference and remits I think are things for the House to decide, but conceptually I do not see that that would be a problem. Of course it would mean that the government of the day would to some extent be yielding policies to committees, and that might cause some difficulties. But as I understand the New Zealand system, the amendments that the committees mostly make to the bills before them are as a result of consultation. Whilst the policy remains intact, it is a finetuning operation. To that extent there is a policy input but the initiative firmly lies with the government. I refer to a former student of mine, Marcus Ganley, whom I cite in my submission, who used to say that the ministers in New Zealand might think they are important but it is really the chairs of the committee that people need to talk to.

CHAIR: You are an avid observer of the Queensland parliament. Of course we cannot consider changes to the committee system without reference to how the parliament is working. In your view, what are the shortcomings of the parliament as it is working now?

Dr Reynolds: How long have you got? I think the shortcomings are to do with the fact that there is not enough time given for backbenchers. I think question time should be much more spontaneous and much less rehearsed and choreographed than it is. I tend to agree that more time should be given for backbenchers, grievance debates and putting forward points of view of constituents and so on. However, to me there has always been a paradox in the Westminster system. On the other hand, we do not have separation of powers except as far as the judiciary is concerned because Westminster has this creative tension in it. The government's legitimacy derives from the fact that it controls the parliament and yet the parliament is said to put the government under scrutiny and hold it to account. No Westminster jurisdiction has ever solved that because it is unresolvable. So what you then have to do is have mechanisms and formulas in order to try to harmonise, as closely as possible, those two poles that are in creative tension.

Mr SPRINGBORG: And how do you do that?

Dr Reynolds: Well, you make it up as you go along, Mr Springborg, as I am doing now. I think that is within the purview of each parliament. That is why I said that each parliament within the Westminster system resolves it in different ways. I think the New Zealand system has had powerful committees, but I have emphasised that their committee system preceded the introduction of MMP. New Zealand went from one of the most rigid two-party systems in the Western world to an Italian parliament almost overnight.

Now, that has created all kinds of things. I well recall when I was an undergraduate at Auckland university in the sixties the parliament was without a committee system. They were passing amendments at the end of the session to legislation that had been introduced at the beginning of the session. It was because of the unsatisfactory nature of that that they really started to get to terms with the committee system.

Mr HORAN: I think one of the things that we have to develop is a very strong committee system that develops some of the things you talked about—the public, backbenchers and opposition members having some input. ‘Reward’ is not the right word, but at the end of the day someone wins the election and that someone who wins the election has to have the almost overriding right to bring in the policies that they have been elected on. What we are contemplating is how to have the very best of checks, balances, accountability or input into the processes and how to make those policies as close to what people want as possible.

Dr Reynolds: I think that is right, Mr Horan. I think the public expectation is for strong government. People do not want governments that flip-flop, that do not make up their mind or that change it every day. That is part of the tension. People want strong, decisive government, which is one reason Queensland really has been a one-party state for most of its history since the advent of the party system in the 1890s. I think, therefore, it is up to the parliament to bring that about, to try to get the formula for that. I do not see any other body that can do that, and I think it would be an abrogation of parliamentary responsibility to try to put that onto some other body or organisation.

Mr HORAN: There has been a lot of thought about the set-up of committees. Should there be committees that shadow a portfolio or should there be clusters? I think you have recommended clusters.

Dr Reynolds: Yes.

Mr HORAN: Have you got any suggestions for us, for example, on an area such as health, which is 25 per cent of the budget? Should it be a committee on its own? The Attorney-General’s portfolio holds most of the legislation that goes through the parliament. Should that be a committee on its own? What is your view on speciality or boutique committees such as an ethics committee, a public works committee or a PCMC?

Dr Reynolds: I think my response to that would be along these lines: there are some committees which would be portfolio shadowing committees. In a sense we have that in a putative way in Queensland, because the ministers have their own party committees which advise or interact with the minister. When I was writing Mike Ahern’s biography it was quite interesting, because he, like all ministers, claimed that he used his ministerial committee but nobody else did. So everybody thought they did but nobody else much did. Take that for what it is worth.

The other thing is what you call ‘boutique committees’. I take that to be committees that are not involved with government policy but are parliamentary committees because they are dealing with matters pertaining to the parliament—ethics, privileges and so on. It is interesting to reflect that when Mike Ahern was a backbencher he, Bill Hewitt and a couple of others went around Australia looking at committee systems with a view to having one in Queensland. The Premier of the day, who was resolutely opposed to committees in any way, shape or form, allowed, however, a privileges committee and a subordinate legislation committee because neither of those would put the government of the day under any kind of scrutiny or hold it accountable. So I would say right at that embryonic start there was this notion of portfolio cluster committees and parliamentary affairs type committees.

Mr SPRINGBORG: As I understand it—and it follows on from the point that you made, Dr Reynolds, and also what I think Mike was driving at—we are talking here about understanding that the government absolutely has the right to implement its policy agenda. We are talking here about using a committee process to refine it and make sure that the legislation actually works and fits best. I understand that that is what you are advocating.

Dr Reynolds: That is right, yes.

Mr SPRINGBORG: We talk about hybrid models that support the competing dynamics within the Westminster parliamentary process. What is the best way to ensure that? Do you support the committee system having a form of proportionality in parliament—that is, the government having a majority in parliament also having a majority on the committee? Or do you support the notion of having non-government chairs of committees or of certain specific committees?

Dr Reynolds: As to the latter, Mr Springborg, I would certainly be very much in favour of that. As to whether that is done in terms of a strategy or a template for certain types of committees, I think probably with your cluster and policy committees it is inevitable that the government would have a majority and chair. But I do not see any reason why non-government members should not chair some of the other committees which are not directly impinging on legislative activity.

In the last New Zealand parliament—I cannot talk about the current one—I think two of the 12 committees were chaired by non-government members. That did not seem to create any problems for the government of the day or indeed for the parliament as a whole. But the New Zealanders have always been experimental. Where else in the Western world would you have a foreign minister who does not sit in cabinet? Admittedly, Winston Peters might be regarded as the Bob Katter of New Zealand politics but, nevertheless, they have never been worried about tinkering or changing. I think one of the things that is pertinent here is that New Zealand does not have a written constitution. That being the case, they have got

a sort of flexibility which we have in Queensland to some extent, although we have consolidated our Constitution in the 2001 act. Very little of that act, as I understand it, is entrenched so, again, there is flexibility for that.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Being a student of history of the place, you will know that the sitting times of this parliament have evolved over a long period of time because of the tyranny of distance. That is still the case today and you made reference to the geography of the state in terms of redistributions. All of this extra responsibility that the parliament could put on itself would necessitate changes, and we have heard from the Clerk and various others this morning that we could sit Fridays, we could do this, we could do that. I think one of the things that has influenced the lack of a committee system is the lack of availability of members of parliament, who necessarily have to straddle the barbed wire fence of the electorate and parliament. You do not win elections in parliament; you win them in your electorate, as you well know.

Dr Reynolds: That is right.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I am wondering whether we have been time constrained in parliamentary terms through having a three-year term, in the sense that you do not have time to have a six- or seven-month inquiry into, let us say, firearms because the government thinks, 'We have to get this through because we have got three years. Parliament will be prorogued and we will be accused of not bringing forward our agenda.' I am starting to think that if we are expecting the parliament to apply a more rigid and robust process to a committee system then we are going to have to face, at some stage, the reality that a parliament with a three-year term is not adequate in contemporary terms.

Dr Reynolds: I thoroughly agree with that. I think it is ironic that Queensland is the only Australian jurisdiction that sticks with three years, which is very much a 19th century concept. Remember that the Chartists actually wanted annual parliaments back in the 1840s. I would agree with you, and I think that is something which we have ignored for too long. I notice that in the referendum that was held in the early nineties relating to three- or four-year terms, the four-year term option was only very narrowly defeated so I do not think there is a groundswell of opposition to that.

If I could add a footnote to your comments about not winning your seat in committees: I remember talking to the Minister for Natural Resources when he was a backbencher and he said to me, 'I know you're a great advocate of the committee system, Paul, but let me put it to you this way. I've got a constituent who comes to my electorate office and wants me to deal with a problem and my electorate officer says, "He's in parliament. He's sitting on a committee".'

Mr SCHWARTEN: I know what the constituent then says.

Dr Reynolds: That is right. At St Lucia I do not have these problems.

Mr HORAN: If we elevated the status of the committee so that you were able to say, 'He's in parliament,' because people do respect the fact that you have gone to parliament.

Dr Reynolds: Yes. This was when the committee system was pretty much in its infancy. I suppose that is pertinent to the point the Clerk made about the prestige that would accrue to the chair and membership of the parliamentary committees if they were constituted in a way which gave them a real policy and cluster type thrust.

Ms MALE: Back to the involvement of the community, NGOs and other stakeholders who may be interested in being a part of that process of expanding the committee and having a say on legislation, do you think there should be a set group of people who are always notified of legislation so they get an opportunity to respond—for example, the Law Society or someone like that? Or should we just advertise what is there and people make submissions if they think it is worthwhile?

Dr Reynolds: That has more or less been the experience in Queensland since 1989 when EARC was doing all of its model stuff—the electoral reforms, freedom of information and all that sort of stuff. It was circulated but it was a kind of whosoever will may come option. That has set the tone for the way it has operated in Queensland—that it is transparent and it is inclusive. I do not think it is an either/or situation; I think it is a both/and. You will always have permanent stakeholders like the Law Society, the AMA for health or whoever it might be, but that should not preclude others from making submissions and appearing.

I am interested in what Mr Rozzoli said. In effect, I took him to say that the committee should have a discretion in terms of who it actually brings before it because of the concept of repetition, going over old ground and reinventing the wheel, but that does not preclude receiving submissions. What EARC did, which I thought was quite interesting, was that it actually published the submissions. It was a bit early for the web then, but it put submissions up in public libraries, for example, so there were all kinds of ways and it was experimenting with this two-step flow of information and opinion. The advent of the electronic age has made it much easier. Indeed, we have just been inducting the interns this week. There are a couple of topics on parliamentary committees for them to write their paper on, and I instanced this committee and all the submissions on the website, which I had read. The kids were very, very interested in that—that it was all there for them to access, that they did not have to sit around in the library for hours on end.

CHAIR: They should have.

Dr Reynolds: They should have been, yes, but unfortunately they are all undergraduates doing other things, like going to the pub.

Mr FINN: As you would expect, this committee has received feedback from members of the Queensland community regarding an upper house. I know you probably have extensive views about this and I have some pretty strong views too. I guess I want to ask a question in a general sense and in a specific sense. Generally, are the administrative and service delivery arms of government benefited by an upper house? Do you think Queensland is served best by an elected upper house or a more detailed and better functioning committee system?

Dr Reynolds: I would emphatically agree with the latter. I see no role for an upper house. Upper houses are a 19th century solution to a set of political circumstances. It is interesting that in 1970 when the Senate reinvented itself—in other words, it found a role for itself because prior to that it was described as 36 slabs in a mortuary; so it developed a committee system—that in a sense precluded the House of Representatives from doing the same thing to the extent that the Senate had.

I think this is where the New Zealanders sort of virtually pioneered it. It is interesting that the upper house in New Zealand was abolished by a conservative government in 1951 after 14 years of Labour rule, and this was an appointed House as ours was. The National Party was not prepared to put up with an upper house stuffed with trade union hacks and red clergy, so that is why it went the way of all flesh. So the Kiwis have got their committee system doing that kind of surveillance work.

Madam Chair was saying to me in the break about going to Canada. I am not sufficiently familiar with the Canadian system, but I am sure it will be very instructive to see what the provinces have done in Canada, none of which are bicameral. Indeed, in Ottawa, the Senate is very much an advisory body; it is almost like the House of Lords with very, very few powers except just to advise and give a second opinion, almost a legal opinion.

So, no, I do not support the introduction of an upper house. I noticed at the P150 dinner that Mrs Sheldon was advocating the return of the upper house but she got around that by saying, 'We'd decrease the size of the lower house in order to have the upper house and no more politicians.' I thought, 'Joan, come on. Who's going to fall for that?'

Mrs PRATT: You referred to New Zealand not having a Constitution, which I must confess I was not aware of.

Dr Reynolds: It has a couple of Constitution acts but no specific document as we have federally.

Mrs PRATT: So with regard to us implementing a New Zealand style of committee system, what would be the impediments in our Constitution?

Dr Reynolds: I do not see any. I have read the Constitution Act and I have actually written a fact sheet for the CE on the Constitution Act and I cannot see any impediments. I think the House is in control of its own destiny on this issue.

Mrs PRATT: That is good.

Dr Reynolds: That is as I read it, but I am not a lawyer.

Mrs PRATT: Let us hope you are right.

Mr SPRINGBORG: With the exception of what is basically only three or four doubly entrenched provisions in our Constitution—basically relating to the term of the parliament, the judiciary and the Queen of Queensland—we are the master of our own destiny.

Dr Reynolds: And local government. There has to be a referendum to abolish local government.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Yes, sorry, but everything else can be changed.

Dr Reynolds: That is right, and it has been.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Simon actually expanded this out in the issue of the abolition of the upper house and whether one should be reinstated. Whilst it is not strictly in our purview, I understand that there will be a whole range of things that we recommend that will probably go much broader on parliamentary process. I am not advocating the return of an upper house.

It comes to the issue of this very, very long period of single rule in Queensland, and this is a hypothetical question. The upper house was abolished in 1922 and basically since then we have had about four changes of government, maybe five, through popular expression at the ballot box, so we have had a one-party-takes-all and no effective scrutiny. Do you think the abolition of the upper house has led to these long, unbroken periods of one particular party ruling?

Dr Reynolds: No, I do not. I think it has got more to do with the political culture of Queensland. I do not want to be partisan here, but the political record is that the Labor Party was the only party that could win seats all over the state and the conservative parties never quite knew how to cope with this. There was a period of amalgamation in the 1920s and the early 1930s, then there was coalition, then there was going separate ways, so there was never a clear-cut alternative to Labor's electoral dominance, if you like. This is one reason why I imagine you were so keen on amalgamation. It will be interesting to see now if we have finally got to a two-party system, instead of a one party and a fragmented system.

I think it is to do with the political culture rather than the abolition of an upper house. The upper house itself guarantees you nothing. The only way you can get any kind of result from an upper house that is different is if you have an electoral system that allows for that. For example, when the Senate went to Brisbane

proportional representation in 1948 for the 1949 election, there were no minor parties. That only happened when the Labor Party split in 1955 and the DLP emerged. So even when they went to proportional representation, there was an imperfect prediction because the political culture was still rigidly defined.

I think with the growth of minor parties now and the notion of an upper house which is reflective of this, that is another ball game, as it were. The New Zealanders did not go back to an upper house; what they did was incorporate upper house mechanisms in their one chamber with their lists and so on. That is really a fusion of the Senate and the lower house within the one chamber.

CHAIR: Given the changing nature of the Queensland population, particularly with growing multiculturalism, maybe this whole political culture that you are talking about might be so last century too.

Dr Reynolds: That is right. It might well be. It is interesting with the youth parliaments that CE is running there is now quite a lot of talk about dedicated seats for Indigenous people. That in itself is another can of worms because the New Zealanders have it and that was a political compromise in the 1870s after the land wars and there were Maori cabinet ministers in the 1920s, for example. If you are going to start talking dedicated seats, which minority gets it and which one does not?

CHAIR: I do not think we will be going there. I am very conscious of the time. Thank you very much for your submission and your attendance here today, Dr Paul Reynolds. It has been very worthwhile.

Dr Reynolds: Thank you very much.

RAWSON, Dr Jim, Queensland Representative, FamilyVoice Australia

CHAIR: I welcome Dr Rawson. Thank you for your very learned submission to the committee. Would you like to make an opening statement or are you happy to just answer questions?

Dr Rawson: I will start with a short opening statement. I am very appreciative, in fact, of what you guys are doing and I hope we will have some really good outcomes from it. I am actually not on the board of FamilyVoice Australia, nor am I a staff member. I apologise that we are not able to get one of those people here. I am actually on the board of reference. I am doing this as a sort of a fill-in, okay?

CHAIR: Okay.

Dr Rawson: I arrived in Queensland in 1972, during the heady days of Sir Joh. I had just come back from the States, where I had been a research scientist. I could not understand why our southern neighbours mocked him and Queensland politics. They ridiculed what they saw as our unjust system of government and that integrity seemed to be lacking. There seemed to be an absence of accountability and balance. It was just not very evident. Representation of minority views seemed to be non-existent at that time. I was around when the Fitzgerald report was a breath of fresh air in 1989, but its recommendations concerning the parliamentary committee system unfortunately seem to have been largely ignored.

Most thinking people I know are very cynical about government and its inability to generally care about alternative views. As long as one of the two major political forces wields all the power then democracy seems to fail the people of Queensland. Democracy becomes nonsense when governments cannot be effectively scrutinised. This seems to have been so since 1922 in Queensland. I thought the submission by the Clerk of the Queensland Parliament addressed the issues well and really appreciated that. I thought submissions 13 and 19 were also helpful ones. If you like I could read our recommendations to you. I am happy to, but if you are up to speed on those recommendations, that is fine.

CHAIR: We have read them.

Dr Rawson: So I am ready to take questions. I would like to just alter the wording on recommendation 1. I would like to put three words in there so that it reads 'since parliamentary committees are likely to function best'. So it does not necessarily mean that they will function best when there is a bicameral parliament. So just change that wording to 'since parliamentary committees are likely to function best'.

CHAIR: Fair enough. Dr Rawson, probably one of the most useful things that you can talk to us about today, I think, is how the committee system can better do the community engagement. You make the point in your submission, which I absolutely agree with, that we do not give community organisations or individuals long enough to respond and the time frame for inviting submissions is way too short. I absolutely agree with you there. You also make the point that one of your members has experienced an unfortunate situation whereby they appeared before a Queensland parliamentary committee and they felt that it was dominated by the chair. I hope that has not happened today.

Dr Rawson: It certainly does not appear to have happened today.

CHAIR: How can committees reach out to groups such as yours and make it a more welcoming environment to appear before them or even to make a submission? How can we do that better?

Dr Rawson: I was head of Scripture Union when we introduced all the chaplaincy things. You are probably quite aware of all of that movement there. I was head for 28 years. That brought me into connection with government quite often. The problem with volunteer and cash-strapped organisations is their limited ability to be up to speed with what is going on. Dr Paul Reynolds had some very good things to say. What I found was that often we did not find out about the need to put in some submission until very late. Then, with our limited resources, the ability to actually get one together just took time because mostly you were using volunteer people. Of course, in the organisation, in terms of staff, you do not have people who are skilled in these issues and so you have to find somebody in your volunteer base who actually has some skill, word them up on what you want from them and what your particular views are and then ask them to write it.

As you go on being head of an organisation—I was head of it for a long while—you start to gather skills, but when I started I had absolutely no skills at all. I did not have any understanding of all these processes of government. Most voluntary organisations do not, unless they are big like the Scouts or Surf Life Saving which are fairly masterful at it. Often they get a lot more money because they are.

CHAIR: How do we get around this?

Dr Rawson: One of the questions you asked Paul was: do you actually inform some of the organisations? I think an organisation that is fairly big—like, say, Scripture Union or an organisation like FamilyVoice—and that is concerned about these sorts of issues could actually receive information by mail or by email or whatever processes you are going to use. I think those sorts of things can really help them, because that will get them up to speed on what is going on. In this submission we have said that there should be at least six weeks. I think that should be the absolute minimum. I have noticed that some things that are quite controversial have gone through in December. I think it has been a deliberate choice of government on both sides of politics when they have done that. It is really very, very difficult to get your volunteer base operating in December or January when you have got to make a submission.

CHAIR: How did you find out about this committee? Through the paper?

Dr Rawson: I did not hear about it at all. I actually got an email asking whether I might appear on their behalf because they did not have anybody who was able to do it. Because it was only a week ago that they asked, I have spent the last week reading probably a hundred or more pages of the reports that other people have made to get myself up to speed because I am not—for my master of administration I did some politics, but I am not really up to speed on it.

CHAIR: Okay. Thank you.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I am just interested in that aspect of it as a minister. If we have new legislation, we tend to talk to the peak organisations that we know about. Obviously there is a wide variety of views out there in the community and it is hard to harness them together into a single voice. What advice can you give to the committee about who it is that is contacted? Clearly, you cannot have a circumstance where every citizen in Queensland is on your mailing list, but you should be able to have stakeholder organisations identified and registered with the parliament so that when there is legislation that is of interest to that stakeholder that organisation is sent a copy of the bill and all of those sorts of things the moment it is introduced into the parliament. That could be done by email or whatever method. But I think what we would need to do is the same as we have done in Public Works. We have prequalified contractors who do business with government. So it is almost a prequalification process that the parliament needs to go through to identify people who have special interests in special subjects and from that you may be able to put together panels of people to advise the committees at that stage. What would be your reaction to that?

Dr Rawson: I think that is very helpful. I think it is very important that the committees, when they do meet, try to be very open-minded. In relation to some of the committees I have appeared before—I have not appeared before really big ones, but I have been to a number of ones where our opinion has been asked—it always appeared to me, except for very few of them, to be a very perfunctory sort of thing. They wanted to be able to say that they had consulted with the stakeholders. That was the way it felt to me. I would sit in on maybe an one- or two-hour meeting and it did not really seem as though they cared about the opinions they were listening to. That was on both sides of politics.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I accept that.

Dr Rawson: That is the way it felt. Maybe it was not true, but that is the way it felt.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I think that is probably a reasonable assessment of it in some circumstance where a government has made up its mind that it is going to go down this path and it is paying the courtesy of, when it says 'consult', telling you what it is going to do, I suppose. But from this perspective—this is once the government has made the decision, once the bill has been introduced to the parliament—it is then a matter of getting the stakeholder groups to go through that legislation and see what are the issues that will trouble organisations. Sometimes that can be solved and sometimes it cannot be, but it is about actually having the involvement of the community—not at the point of whether you are going to do it but at the point of when you are going to do it. That is my understanding of it.

I think it is government's responsibility to make a decision about what it is going to do and then it is the parliament's responsibility to decide how that manifests itself—whether it is passed or whatever. But the process that we are talking about here is involving people such as yourself in legislation once it has been drafted to look for the loopholes, to look for the things that may offend sections of the community that the government does not want to do. That is what I think the difference in consultation will be. I think you will still have a consultation phase with government about whether or not you should take a decision to do something and that will be very different to a situation where the parliament is involved in just how that thing then becomes legislated.

Dr Rawson: I think it will be really great if the views are taken very seriously. I mean, you have gone to the people with your particular policies and you have to implement those; otherwise they will defeat you at the ballot box next time. But, yes, if the stakeholders' views are taken seriously and if the particular bit of legislation can be amended or slightly rejigged to meet the concerns of community groups then that will be great. Obviously you will not always be able to do that because often community groups have totally opposite views.

Mr HORAN: Thank you, Jim. I suppose what we are trying to find in this committee is that balance—you mentioned the cynicism that can be there; sometimes people feel they have not had enough input—between people's desire for strong leadership and a system of accountability. To increase that belief and trust of people in the committee system there are a couple of things I want to explore. Say, for example, we are looking at a particular piece of legislation or inquiry—letting people know. I think what you are suggesting is that a lot of people out there are time poor and so on but also probably they simply do not understand the system. So there needs to be a simple explanation with the ad or website of what this is and why it is and how you can respond—that it goes for six months and then it goes into the parliament or something like that.

Dr Rawson: We think six months.

Mr HORAN: I will not argue about the time.

Dr Rawson: Because you do not have three years, unfortunately.

Mr HORAN: How do you see a general ad and how does it get to most people? Finally, what sort of follow-up would organisations like that wish to have on what the committee did? Would they like a copy of the report or a copy of the parliamentary debate?

Dr Rawson: I think the last part of your question is easy. I think if a person makes a submission then there should be an opportunity for them to say that they would like a copy of the report or do not want a copy of the report. I think that is fairly easy. So they are just given an opportunity. I think that is fairly straightforward. In terms of letting people know, I think you probably have to use multistrand approaches. I used to be frantically busy and go to bed at two o'clock most nights just to keep up. During the day you do all of your counselling and caring for people so all of your paperwork is then done at night. You work very hard when you are head of a big organisation.

Being up to speed about what is happening out there in the community is quite hard. Often, my volunteers were the ones who would be making me aware of that. What I think has to be done is that there be a multi approach. I think sometimes you make a phone call if you really want the views. Let us say you are going to do something about chaplaincy in Queensland. I think a phone call to the biggest stakeholder, which is Scripture Union, would be a wise thing to do, to say, 'Are you aware that there is going to be some legislation on this and we would like a submission from you.' You know some of the people are very, very important for particular legislation and you want them on side, if possible. Partly it is good manners, but it is good sense politically. Sometimes a phone call would be the way to go, but other times take a multi approach, so website, email, advertising. If it happens to be something of a legal nature, advertise it in some of the legal publications; if it is of an academic nature, advertise it at QUT, Griffith or UQ, just to let them know. That would be the way I would be going.

Mr HORAN: You have given me a thought about what we need to consider, which is that we probably need to develop a system that has the potential to be a consistent system, because there is obviously going to be a need for corporate knowledge. The membership of the committees will change. It could change from term to term.

Dr Rawson: Yes.

Mr HORAN: But there probably needs to be a system backing that up. For whatever staff are involved, if that cluster of committees stays the same, the corporate knowledge where they know 90 per cent of the people who should be told and so on would help make the system work well.

Dr Rawson: Yes.

CHAIR: Obviously, you are a seasoned performer in terms of coming before government and other people are not. How do you make it less daunting for people to come before a committee like ours and talk to us?

Dr Rawson: I think this is extraordinarily daunting for most people.

CHAIR: Yes.

Dr Rawson: Obviously I have 'Doctor' in front of my name, so I have done something and it is not going to be super daunting for me. I think a much more casual way of doing it would be good. For someone like Paul or myself, this is okay. But for other people I think maybe you could sit in lounge chairs and just have a chat. The way you are asking questions is not daunting. I was very pleased to be able to get here a little bit early just to see how this works, because I have not done one of these since 1972, in front of this sort of committee. It was an inquiry into youth. I have not actually sat on a committee like this. I have actually worked on the Male committee into human relationships in schools and whatever. I think that it needs to be much more casual.

I do not know whether it is possible to have a lot fewer people, and this may save you an enormous amount of time. For example, you would have three people meeting with people who are just ordinary citizens. With someone like Paul, you all have to hear what he has to say. He is obviously extraordinarily gifted and he knows what he is talking about. But with others—and you might have a group—everything is recorded and then you can all read it or listen to it on a podcast or whatever it might happen to be. There needs to be ways of it not being quite so—

CHAIR: I suspect that even with the way we advertise, the word 'submission' is quite a daunting word to a lot of people.

Dr Rawson: It is.

CHAIR: They think that it is an academic piece of work, don't they, which has to be long and considered. They do not realise that a submission can be just one piece of paper with their views.

Dr Rawson: That is right.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Can I just follow that with regards to the citizens making a submission to the committee. I am not quite sure we would be sitting in lounge chairs, but the notion where you are sitting around a table and somebody is at that part of the table and other people are sitting around or amongst them, that would be far less daunting, I would imagine, sitting amongst people.

Dr Rawson: I think so, yes.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Judy's point was a very good one, with regards to submissions, because it can be quite daunting.

CHAIR: The word.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Yes, I understand. The word can be quite daunting. It conjures up certain things, but if it was an invitation to participate in the inquiry or something like that, that invites people in. Often it is about the language.

Dr Rawson: That is right. You might say, 'We want to hear your opinions'. It would be a lot more gentle way for other people. People who have worked in university or anything else know what submissions are, but for other people who might have a strong view, saying 'We want to hear your opinion' would be a much gentler way of doing it. I think this is a fairly technical thing that you people are doing. It is really quite complex. I think that most citizens out there would not understand what this is about. This is really—

CHAIR: When you tell them that you are on a committee that is looking into the committees, they are quite astounded.

Dr Rawson: That is right. It is governance. I am on Christian Management Australia and have just written a booklet on governance. There are 16 principles of governance and 111 ways of actually doing it. It is very, very difficult. When that went to my church, they just did not understand it. They did not get it. It is very difficult.

CHAIR: You would be pleased to know that we will be making recommendations about dedicated committee facilities in the parliament. We will certainly take on board your comments about how even the physical layout of how we design these committee rooms is important. I have visited the Scottish and Irish parliaments, where they have dedicated committee rooms. Yes, they do not sit in this kind of adversarial-looking format, so we will do that. Any other questions?

Mr HORAN: I would ask about the tasks that you think committees should do. Do you think committees should examine petitions, for example? At the moment, petitions simply go to a minister.

Dr Rawson: That is a difficult one, because you get petitions ranging from piddling things to quite serious ones where there might be several thousand signatories. I think that if it is large enough, and you would have to work out at what sort of level you would have a cut-off, it would be really important. If, say, 5,000 people have petitioned on something, there is enough people out there concerned because you know it is quite hard to get 5,000 people together, so I think that should be taken very seriously. If it is 200 on some issue or other, it needs to be taken seriously politically in a sense but, on the other hand, you have to think about the time that is spent dealing with all these things. You have only three years in parliament, which I think is a nonsense frankly. You cannot run a parliament in three years. By the time people get up to speed, it just does not work.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for your attendance here today, Dr Rawson. You have done a great job for FamilyVoice Australia. You have certainly given us a lot to think about. We will make sure that we send you a copy of our final report.

Dr Rawson: Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

CHAIR: I thank the members of the committee and our staff for their hard work in organising today. We conclude this meeting.

Committee adjourned at 11.28 am