

Sub# 6

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Name: Barbara Stone MP
Position: State Member for Springwood
Email: springwood@parliament.qld.gov.au
Address: PO Box 174
City: Rochedale South
State: QLD
Postcode: 4123
Phone Number: 0734232788

1. How could the existing committee system be strengthened to enhance accountability?

Government response to inquiries could be questioned by the relevant committee. Similar to the estimates hearing process.

2. How effective is the role of Parliamentary committees in both Australian and international jurisdictions in examining legislative proposals, particularly those with unicameral parliaments?

Could be more effective. (see response to question 1)

3. How could the Parliamentary oversight of legislation be enhanced, including timely and cost effective ways by which Queensland Parliamentary Committees can more effectively evaluate and examine legislative proposals?

A committee process of questioning the legislation by committee members could take place in the red chamber in sitting weeks and hours, after it has been debated but not passed in the green chamber. This allows for other legislation to be debated in the green chamber while the committee process is being carried out in the red chamber. It could also allow more time to have more speakers question the clauses. This would not be required for all legislation and a process of what legislation would be treated in this way would need to be considered.

4. How effective is the committee structure of the 53rd Parliament following the restructure of the committee system on 23 April 2009?

The restructure of the committee system is a positive move. However it has come with some problems. The areas being investigated by committees are more controversial and require more work both in research and in meeting and inquiry time. They are also under more scrutiny by the press and the public. It is very difficult for all committee members to be able to put in the necessary time particularly for the more controversial inquiries. This is especially hard when members are a Parliamentary Secretary, a marginal seat member or a far north or west regional member. The new structure has increased workload and members are finding it hard to meet all duties. The restructure is similar to the Senate inquiry process the major difference is the Senate do not have the responsibility of an electoral division. This is a very important difference and makes a large difference to the workload of a committee member. The other area of impact is in research. I don't believe it is effective to have staff doing parliamentary duties and research / secretariat work on the more controversial or broad inquiries. I believe these inquiries require a fulltime effort and focus. This should be a consideration in staffing the committee.

5. Other areas of comment:

Not much is known about the Qld Parliamentary committee system. Therefore when it comes to ownership of submissions or communicating with a committee, public knowledge is very limited. Internally I believe there is little knowledge of the system especially for new members. As more inquiries are undertaken and the public awareness starts to increase I believe it is necessary for processes to be explained or expressed very clearly to members and to those participating in inquiries. The area of who owns a submission is one such area where people do not understand the need for confidentiality or the environment the committee needs in order to investigate the matter before it. Both Members and the public are not aware of any penalties to them for disclosing their submissions or their communication with the committee. In some cases those that do know are not deterred by the penalties. Are they sufficient? Are they used? Their deterrent factor needs to be addressed and they need to be enforced. I believe this is an area that will need more details to be clear and explained in full to both committee members and the public. Discussion papers need to identify very clearly the ownership of the submission until publication and the penalty for breaching committee confidentiality. Breaching committee confidentiality also needs to be very clear to members and penalties for breaches must be a deterrent and enforced. As the media keeps increasing their interest and participation in the restructured committees the area of confidentiality will become more important.

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