



Environment and Resources Committee

ENVIRONMENT AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

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Sub# 18



Hon Judy Spence MP
Chair
Committee System Review Committee
Parliament House
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Hon Spence

Review of the Committee System of the Queensland Parliament – call for submissions

The committee provides the following comments in response to your letter of 8 April 2010 seeking submissions to your committee's review of the Queensland Parliament's committee system. Our comments relate to the practice of the House for debating committee reports, and opportunities for improvement.

We consider that the noting of reports by the House is a key final stage of the committee reporting process. It provides committee members who have invested considerable time and energy into producing a report the opportunity to highlight and reinforce key findings and recommendations. For other members, it provides opportunities to express their support or otherwise, and to highlight perspectives from their own electorates on the issues examined. For ministers and shadow ministers, it provides opportunities to canvas the differences in their respective policies. The debates of committee reports help to ensure that all members are fully informed of the work of committees.

As you will be aware, there are two processes for the House to take note of committee reports. The Standing Orders provide at SO 191 a process for adoption debates of estimates committee reports. Ministers and other members may each speak for up to five minutes, with the full debate not exceeding an hour for each report. The debates are conducted over one sitting week during Government Business, and form the consideration in detail for the Appropriation Bills. Without exception, all 80 estimates committee report over the past decade have been debated by the House in this way.

The debates of reports other than estimates reports are covered by Sessional Orders. Sessional Orders provide that, if a motion to debate is moved by committee chairs when tabling a report, any members may participate and speak for up to three minutes each. There is no specified time limit for the length of the debate, though, in practice debates since 2000 have not exceeded 16 minutes. The Sessional Orders also provide that the debates of committee reports shall occur only on Thursdays in sitting weeks towards the end of the first hour of business. This hour of business also includes ministerial statements, matters of privilege, the tabling of reports, personal explanations and notices of motion. In practice little time is left for debating committee reports within this hour of business. As a consequence, debates of reports have been held a few minutes each week, and spread across several sitting weeks.

We are advised that, of 191 substantive committee reports (excluding oversight, estimates and annual reports) tabled since 2000, only three were debated by the House under this process. These debates combined lasted only 45 minutes.¹

In our view, the Sessional Orders should be amended so that debates of substantive committee reports are included in the Order of Business (of the House) as an item of business in its own right. We suggest the time allowed for debating of committee reports should be at least one hour per week, and that speaking times should be modelled on the provisions in the Standing Orders that apply to adoption debates for estimates reports.

Furthermore, we suggest for consideration that the Sessional Orders be changed to also permit that the timing of the debate of a committee report may be delayed, with the consent of the House, so the report can be debated together with the final response, or responses, to the report findings tabled by relevant ministers. The *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001* provides that ministers with portfolio responsibility for matters addressed in a committee report must provide the House with written responses to the report. These responses set out the government's policy responses to the findings of committees. They should also be noted and debated by House. This would add further value to the debate of committee reports and the committee inquiry process, though the benefits would need to be weighed against the dis-benefits of the delaying of the debate. Under the *Parliament of Queensland Act*, ministers have up to six months to table their final responses to committee reports having provided an interim response within three months of the report being tabled.

We submit these suggestions to you and your committee for consideration.

Regards



Carryn Sullivan MP

Chair

¹ The report from the Palm Island Select Committee was debated 24 mins - 12 mins on 30.9.05, 6 mins on 6.10.05 and 6 mins on 27.10.05; Report of the Investigation into Altruistic Surrogacy Committee was debated 16 mins - 6 mins on 9.8.08, 6 mins on 27.11.08 and 4 mins on 4.12.08; Report No. 82 of the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee debated 5 mins on 6.9.07.