



## Role of the Media

At the Queensland Parliament, the media gallery consists of journalists who work for newspaper, television and radio organisations. These journalists collect and publish information on parliamentary activities.

The media plays a significant role in democratic societies, such as Queensland. The media provides information to the public by its reporting of and commentary upon the proceedings within the Parliament, the operations of the Government, and the views and alternate policies of the Opposition. All of these activities rely on access to information.

Queenslanders, through the media, can expect to:

- be informed about government decision-making processes;
- debate these decisions; comment on government conduct; and
- demand that decision-makers defend their stance.

### The Role of the Media

The media who cover the Queensland Parliament are collectively identified as the Parliamentary Press Gallery because of their location in the gallery overlooking the Legislative Assembly Chamber to the right of the Speaker's Chair. This enables the journalists to see and hear everything that occurs during a parliamentary debate.

When the House is sitting, the media attend the parliament in strength and the Parliamentary Press Gallery is usually crowded during Question Time. The main task of a parliamentary journalist is to select information about parliamentary debates and events which is of interest to their readers. They present this information in such a way that enables Queenslanders to be aware of what decisions are being made in parliament.

A media room is provided next to the media gallery so that newspaper and radio journalists can collate and transmit parliamentary news items. Other facilities include mini-television studios and an interview room. An in-house television coverage of the Chamber's business allows journalists to keep in touch with the proceedings throughout the parliamentary complex. Further, the broadcast of the parliament's proceedings over the internet allows all Queenslanders, to also monitor debate relevant to their localities. Sound and video clippings can be accessed for use in news bulletins.

Even when the House is not sitting, a lesser media presence still exists, particularly as government ministers and shadow ministers often use the facilities for press conferences.



*Members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery at work in the media gallery of the Legislative Assembly Chamber.*



## Parliamentary Privilege and Citizen's Right of Reply

Under the *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001*, debates or proceedings in the Assembly cannot be questioned in any court or place outside the Assembly. This means that a Member's speech in the Chamber can be reported by the media without fear of litigation, as long as it is deemed to be a fair and accurate account.

At times, certain citizens and corporations have claimed that their reputations have been damaged by Members' statements under the protection of privilege. Since 1995 aggrieved persons or corporations may communicate a response to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. The Speaker will judge the response on its merit and may refer the matter to the Ethics Committee. After investigation, the Ethics Committee may

- (a) recommend no further action be taken, or
- (b) order the person's or corporation's response be incorporated in Hansard.

## Relationships and Influence

Political commentators have remarked upon the complex relationships between the media and parliamentary Members as well as the Government, the Opposition and political parties. Advances in communication, largely through the internet, have improved community access to information. Therefore the media play an important role in society as a source of information, but also as a "watchdog" or scrutiniser.

Members of Parliament often depend on the media to inform Queenslanders, and possibly others nationally and internationally, about what is happening in the Parliament. As a result, journalists are quite powerful because they decide which issues to publicise. Journalists also decide the angle or the content of the story. In this way, the media play a very important scrutinising role in the Parliament.

Over the years, governments and departments have established sophisticated information units to ensure that their policies gain maximum coverage. As well, Ministers and political parties employ press secretaries for the same purpose. The media, however, aim to filter the information received and present information in a way which they believe best represents the "story". This story may cause discomfort to Members, the Government or Opposition and political parties. However, the media is free to select the stories they consider important or interesting. Therefore, the media is often perceived as an influencer of public opinion. On the other hand, many of the press secretaries have previously been employed by the media and there is a constant interchange between the two groups.

The media's role in the Queensland Parliament is therefore multifaceted and cannot be viewed solely as reporter of parliamentary and government news items to the public, but as a participant in a complex process involving both mutual and competing interests.