



Speech by

**Hon. ANNA BLIGH**

**MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE**

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Hansard 8 August 2001

### STANDING RULES AND ORDERS

**Hon. A. M. BLIGH** (South Brisbane—ALP) (Minister for Education) (11.45 a.m.): I rise to second the motions moved by the Premier. The standing rules and orders, in conjunction with the sessional orders that are adopted from time to time by the parliament, govern all that we do in this place. They bring order to the often volatile nature of parliamentary debate and they ensure that a balance is struck between the opportunities that are available for government and non-government members to express their point of view and to contribute to debates. They also strike a balance between the interests or the opportunities of private members and members of the executive government.

Ideally, it is the standing orders to which new members should look to familiarise themselves with the way in which parliamentary business is conducted. I think that we would all agree that there is often a great deal of mystery attached to becoming a new member of parliament. There is much for any new member to learn—much to learn about the communities that each of us represent, much to learn about the way in which the government operates and what level of government is responsible for particular activities, and much to learn about the way in which to properly represent the needs of our respective communities and their constituents.

**Mr Seeney:** You should know some of that before you come here.

**Ms BLIGH:** I think that it is important that people recognise that they have a lot to learn. The best new members are those who are prepared to keep an open mind and to spend some time in their electorates learning the things that make them effective representatives.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all the new members of the Beattie Labor team on the efforts that they have put in over the past five months to recognise that being a new member of parliament brings with it a great many challenges. They need to keep an open mind, they need to put their nose to the grindstone, and that is what every one of them has done. They have not come into this place with a cocky attitude, assuming that they know everything. Unlike some members opposite, they have not come into this place assuming that they are the font of all wisdom and that we should all bow in their path and bow to their wisdom. I say to the member for Callide that that is a mistake that none of them will be making. I am very pleased to take this opportunity to recognise the hard work that the new members have put in and, most importantly, the attitude that they have brought to this place. I hope that they have the attitude that, I think, represents our whole government, and that is that every day is a learning day. Every day we learn something new. Every day we have an opportunity—whether we are here for one month, 10 years or 20 years—to learn something more about our electorates, more about Queensland as a whole, more about representative democracy and to be a contributor to it.

However, for many new members, I would say that one of the most mysterious things of all are the intricacies of the parliament. Often new members of the parliament, because of their involvement with a political party or because of a previous employment opportunity, have had an opportunity to be in the parliamentary gallery to witness the debates and to have a sense of how things happen. But that is not true for all new members. For many new members, their first couple of months in parliament is one of their steepest learning curves. Indeed, I think that a number of members in this place today—members of some years' duration, I might add—would still find some of the standing orders and rules of this place a mystery.

Just as the standing rules and orders of 1860, when this parliament first sat, reflected the needs of members of that time, so, too, must we ensure that the standing rules and orders of this century are accessible, readable and, above all, relevant to society today and to the needs of the members who are here today. In keeping with the recommendations of the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee—it is their view, and I support it in seconding this motion—the Standing Orders Committee should review the current standing rules and orders. I would like to take this opportunity to concur with the Premier in recognising that the parliament is working very well. In terms of getting through the business of the House and giving opportunities to both private and executive government members, in my view the current standing orders are working very well. When the standing orders are enforced, we have a parliament that I think is getting its business done in a very effective way. Therefore, I also predict that the review of the standing orders would see relatively minor changes to the way in which the parliament runs.

Over the past three or four years, the combination of the standing orders and the sessional orders have stood this government in good stead. In my view, they do not need a significant overhaul. However, such a review gives us a chance to, where necessary, reorder in line with the proposals of the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee. For example, the suggestion that we take the opportunity to put all matters that relate to a member's conduct in one chapter is, I think, a very sensible recommendation. I predict that the review committee will adopt it. It gives us a chance to look at the language of the standing orders and, hopefully, it gives us an opportunity to make the standing orders a little more accessible and relevant to the twenty-first century. It also gives us an opportunity to change the standing orders by including some items that have now become a matter of regular practice and, I understand, enjoy a commitment from both sides of the parliament. For example, I refer to including in the standing orders the requirement for members to declare their pecuniary interests.

The way in which we conduct ourselves as members of parliament has a direct bearing on the respect that the community has not only for each of us as members but also on the institution of the parliament. The conduct of members in this parliament is under a significantly higher level of scrutiny in this century than was the case when the standing orders were written in 1860.

In 1860 the architects of the current *Standing Rules and Orders* could not possibly have predicted the degree of electronic media that is available and that is a routine part of everyday life. Members of the public not only know of the content of the debates, the ideas and thoughts of members of parliament, but they also get a regular opportunity on the evening news and radio to hear the tone of our voices, to see the expressions on our faces, to see whether we are interrupting each other and to hear the sorts of debates that occur. In my view, that places an even higher responsibility on us all to conduct ourselves in a way that shows constant respect for the parliament. I endorse the Premier's comments that the standing orders should provide sufficient rules for us to meet that requirement. When we are looking at the standing orders, it is important to keep that in mind.

By prominently displaying all matters that relate to the conduct of members in one chapter or part, we are clearly telegraphing to the public of Queensland that we are genuine about fulfilling our duties in a serious and responsible manner. I heartily support the recommendations to do that clearly in any revision of the standing orders.

Given the bipartisan nature of the Member's Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committees, I hope that the recommendations of its report will enjoy the bipartisan support of the House today. I urge all members to support the motion.

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