




Speech By
Trevor Watts

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

Record of Proceedings, 3 May 2018

MOTION

Amendments to Sessional Orders

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (3.11 pm): I would like to talk briefly to this motion. I remember debating the sessional orders in this House and highlighting some of the difficulties that they would cause for regional members, such as not holding committee meetings on Wednesdays and regional members being unable to get home to their families at night and still being in Brisbane with no business being done in the House.

I travel down to Brisbane. I am here every evening. I want to make sure that, when we are here, we are getting the business of the state done. I will be supporting this motion, because it means that, finally, we will get the opportunity to speak to bills and get some work done without having an adjournment forced on us. Those members who live in Brisbane pop home to their families while the other members are stuck here unable to travel.

I find it curious that only just a few sitting days ago we were debating the sessional orders and how, in the brave new world under this incompetent administration, we would be able to get all the business of the House done in the time that it has decided would be allocated. Here we are, just a few short sitting days later, finding out that the government members are asleep at the wheel. They cannot manage the business in the chamber. Even with an early bedtime on a sitting day, they cannot manage the business of the House in the time they have allocated.

I think we should seriously consider going back to operating under the sessional orders as they existed in the previous parliament, which would allow not only debate—

Ms Jones interjected.

Mr WATTS: I am being told that I do not stand for family values. I cannot get home to see my family because I live in a regional town. Does the minister not understand where regional Queensland is? Some members who live in Brisbane should go home via Toowoomba after a sitting day. That way they might understand the concept of being unable to see their family under these family friendly sitting hours. Obviously, it would not be safe for me to drive for five hours from my home to Brisbane and back again each night during a sitting week.

When I come to parliament, it is my intention to get some work done to make sure that the voice of the people of the Toowoomba North electorate is heard in this place and heard loudly so that the people of my electorate get the resources and the things they want, and to make sure that their representation on legislation is put forward. We cannot do that if the government constantly keeps chopping short the sessional orders.

I cannot attend committee meetings on a Monday because I have shadow cabinet responsibilities. I want to go to some of those committee meetings, but I cannot do two things at the same time. This motion that we are debating is a clear consequence of government members in the south-east corner changing the sessional orders to suit themselves and to make sure that some

members of the opposition cannot attend committee meetings on very important bills. Those committee meetings provide very important opportunities for members to listen to witnesses who come forward to address the committee.

The original sessional orders were bipartisan. We held committee meetings on a Wednesday morning. That was a bipartisan decision. That sessional order was made for the good of the parliament. When I look at some of the legislation that is before us and when I consider some of the things that happen on a Monday morning, I would dearly like to be able to represent the people of the electorate of Toowoomba North by attending those meetings and listening to the witnesses as they put their evidence. I cannot, because the hours allocated for committee meetings have been moved. I cannot remember exactly how many short sitting days ago it was that that happened, but it was not many. Now, here we are making an adjustment.

I have not made my address-in-reply. I do not imagine that I will make my address-in-reply today. I am not even sure that I will make my address-in-reply before I have to talk about the budget, which is a bizarre situation. I think the Leader of the House needs to look at the sessional orders of the previous parliament in order to understand the concept of parliament, which is that people who have been duly elected to represent their electorates get the opportunity to come to this place and talk about the issues that are affecting their electorates.

Those members who are members of committees, and who, when considering bills, have travelled throughout the state, have only 20 minutes to speak to those bills. We have all heard the debate that we have had on vegetation management. Some of the members of the committee that considered that bill had a mere 10 minutes to talk about all of the evidence they heard about this bill as they travelled throughout the state. If we consider all the locations that committee went to and all the witnesses—

Mrs D'ATH: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order on relevance. This motion is about budget week. It is not about changing the sessional orders for the usual sitting weeks.

Mr BLEIJIE: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. In answer to the point of order, you cannot amend the sessional orders for the budget—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Stewart): You cannot—

Mr BLEIJIE: My point of order is that, in terms of the debate, you cannot have a debate about the new sessional orders without the sessional orders that will not now apply on the same evening.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Toowoomba North, we continue to hear the same argument. Under standing order 236, I ask you to come back to your point and make it relevant. Otherwise, I will ask you to resume your seat.

Mr WATTS: I appreciate the opportunity to make my point in relation to these temporary sessional orders that have been proposed for budget week. Certainly, for me, one of the points is to make sure that I can represent the people of Toowoomba North during budget week. I would also very much like to represent—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Toowoomba North, I have guided you and now advise you under standing order 236(1) that your argument is becoming tedious repetition. I would advise you now to make your point and make sure you do not continue to repeat yourself; otherwise I will ask you to resume your seat.

Mr WATTS: I appreciate it may be tedious repetition. The job I have is to come here and represent the people of Toowoomba North. I cannot represent the people of Toowoomba North if I am not allowed to make the point. The point is that I cannot make the point.

Government members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Members to my right, I encourage you not to shout out your objections across the chamber. I have made my ruling. I have given guidance to the member. Allow me to do my job.

Mr WATTS: My point is it that if I cannot go to committee meetings then I cannot represent the people. This may be, in fact, the only opportunity I get to discuss the fact that I have been completely gagged in terms of my ability to attend committee meetings by the sessional orders that now guide this parliament.

I am very pleased today to see a new set of sessional orders be proposed for the budget week. The simple facts are that these are superior sessional orders to the ones that guide the parliament on a regular basis. I would ask that the Leader of the House consider that these sessional orders be adopted going forward so that we have the opportunity to speak on bills on a regular basis and that the work of this House can happen when people come down to Brisbane to represent the people that they were elected to represent. With that I will cut myself short, even though I have a couple of minutes left.

Government members interjected.

Mr WATTS: I do not have to cut myself short. If people would like me to continue on I am happy to do that.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Through the chair.

Mr WATTS: I hear many people who would like me to continue for the additional minutes. I was quite prepared to sit down because I understand that there is a lot of business before the House that we need to get through because, of course, we have the automatic adjournment during the normal sessional hours. Even though I hear the Labor members who would like me to continue, I will finish up with a little bit of time on the clock even though the people of Toowoomba North would very much like to make sure their voice is heard in this place on a regular basis.