




Speech By
Michael Berkman

MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

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MOTION

Sessional Orders

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (5.46 pm): I rise to make a contribution on this motion and the sessional orders that are proposed for the 57th Parliament. This is a vitally important opportunity for us to improve how we do things in this place. More importantly perhaps, it is also an opportunity to change the perception of the way we work in the House for those people in the communities we represent.

I will start at the outset by saying that I do support fixed hours for this parliament. As the Leader of the House has indicated, we should not expect to sit here till the wee hours of the morning and make sense and even less to legislate on important issues for the state of Queensland. In practice, as I said at the beginning of the last term of parliament, family-friendly hours do in practice prevent members from speaking, and I think it has a particular impact on the crossbench.

I have circulated amendments which I do not propose are a complete answer to all of the issues or all of the improvements that we could make to how we work in this place. I suggest that we would need plenty of changes to the committee system in addition to anything that happens in here. However, I do want to address some particular issues. They are the time that is spent dealing with Dorothy Dixers in the chamber, the ongoing practice of the government bypassing committees by piggybacking unrelated amendments to bills, and the importance of ensuring that every party and Independent MP gets the opportunity to speak on every bill in this place.

I also want amendments to make sure that every bill is considered properly by ensuring that we have at least one hour of consideration in detail and, beyond that, to make space in this parliament for the consideration of new ideas both through the addition of a second private member's motion with less time allocated for each of those two motions but also to ensure that private member's legislation actually has the opportunity to come before the House for debate and for the questions to be put to the House.

On the first of those, Dorothy Dixers are perhaps the best recognised and most egregious waste of time in this place. Voters in our constituencies do not elect representatives to come into this place to blow smoke up each other. We could be using question time each and every sitting day for the crossbench and for non-government members to put important questions to the ministers. If there are things that the ministers want said, they can call the press or they can get to their feet and make a ministerial statement at whatever point they choose.

I am not sure whether most voters are aware of this, but I have a sneaking suspicion which has grown into a strong impression that the Premier and the ministers actually write the questions that government backbenchers stand up here and ask them.

Government members interjected.

Mr BERKMAN: The ministers write the questions and they give the answers. Everyone is agog. It is a huge waste of everyone's time. Without being unkind or rude to the ministers, I think it is, frankly, a little bit embarrassing for them. The government get a big chunk of time at the start of the day for their

statements, as I said. They can toot their horn during the ministerial statements and they can do it again later in the day at whatever point they want. They do not need more time during question time. Even though it is often a demoralising farce, question time can be really important. It is the only time during the day that non-government MPs actually get to set the agenda, and we need to work hard to improve that.

On the question of the government bypassing committees and piggybacking unrelated amendments onto bills, during the last term of parliament we saw—and I will use the words again—some incredibly egregious abuses of process. For example, the Public Service pay freeze, the changes to youth bail requirements and the Ekka public holiday were all tacked onto a bill about portable long service leave. We also saw the enormous hundred pages of amendments to the government's electoral reform legislation that were introduced one day and passed the next. Clearly, we are all well aware that the government are now scrambling to fix problems with that legislation that could have been picked up if they had not abused process in the way they did.

The government's abuse of urgency provisions to piggyback unrelated amendments and bypass the committee system is deeply undemocratic. In the words of Constitutional law expert Gim Del Villar QC, it is contrary to the spirit of Queensland's Constitution. Ramming through complex legislation with no committee scrutiny makes a mockery of this parliament and of the committee system that is here to support it. In a state like Queensland which has only one house of parliament and has a long history of corruption, that is something we should all be worried about and we should be working hard to correct.

As I mentioned, the family-friendly hours—commendable as they are—do have a disproportionate effect on the crossbench. That is largely due to the outdated two-party mindset in this parliament. It ends up being that crossbench MPs like me are quite routinely shunted off the bottom of the speaking list. For example, I was not permitted to even speak on the COVID-19 emergency legislation passed in April of this year, which among other things established the temporary rental eviction ban and set up a framework for rent deferrals and reductions. It is vital that this parliament hears the diversity of views that minor parties and independents bring. We should not be shut out by the major parties just because of the anachronism that is the two-party system that we are all too used to in here.

Others have mentioned the concerns about us not getting to consideration in detail on many or any bills in some sitting weeks. No-one has proposed anything to actually address that directly. What I would propose is that there is at least one hour for consideration in detail of every bill. It is clear from the previous term that the family-friendly hours have come at a cost and that cost is that we regularly lose the opportunity to undertake consideration in detail. I do not think I need to tell members in here just how important it is.

Without consideration in detail, we do not have the chance to put questions to ministers about the operation of specific bills. We are not passing bills that operate as a whole in some nebulous vacuum; we are passing specific provisions that have effect in everyday people's lives. What we say in this place affects how those provisions are applied in real life, how they are applied by courts. It matters what we say in here. If we do not have an opportunity to interrogate the meaning and the application of specific clauses of bills, the entire state of Queensland is worse for it. What we are proposing would mean that every bill is examined by the whole chamber, including the opportunity to ask those questions and to move amendments to each clause where it is deemed necessary.

The proposal to make space for new ideas would operate by increasing the debate time allocated to private members' bills and private members' motions. I started here in the last term. Early in the term, I had a bit of a sense of disbelief at the way private members' motions played out—the scream, as it was described to me. It did feel like something of a waste of time, but it is important that non-government members have the opportunity to move motions and challenge the government's position on issues that are important to them and their communities. I would argue though that we do not need to spend an hour on this. I think we could spend much less time—a half an hour on each motion—and we could have more of these motions each week with shorter debate times.

Similarly, non-government members should have the opportunity to put up private members' bills and see these proposals right through to the conclusion of the legislative processes. We should have the chance to require the government to consider legislative proposals. There were relatively few private members' bills in the last term and even fewer of these made it to a vote on the second reading. If we are to serve the diverse communities of Queensland and the diversity of views that they hold, we need to make sure there is sufficient opportunity for all members to present legislation for the scrutiny of committees and for debate in this House.

The Leader of the House made an observation before that this diversity of views is the cornerstone of our democracy—that debate in this place is incredibly important. I agree with that. We just need to actually make it happen. We need to make time for that. If we need more time in amongst amendments like this, then we should simply sit more often. Let us add a Friday, let us add extra sitting weeks in the calendar. There are ways to address it that do not compromise the quality of debate in this place and the state of our democracy. I table a copy of the amendments that have been circulated in my name.

Tabled paper: Amendments to Sessional Orders by the member for Maiwar, Mr Michael Berkman MP [262A](#).

I move the amendments that have been circulated in my name.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Pause the clock while I take some advice. Member for Maiwar, the House is currently considering an amendment already. We will consider that amendment and vote on it accordingly. If required, you will then have the opportunity to put your amendment to the House. We will not accept the moving of your amendment at this point. You are actually speaking to the amendment moved by the Manager of Opposition Business. You will have the opportunity to put that amendment later if you so desire.

Mr BERKMAN: Thank you for the guidance. I will finish in short measure now by saying that the proposed amendments that I will move in good time are straightforward and sensible. They aim to send a message to the government that we are watching and that they cannot take their return to government as a mandate to do whatever they like in this place without scrutiny.