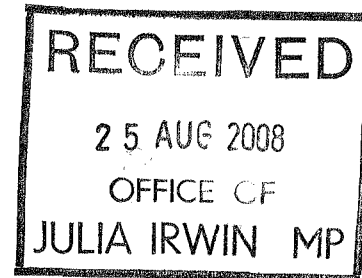


Submission No. 12

Received on 1/8/08
J.R.

HON MIKE REYNOLDS AM MP
SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF QUEENSLAND
MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

14 AUG 2008



Mrs Julia Irwin MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mrs Irwin

I refer to your letter of 18 June 2008, in which you sought the comments of the Queensland Legislative Assembly in relation to a new Inquiry being undertaken by your Committee in relation to electronic petitioning.

Please find below, information and observations under the headings of the terms of reference of your Inquiry:

a) the different models of electronic petitioning that could be introduced, and their effectiveness in facilitating electronic petitioning of the House of Representatives

The Queensland Parliament was the first in Australia to introduce electronic petitioning as an alternative to the traditional method of petitioning in 2002.

The model adopted in Queensland is one where e-petitions seek to complement, rather than to replace, paper petitions. E-petitions for electronic signing are actually hosted on the Parliament's website, rather than through a third party.

From this site citizens can locate e-petitions, find out information about the status of, or join a current e-petition. In addition, with the assistance of a sponsoring Member, persons may start an e-petition as the principal petitioner.

The Clerk of the Parliament checks the application of the principal petitioner for compliance with Standing Orders before publishing the petition on the website. The processes of opening, joining, closing and disposing of details and deletion of a petition are detailed in two papers attached. (The first is from an article in *The Parliamentarian* from 2002 titled "E-Petitions Trial" by the Clerk. The second paper by the Clerk Assistant is more recent (2008) and titled "E-Petitions the Queensland Experience" – especially Appendices 1 to 4.) Exhibits 1 and 3.

b) changes required to the practices and procedures of the House in the implementation of an e-petitions system

The Legislative Assembly amended its Standing Rules and Orders on 27 November 2003 to make e-petitions a permanent feature of the Queensland Parliament (see Chapter 21)

<http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/view/legislativeAssembly/documents/procedures/StandingRules&Orders.pdf>

c) the role of Members in e-petitioning

In the Queensland model a Member of Parliament must first sponsor an e-petition before it can be posted on the website to collect signatures whereas a traditional paper petition must be presented by a Member of Parliament for tabling once the signatures have been collected.

The relevant Member that sponsors a petition also receives a copy of any Ministerial response.

d) privacy and security concerns

The e-petitions website includes a detailed privacy statement
<http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/view/EPetitions%5FQLD/Privacy.aspx?LIndex=11>

Petitioners' details are deleted from electronic storage in accordance with the data retention policy at a maximum of 6 months after the tabling date.

The names and addresses of signatories are not available on the website. However printed copies of the tabled e-petition are available upon request to the public as is the case with paper petitions.

Following consideration of several authentication options it was resolved that there was no practical means to authenticate petitioners' personal details in an online environment that was universally available or equitable. Whilst e-petition signatories are required to supply an e-mail address there is no way to authenticate that address so the authentication is merely symbolic.

e) the financial and resource implications of an e-petitions system

The introduction of e-petitions involved the establishment of a dedicated database and website. The petitions website and associated e-petitions system was developed in house by the Parliamentary Service.

The initial design and implementation cost was in the vicinity of \$80,000. This included hardware purchase (server), software (Microsoft SQL server licences) and the notional time of an in-house software developer (software design). The Tasmanian Parliament has adopted the Queensland E-petition model and uses the system and software under nominal license fee. Should the House of Representatives wish to use the Queensland system and software developed it can be arranged under a licensing agreement for a nominal license fee.

The processes are not completely automated and require some data input and processing from Parliamentary Service staff including the follow up process of posting Ministerial responses on the site. Total maintenance of the site is estimated at about .4 of a full time equivalent officer.

f) the experience of other relevant jurisdictions, both in Australia and overseas

The Queensland user's perspective was sought via an optional visitor's on-line survey conducted between April 2003 and May 2005. A total of 736 person responded to the survey which represents 3.5% of the 21,300 signatures on e-petitions received during the same period. Generally speaking respondents found the e-petitioning process and website easy to use and supported the view that e-petitioning is a useful opportunity for democratic participation. The key findings of the survey are detailed at pages 9 to 13 of the attached paper "E-Petitions the Queensland Experience".

The Queensland experience is that the number of petitions is generally increasing along with the growth of a number of e-petitions (see Figure 1 of the attached Procedural research paper 1/08). *Exhibit No. 2.*

Since e-petitioning was introduced in late 2002 the number of tabled Ministerial responses has increased significantly (see Figure 3 of attached Procedural research paper 1/08). However, there is currently no compulsion for a Ministerial response to a petition within a specified timeframe. An argument could be made that a time limit for responses to petitions might increase Ministerial accountability. The Standing Orders Committee is currently

considering amendments to Standing Orders and should report in the near future and may include amendments to ministerial response requirements.

Should your committee require any further information please don't hesitate to contact the Clerk of the Parliament, Mr Neil Laurie on 07 3406 7185 or neil.laurie@parliament.qld.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

HON MIKE REYNOLDS AM MP
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Queensland

Enc