

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE  
TO THE REPORT OF THE  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE**

**‘THE SECOND CHAMBER:  
ENHANCING THE WORK OF  
THE MAIN COMMITTEE’**

### **Recommendation 1**

The committee recommends that the title 'Main Committee' be changed to 'Second Chamber'.

Not supported.

The title 'Second Chamber' could result in confusion as it can be taken as a reference to the Senate. However, the idea of a new name for the Main Committee to enhance its recognition is supported in-principle. The government is prepared to consider other alternative names for the Main Committee.

### **Recommendation 2**

The committee recommends that, subject to feasibility, the Main Committee be relocated to a position adjacent to the Chamber and immediately accessible to the public.

Not supported.

The cost of implementing this recommendation would be too high.

### **Recommendation 3**

The committee recommends that the following sessional order be adopted for the remainder of the 39th Parliament:

#### **Interventions in the Main Committee**

**84A** During consideration of any order of the day in the Main Committee a Member may rise and, if given the call, ask the Chair whether the Member speaking is willing to give way. The Member speaking will either indicate his or her:

- a) refusal and continue speaking, or
- b) acceptance and allow the other Member to ask a short question immediately relevant to the Member's speech—

Provided that, if, in the opinion of the Chair, it is an abuse of the orders or forms of the House, the intervention may be denied or curtailed.

Supported, on a trial basis for the remainder of 2002.

Allowing formal interventions would constitute a major shift in practice. However, the proposed change would appear to suit the way in which the Main Committee operates. As there are potential problems that could arise from such a change, particularly an excess of requests to intervene, the government would want to observe a trial of the new procedures before agreeing to changes to the Standing Orders.

#### **Recommendation 4**

The committee recommends that the provisions in the standing orders which restrict the occurrence of Members' statements and adjournment debate in the Main Committee to specific days and times be removed including amendments to the standing orders as follows:

- Standing order 81, paragraph (a) be amended to read '(a) on the question for the adjournment of the House or the Main Committee to terminate the sitting.'
- Standing order 274, omit the proviso in paragraph (e)
- Standing order 274A, omit the standing order, substitute 'The question—That the committee do now adjourn—shall be open to debate but no amendment may be moved to the question.'
- Standing order 275, add at the end 'or as specified in these standing orders.'
- Standing order 275A, omit the standing order, substitute 'With the agreement of the Committee, the Chair may call statements by Members. Members, other than Ministers, may be called to make statements, each not exceeding three minutes. For the purpose of this standing order a Minister does not include a Parliamentary Secretary.'

Supported, except for the proposed new standing order 275A which is not supported.

In relation to standing order 275A, the government supports the current arrangements for the calling on of 3 minute statements. The government would like the Procedure Committee to examine whether Ministers should be able to make three minute statements.

#### **Recommendation 5**

The committee recommends that standing order 282 be amended to read:

##### **Chair to suspend or adjourn sitting when disorder arises**

**282** If any sudden disorder arises in the Main Committee the Chair may, or on motion without notice by any Member shall, forthwith suspend or adjourn the sitting and shall report the disorder to the House. If the sitting is adjourned, any business under discussion and not disposed of at the time of the adjournment shall be set down on the Notice Paper for the next sitting.

Supported.

### **Recommendation 6**

The committee recommends that the convention by which Members of the governing party sit on the right of the Chair and others elsewhere be relaxed in the Main Committee.

Supported.

As the report notes, the Main Committee is already less formal than the House of Representatives Chamber and Members are not prevented, except by convention, from sitting anywhere in the Main Committee. The government would not want informality to lead to Members inadvertently impeding Ministers responsible for matters under consideration and the Chair should ensure this does not occur.

### **Recommendation 7**

The committee recommends that, subject to feasibility and reasonable cost:

- the digital speech time clocks in the Main Committee be replaced with analogue clocks similar to those in the Chamber;
- camera angles be rearranged to improve the identification on the House Monitoring System of individual Members in the Main Committee;
- glass panels be fitted to all doors in the Main Committee which are normally closed during proceedings; and
- the provision of better facilities for ancillary staff be examined.

Supported, subject to existing resource constraints.

## **Recommendation 8**

The committee recommends that the following provision be added to standing order 331 (Selection Committee):

(h) The committee may select orders of the day, committee and delegation reports, and private Members' business, for debate in the Main Committee and report its determinations to the House. If it does so the following provisions will apply:

(i) Upon presentation of a report of the committee nominating items for debate in the Main Committee, the report will be deemed adopted by the House and the items shall be deemed to be referred to the Committee.

(ii) The business so referred will have priority in the Main Committee after 4.30 p.m. on the sitting Wednesday immediately following the presentation of the report of the Selection Committee until the adjournment of the committee on that day.

(iii) Any items referred to the Main Committee under these provisions will be deemed to be returned to the House for further consideration at the adjournment of the Main Committee on the relevant Wednesday.

Some minor alterations would also be required to other standing orders including 104A, 104B and 270.

Not supported.

The time currently available in the main Chamber and the Main Committee is sufficient for debate on those matters which it is agreed will be allocated parliamentary business time. The Chief Government Whip considers requests for allocation of time in the Main Committee for debate on: motions to take note of documents; committee and delegation reports; and private Members' business. Debate on matters occurs in the existing hours of the Main Committee by agreement of the Chief Government and Chief Opposition Whips.

As the report notes, the Main Committee's flexibility means it is able to respond to sudden demands for additional speaking time. If the quantity of business is such that the Main Committee needs to sit additional hours, this occurs as necessary by agreement of the whips.