



Parliament of Tasmania

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE

**WORKING ARRANGEMENTS
OF THE PARLIAMENT**

REPORT NO. 8

**COMMITTEE MEETING TIMES AND
RESOURCES**

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

**Mr Aird MLC (Chair)
Mrs Sue Smith MLC
Mr Don Wing MLC**

**Mrs Jackson MHA
Mr Lennon MHA
Mrs Napier MHA**

INTRODUCTION

Two Joint Standing Committees, namely the Environment Resources and Development Committee and the Community Development Committee, were established in December 2000 on a two year trial.

Presently, the three Joint Standing Committees on Subordinate Legislation, Public Accounts and Public Works meet when both Houses are sitting.

Prior to the Government Business Enterprise Scrutiny Committee hearings, some Legislative Councillors have, in recent years, met informally with selected stakeholders. To facilitate these meetings prior to the formal hearings, it is suggested that time be scheduled for this purpose.

There is also a need to ensure that Committee Members recognise and support the notion that parliamentary duties come before non-parliamentary activities.

BACKGROUND

The two new Joint Standing Committees have had difficulty in finding suitable times for all Members to meet.

While the Committees were agreed to by both Houses of Parliament in December 2000, membership was not appointed until late March 2001. Easter, Legislative Council elections and the Budget process all limited meeting time opportunities through the earlier part of the year. Nevertheless, the Community Development Committee did manage 14 meetings in 2001. Parliament was prorogued on 1 February 2002 and did not resume until 26 March. Easter, the resignation of two Members and the State election have reduced the opportunities to meet by at least six months from 2002. Therefore, of the two-year trial, about 8 months have been available for these Joint Standing Committees to meet.

With the House of Assembly and the Legislative Council having different legislative sitting timetables, it is difficult to co-ordinate a convenient time for all concerned.

A variety of options were discussed, which also recognise the need for adequate resourcing. These options are listed below :

MEETING TIMES

Option 1

This option identifies time blocks for the meeting of parliamentary committees. This option operates effectively in some other Australian Parliaments, as well as internationally.

Implementing Option 1 would require forward planning. The sitting patterns of both Houses are determined by the Leaders of Government business in each House at approximately six monthly intervals. Times available for committee work would have to be identified as part of developing the schedule.

The Joint Standing Committees on Environment, Resources and Development and Community Development and any Select Committees, would have first option to take up the committees' time blocks. The President and Speaker would assist in determining appropriate committee times.

The proposal is that two or three weeks every six months could be allocated as time blocks for parliamentary committees. The time blocks would only be used if required by the Committees and would certainly not preclude the use of other time if it were convenient to committees. Again, planning and notice of meetings would be needed to obtain the maximum advantage from this option. (See attached example).

The advantages of Option 1 are: -.

- (1) Members would have sufficient notice to make themselves available for meetings. They would prioritise the committee meetings in a similar way as if Parliament itself was sitting.
- (2) A clearer timetable of all parliamentary activity provides the opportunity for greater media and public scrutiny.
- (3) A widely published, comprehensive timetable of Members' parliamentary activities has benefits. This information gives the public and the media an accurate picture of parliamentary and committee sittings. It would also be published on the internet.
- (4) There are a number of periods through the year where parliamentary committees could meet. Committee time blocks would not interfere with legislative sitting periods, where Members are occupied with Parliament, and committee work is a second priority.
- (5) Separate time blocks would also allow parliamentary committees to meet in other parts of the State.

Option 2

During legislative sitting weeks where both Houses sit simultaneously :

For example, committees could meet every Wednesday from 3.00 pm to 6.00 pm, by agreement between the two houses.

Option 3

For example, Wednesday, 9.00 am – 12 noon.

Time would be allocated on a rotational basis between the two Joint Standing Committees on Environment, Resources and Energy and Community Development and Select Committees.

In this case both Houses would sit at 9.30 am on Tuesday and Thursday to recover the time dedicated to the committees on Wednesday.

Option 4

Legislative Council Government Businesses Scrutiny Committees

Government Businesses Scrutiny Committee meetings are held early each year by both Houses of Parliament.

In the last few years some Members of the Legislative Council have undertaken meetings with stakeholders prior to the formal scrutiny of government businesses. Members believe that these meetings enable them to gain a better understanding of the organisations' activities.

To facilitate this, it is suggested that specific time be made available in the sitting schedule, prior to the formal hearings, to allow these meetings to take place if required.

Therefore no committee meetings should be scheduled in the week immediately prior to the hearings of the Government Businesses Scrutiny Committees to allow for informal stakeholder meetings.

RESOURCES

Option 1

This option supports the creation of a Parliament House Committee Office to serve both Houses. This Office would provide staff and resources for the whole of Parliament.

It is apparent there are a large number of staff throughout the Parliament who have or could have an involvement in committee work. While it is acknowledged that for some of these staff, committee responsibilities do not constitute all of their workload, it is clear there are substantial resources already in existence. To ascertain the full extent of staff availability for this Office, it is suggested that an assessment be made of the job descriptions of all staff.

What is apparent is that there is no central co-ordination point for the committees of both Houses. If greater co-ordination existed then some of the criticisms of the present committee system might be eased :

- committee meeting times could be coordinated to avoid clashes;
- less busy staff would be redirected to a committee with a tight timeline; and
- expertise in particular areas of committee management could be maximised.

Option 1 has historically less appeal because of existing departmental and staffing structures. With the changes that have occurred with numbers of Members of Parliament, it may be an appropriate time to redistribute resources within the Parliament itself.

Option 2

Option 2 proposes the allocation of a Parliamentary Research Service staff member to support each of the Joint Standing Committees on Environment, Resources and Development and Community Development.

The Parliamentary Research Service (PRS) consists of five staff with tertiary qualifications in a range of disciplines. It is under the general control of the Parliamentary Library Committee.

Presently the PRS are committed to different committees at different levels, ie, attending all Committee meetings or only when requested.

A 1993 resolution of the Library Committee presently prohibits the PRS from providing any documentation for committees other than research. This restricts the use of their talent and resources and this Committee urges the Library Committee to convene and revoke this instruction to PRS staff.

Committee work should be a priority for the assigned staff from the PRS.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Committee Meeting Times

The Committee recommends that :

- Time blocks be identified for the purpose of all parliamentary committee meetings.

- In addition, committee meeting time be allocated when both Houses are sitting simultaneously, provided it is agreed to by a two-thirds majority of both houses.
- This Committee will meet prior to the Parliament resuming in 2003 to finalise the timing arrangements to be put to both Houses.
- No committee meet in the week immediately prior to the hearings of the Government Businesses Scrutiny Committees, to allow for stakeholder meetings.

Resources

The Committee recommends that :

- A Parliament House Committee Office be established to serve both Houses. This Office would provide staff and resources for the whole of Parliament.
- The Chair of the Joint Select Committee on the Working Arrangements of Parliament liaise with the Speaker, the President and the Clerks of the House of Assembly and Legislative Council to facilitate the establishment of the Parliament House Committee Office.

**Parliament House, Hobart
28 November 2002**

**MICHAEL AIRD MLC
Chairman**

EXAMPLE OF SITTING SCHEDULE, INCLUDING WEEKS FOR COMMITTEE WORK

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
FEB 10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19 GBE	20 GBE	21 GBE	22 GBE	23
24	25	26	27 L'ton Cup	28	MAR 1	2
MAR 3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11 EHD	12 HA	13 AND LC	14 SITTING	15	16
17	18	19 HA	20 SITTING	21 ONLY	22	23
24	25	26 LC	27 SITTING	28 ONLY	29 EASTER	30 EASTER
31 EASTER	APRIL 1 EASTER	2 EASTER	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16 HA	17 SITTING	18 ONLY	19	20
21	22	23 HA	24 SITTING	25 ANZAC DAY	26	27
28	29	30	MAY 1	2	3	4 LC ELECTION
MAY 5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21 LC	22 LC AND	23 BD SITTING	24	25
26	27	28 LC AND	29 HA	30 SITTING	31	JUNE 1
JUNE 2	3 EST	4 EST	5 EST	6 EST	7 EST	8
9	10 OB	11 HA	12 SITTING	13 ONLY	14	15
16	17	18 LC AND	19 HA	20 SITTING	21	22
23	24	25 LC AND	26 HA	27 SITTING	28	29
30	JULY 1	2 LC	3 SITTING	4 ONLY	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31	August 1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31
Sept 1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	Oct 1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10 Laun Show	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24 Hobart Show	25	26
27	28	29	30	31	Nov 1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Dec 1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14

