



2010

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# PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

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## HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

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# REPORT OF THE STANDING ORDERS COMMITTEE

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## Question Time and Divisions

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### MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Hon. Michael Polley MP (Chair)  
Hon Lara Giddings MP  
Mr Rene Hidding MP  
Mr Tim Morris MP  
Mr Jeremy Rockcliff MP

## INTRODUCTION

The Standing Orders Committee met on 24 June 2010 to consider the Sessional Order for the number and allocation of Questions without notice and the length of time for the Division Bells to be rung.

## QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

The Standing Orders Committee recommended in its Report of 26 February 2009 that a new Sessional Order be introduced to provide for a minimum number of 12 Questions without notice to be asked in Question Time. In addition, it was also recommended that the allocation of those Questions be 6 for the Opposition, 3 for the Tasmanian Greens and 3 for Government Private Members. This allocation was based in part on the existing practice of the House and in part on the number of Members who would ask questions.

The Committee's recommendation was accepted by the House and came into force in the Autumn Session of the House in 2009. Its operation was reviewed by the Committee in August 2009 and it was agreed by the House to continue with the Sessional Order.

Following the General Elections for the House of Assembly the makeup of the House changed, thus prompting a request of the Speaker to call a meeting of the Standing Orders Committee to review the Sessional Order. This occurred on opening day, 4 May 2010 when the House was considering re-establishing the Sessional Order.

The Committee accepted that the matter needed to be re-considered in light of the Election result and thus the makeup of the House. The Committee considered options, including maintaining the minimum number of Questions and changing the allocation within that number, or increasing the number thus also altering the ratio. It was acknowledged that since the introduction of the original Sessional Order that there had been an increase in the average number of Questions asked in Question Time.

In light of this it was agreed that the Sessional Order be amended to increase the minimum number of questions to be asked to 13 and that the ratio be 7 for the Opposition, 3 for the Tasmanian Greens and 3 for the Government Private Members. If there is time for further Questions within the period of one hour, the Chair is to have regard to the ratio described in the Sessional Order when giving the call.

**Recommendation: That Sessional Order 99A be as follows:**

**99A. Notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order 98, the Speaker shall ensure that a minimum number of questions without notice to be asked shall be seven by the Opposition, three by the Tasmanian Greens and three by the Government Private Members.**

## DIVISIONS

It is proposed in the "Parliament Square" development that the part of Parliament House generally known as "the Annexe", situated at the area to the rear of the House of Assembly Chamber, be demolished and the occupants of that part of the Parliament building be accommodated in the State Offices building at 10 Murray Street.

To enable Members who will be accommodated in the temporary accommodation to respond to the Division Bells and attend divisions in the House the time for the Bells must be rung for a longer period.

It was explained to the Committee that an officer of the House had walked from the furthest point in the temporary accommodation to the Chamber and it was timed at just under four minutes. In addition it is expected that the new purpose built accommodation in place of the Annexe will not be ready for accommodation for at least two years, so any change to the time for the bells to be rung will be for a reasonably long but limited time.

It was agreed that four minutes would not be sufficient because Members are often in meetings or involved in other proceedings which they may not be able to leave immediately, so the time should be set at 5 minutes.

With further discussion, and in an effort to not unduly delay the business of the House, it was also agreed that if the Whips of the three parties represented in the House signified to the Speaker that all Members who are to vote on each occasion are present in the House that the Speaker may order the Bells to cease being rung. As this provision is expected to be in existence for a limited time only as a Sessional Order, the question was not expected to arise of providing for an independent Member or another party being represented in the House. If such a situation arose, the Sessional Order would be reviewed.

**Recommendation: That the following Standing Orders shall be read as follows for the remainder of this Session-**

**200. When a Division is demanded the Division Bell shall be rung, and the Clerk of the House shall turn a five-minute sand-glass, to be kept on the Table for that purpose, and the doors shall not be closed until after the lapse of five minutes as indicated by such sand-glass, unless the Government Whip, the Opposition Whip and the Tasmanian Greens Whip each signify that all Members who wish to vote are present in the Chamber, in which case the Speaker may Order the Division Bells to cease being rung.**

**201. The doors shall be locked after the lapse of five minutes, or such lesser time as may be directed by the Speaker after signification from the Whips that all Members who are to vote in the Division are present in the Chamber.**

**M. R. POLLEY  
CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE  
24 August 2010**