



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

BUSINESS

SPEECH

Thursday, 22 August 2002

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Date Thursday, 22 August 2002
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Questioner
Speaker Abbott, Tony, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (9.42 am)—I move:

That the following changes to the standing orders be made with effect from 16 September 2002:

(1) That standing orders 81, 274, 274A and 275 be amended to read as follows:

Debate confined to present question—Exceptions

81 No Member may digress from the subject matter of any question under discussion:

Provided that—

(a) on the question for the adjournment of the House or the Main Committee to terminate the sitting, matters irrelevant thereto may be debated, and

(b) on the motion for the second reading of an Appropriation or Supply Bill, except an Appropriation or Supply Bill for expenditure that is not expenditure for the ordinary annual services of the Government, matters relating to public affairs may be debated.

Sittings and adjournment

274 The Main Committee may meet at any time during a sitting of the House and the following provisions shall apply:

(a) the Committee need not adjourn between items of business;

(b) proceedings in the Committee shall be suspended by the Chair to enable Members to attend any division in the House;

(c) a sitting of the Committee may be adjourned on motion moved by any Member without notice;

(d) upon the adjournment of the House the Chair shall interrupt the business before the Committee and forthwith adjourn the Committee; and

(e) upon the completion of consideration of all matters referred to the Committee by the House the Chair shall propose the question—That the Committee do now adjourn.

Adjournment debates

274A The question—That the Committee do now adjourn—shall be open to debate but no amendment may be moved to the question:

Provided that if, on the question—That the Committee do now adjourn—being proposed, a Member requires the question to be put forthwith without debate, the Chair shall forthwith put the question.

Provided further that, at the conclusion of the debate on the question—That the Committee do now adjourn—a Minister may require that the debate be extended for 10 minutes to enable Ministers to speak in reply to matters raised in the preceding adjournment debate; on the expiry of 10 minutes, or upon the earlier cessation of the debate, the Chair shall forthwith adjourn the Committee.

Committee to consider only matters referred

275 The Main Committee shall consider only such matters as have been referred to it by the House or as specified in the standing orders.

(2) That standing order 282 be amended to read as follows:

Chair to suspend 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.

(3) Omit “(on a Thursday)” from the item concerning Question for the adjournment of House or Main Committee in standing order 91.

Essentially what this motion proposes to do is respond to the report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, *The second chamber: enhancing the Main Committee*. This report was brought down some time ago. As the House may recall, in June, during the last sitting period, I tabled the government's response to that report. There was much in that report that was valuable and there was much that the government really do appreciate. In particular, the government are determined to try to ensure that we do have fuller debate, that we do have a more realistic exchange of views and ideas between members of this parliament. I think it is important that we try to promote those very desirable objectives through some innovation in the Main Committee.

What we are proposing to do is to provide more opportunity for adjournment debates in the Main Committee. I suppose the most significant change is the provision allowing for interventions during second reading speeches in the Main Committee. This is something which has happened in the House of Commons traditionally. It is something which I understand has never previously been permitted in this parliament, but I understand that those who have studied the House of Commons believe that it works well there. Certainly I think it is worth having a go at this procedure in the Main Committee. So in recognition of the report of the Procedure Committee, which was a bipartisan report, the government are prepared to see how this works.

I suppose that the Manager of Opposition Business is going to remind me in a few moments that there are other proposals for parliamentary reform, and I certainly accept that the opposition has put forward some proposals for more sweeping parliamentary reform. As the Manager of Opposition Business knows, the government also has some thoughts of its own on this. At this point in time, it would be premature for me to make commitments to further progressing parliamentary reform. Nevertheless, I think this is a down payment on the important work of trying to ensure that the parliament operates as well as it humanly can.