



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

WORK OF COMMITTEES

The Legislative Assembly's committees undertake functions of the Assembly that are more easily performed by a small group of Members. This includes inquiring and reporting on matters of public importance, such as the scrutiny of government activities, addressing a difficult issue of public policy, or consulting on proposed laws.

Committees comprise a number of Members from both government and non-government parties. Committees are an extension of the Assembly and operate according to the authority delegated to it.

What do committees do?

Committees conduct inquiries by obtaining information from individuals, organisations, government departments and experts on the matters under investigation. Committees examine evidence, draw reasoned conclusions and make recommendations to the Assembly and the government.

Committees enhance public accountability of government, and contribute to the development of public policy and a better informed government administration.

The work of committees provides opportunities for Members and the public to be in personal contact during activities such as hearings and site visits. This can promote public awareness and debate of the issues being considered and allows more direct public input into parliamentary and policy processes. It also provides Members with the opportunity to exchange views across party lines and reach bipartisan conclusions and

recommendations on matters of public interest.

The Assembly currently has three types of committees: 'standing', 'sessional' and 'select'. These terms refer to the duration of the life of a committee.

STANDING COMMITTEES

Standing committees are appointed to investigate and report on specific subject areas for the life of an Assembly. Some are required by the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly and are appointed at the commencement of each Assembly. Committees may also be established by resolution of the Assembly.

Committee of Privileges

The Committee of Privileges inquires into and reports on matters of privilege referred to it by the Assembly.

House Committee

The House Committee advises the Speaker on matters relating to Parliament House and services to Members.

Public Accounts Committee

The Public Accounts Committee examines and reports on government income and spending, reports of the Auditor-General and considers whether petitions referred to it by the Assembly should be debated.

Standing Committee on the ICAC

Performs the functions of the Assembly Committee under the *Independent Commissioner Against Corruption Act 2017*, and examines ICAC annual reports and trends in similar bodies elsewhere.

SUMMARY

Committees examine evidence, draw reasoned conclusions and make recommendations to the Assembly and the government

Standing Committees are appointed to investigate and report on specific subject areas for the life of an Assembly

Sessional Committees are appointed for the duration of the current session of the Assembly

Select Committees are established by a resolution of the Assembly to investigate and report on specific matters.

Standing Orders Committee

The Standing Orders Committee makes recommendations to the Assembly about changing the Standing Orders, which are the rules for how the Assembly operates.

Members' Interests Committee

Directs how the Register of Members' Interests is kept and made available for inspection.

Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee

Inquires and reports on constitutional and legal matters referred to it by the Attorney-General or the Assembly, and examines and reports upon all instruments of a legislative or administrative character and other papers which are required by statute to be tabled in the Assembly.

SESSIONAL COMMITTEES

Sessional committees are appointed for the duration of the current session of the Assembly, and are given terms of reference by a resolution. The terms of reference tend to be reasonably broad with no specific time frame set for reporting.

A sessional committee of the 13th Assembly was the Legislation Scrutiny Committee that examined and reported on any bill or matter referred to it by the Assembly, a Minister or on its own motion.

SELECT COMMITTEES

Select committees are established by a resolution of the Assembly to investigate and report on specific matters. Their terms of reference are generally quite narrow and usually incorporate a set date for reporting. Select committees cease to exist following the tabling of their final report to the Assembly.

A select committee of the 13th Assembly was the Select Committee on Opening Parliament to the People.

MEMBERSHIP

The Standing Orders set out the make-up of Standing Committees. Membership of committees is established by resolution of the Assembly. The Assembly may by motion move on notice:

- appoint committees
- appoint or discharge Members from a committee.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Depending on their terms of reference, committees can receive references for inquiries from a variety of sources including:

- Acts of Parliament
- Standing Orders
- Sessional Orders
- resolutions of the Assembly
- Ministers, the Speaker, or the Administrator
- self-referral.

INQUIRIES

Parliamentary inquiries produce reports and associated recommendations to address specific issues of public concern or interest. When committees undertake inquiries there is an expectation on the part of the Assembly and the public that all relevant interests will be canvassed and the inquiry process will fairly address all viewpoints on the matter.

Research

Following receipt of an inquiry referral or a committee resolution to undertake an inquiry, the first step is to conduct background research. Background research is undertaken by the Committee Office to:

- identify the key issues related to the committee's terms of reference
- identify key stakeholders and experts on the issues under inquiry
- ascertain options for obtaining evidence

inform the development of an inquiry work program.

Submissions

The second step in the inquiry process usually involves calling for submissions. Committees may use a number of methods, including social media, direct and targeted letters and e-mails. Importantly, submitters must address the committee's terms of reference.

Hearings, briefings and forums

Standing Orders empower committees to conduct proceedings in private, in public and 'using any means approved by the Assembly'.

In private meetings, committee Members discuss matters, deliberate on evidence, receive briefings and consider draft reports.

Public meetings include hearings, briefings or forums. Public hearings and briefings allow committees to hear from and ask questions of witnesses, including experts, government officials and people who have submitted. Public forums are a less formal format.

Reports

Committees report to the Assembly on the outcome of their inquiries. This is usually done by a final inquiry report. However, a committee may submit an interim report for a complex or long inquiry.

Reports outline the committee's method of inquiry, discuss their findings and provide recommendations to the Assembly or government.

More information about committees is here: parliament.nt.gov.au/committees