



MEDIA RELEASE

SELECT COMMITTEE ON OPENING PARLIAMENT TO THE PEOPLE

29 March 2017

REPORT ON OPENING PARLIAMENT TO THE PEOPLE

Mr Jeff Collins MLA today tabled the Committee's report on *Opening Parliament to the People*.

"The Committee has proposed fundamental changes to the Assembly to open it up to greater involvement by the people of the Northern Territory," Mr Collins said. "It recommends Bills be referred to committees for public consultation before the Assembly considers their detail."

"Committees enable the Assembly as a body to consult with the community. They provide the opportunity for people to put their views on the Assembly's record and speak to the Assembly through public hearings."

"Adopting these changes would give every Territorian the chance to have their say before the Assembly makes a law," Mr Collins said.

"A key task for the new committees would be effectively communicating with people across the Territory to alert them to proposed laws and their opportunity to make a difference. This would include implementing strategies for engaging regional and remote communities."

"The report makes 30 recommendations which aim to deliver a more open and transparent Parliament by increasing opportunities for public participation" Mr Collins said.

The recommendations include:

- Having two portfolio scrutiny committees to inquire into issues within their portfolio areas, including Bills, Government scrutiny and Agency performance, and difficult policy matters
- Referring all but urgent Bills to the scrutiny committees for community consultation
- Empowering the Auditor-General to examine Agencies' performance information
- Holding public hearings on Agencies' Annual Reports in November each year
- Having debates on petitions and the Government's responses.

The Legislative Assembly meets on Larrakia land, and the Northern Territory extends across lands of a number of Aboriginal peoples. The Committee has recommended that the Assembly acknowledges this at the commencement of its sittings.

The Committee has also recommended that the Assembly works to align itself more closely with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures.

"The Committee has drawn on earlier proposals, the experience of other Parliaments, and the ideas and suggestions of Territorians who made submissions and spoke to the Committee. We have produced a proposal supported by Government, Opposition and Independent Members that will make the Assembly more open to Territorians and more responsive to their needs," Mr Collins said.

A summary of the Report's recommendations is attached.

END



SELECT COMMITTEE ON OPENING PARLIAMENT TO THE PEOPLE

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Select Committee on Opening Parliament to the People's report proposes:

- opening up the law-making process to active community participation by referring all non-urgent Bills for committee consultation
- establishing a robust system for Government scrutiny, with two committees that together cover every ministerial portfolio and Government department and new processes to improve accountability
- allowing for debates on petitions and Government responses to petitions
- acknowledging the Northern Territory's traditional owners.

If implemented, the Committee's recommendations would make the following key changes:

Bills

After giving a speech explaining a Bill, the Minister would move either to refer the Bill to one of the portfolio scrutiny committees or to declare the Bill to be urgent.

The Committee would then call for public submissions on the Bill and, if required, hold public hearings the week of the following Assembly sittings. This would allow anyone to put their views about the Bill on the Assembly's record and allow consideration of those views. The committee will also review the Bill against fundamental legislative principles.

The Committee would recommend to the Assembly at its next sitting whether to pass the Bill and whether to make any amendments. If the Minister agrees with any of those amendments, they can ask them to be adopted before the Assembly debates the Bill.

The Assembly then debates the second reading, consideration in detail, and third reading of the Bill in the usual manner.

Committees

The Assembly will establish two portfolio scrutiny committees and allocate each ministerial portfolio to one of the committees.

The committees will inquire into the Bills, any matter referred by the Assembly, a Minister or on its own motion, the public accounts and Auditor-General's audits, and the performance and operation of Government Agencies for their allocated portfolios. The committees will implement strategies to ensure effective communication across the Territory, including regional and remote communities.

The Public Accounts, Legal and Constitutional Affairs, and Subordinate Legislation and Publications committees would be abolished and their functions performed by the portfolio scrutiny committees.

An Estimates Committee will be established each year in a similar manner to previously, but in addition to Estimates hearings in June it will hold hearings on Annual Reports in November. It will continue to hold a total of 60 hours of hearings and the allocation of those hours between Estimates and Annual Reports will be decided by the Committee.

Petitions

Petitions signed by more than 1,000 Territorians will be put on the Notice Paper for debate in the Assembly, with two Members speaking for five minutes each and two for three minutes.

Government responses to petitions will be put on the Notice Paper for the next day, and if four Members indicated that they wish to debate the response at the allocated time, then two Members may speak for five minutes each and two for three minutes.