

Ms FYLES (Attorney-General and Justice): Mr Deputy Speaker, the government thanks everyone for their contribution.

I move that the motion be amended by inserting after the word 'report', 'the Assembly adopts Recommendations 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17, 18, 22, 24, 25 and 30, and refers Recommendations 1, 2, 4, 19, 23 and 26 to the Standing Orders Committee for inquiry and report on procedural matters'.

I am proud to stand here today as part of a government that is responding to recommendations by the Select Committee on Opening Parliament to the People. I acknowledge all members of the committee for their hard work, especially the Member for Fong Lim, who chaired the committee, and the Member for Araluen, who was the deputy chair.

I also thank the Opposition Leader, Gary Higgins; the Member for Karama, Ngaree Ah Kit; the Member for Stuart, Scott McConnell; the Member for Namatjira, Chansey Paech; the Member for Nelson, Gerry Wood; and the Member for Sanderson, Kate Worden. They all served on the select committee. We all know the level of work involved in committees and we sincerely thank you for that.

The minister was just commenting on remembering fondly his days of committee work. In the previous Assembly I was on the Public Accounts Committee for the full four years, and it was an interesting four years.

I thank all the staff who supported the select committee. Their support is vital not only to the running of the committee but for strong outcomes and recommendations to the Assembly. I note from my own committee experience that they remind you of things and organise you.

One of our first actions as a new government in this Assembly was to establish this select committee in October 2016 to explore parliamentary reform. We saw a chaotic and dysfunctional term of government over four years, and it resulted in all-time low levels of confidence in us in our positions.

Territorians sent a clear message at the last election, that they would not put up with it, and we all agree it should never be repeated. As parliamentarians we debate and strive to find solutions to some of the most challenging issues facing the Territory. Territorians must have confidence that all of us here will truly act as their representatives. They must have confidence that their views will be properly reflected. They must have confidence that we will approach those matters with the respect they deserve.

As a government we implemented changes to Question Time. My colleague, the Member for Barkly spoke about that. We have allocated Wednesdays for questions from the Independents and opposition benches, and we brought forward General Business Day to a slightly earlier time frame, allowing for a higher level of community attendance. I think the Wednesday afternoon Question Time period followed by GBD provides for Independent and opposition scrutiny.

The Labor Caucus has previously supported some of the recommendations put forward by the select committee in its green paper, and there has been a high level of communication between me and the SCOPP, including the formal correspondence on a draft of the committee's recommendation in February and March, and attendance at a meeting in March to discuss the government's position. I thank the committee for allowing me that opportunity.

The government notes that this report was tabled to the position of Speaker on 28 March by the Member for Fong Lim as the Chair of the Select Committee on Opening Parliament to the People on 2 May 2017.

The majority of recommendations are agreed to but we will be proposing that the recommendations that I read out at the start will be referred to the Standing Orders Committee for inquiry and report on procedural matters.

One of the reasons we wanted to send those matters to the Standing Orders Committee as they are very procedural in nature that they fit with the standing orders of this House which is essentially our rule book for running the parliament. Also, I note for example in regard to petitions there certainly was a strong and robust debate and we do not want to exclude people or that was have people feel like that we are not including them in the process. The intention around petitions is to provide for opening that up, what would be the threshold to bringing a petition into this House.

We need to ensure that we do represent very diverse electorates. I think in the previous Assembly I will never forget the then Chief Minister laughing that 74 or 90-odd emergency department nurses had signed a petition and I did some maths and figured there were some 1600 staff at RDH and to have nearly 100 of them sign a petition is quite significant. The way they were treated with such disrespect certainly sticks in my mind.

I am looking forward to standing orders working that through so we can ensure, obviously we have a process currently around petitions and I think that works well. We genuinely want to open it up to further debate but how do we get there. That is why there are a number of matters that we have referred off to the Standing Orders Committee so we can look at those and look at what sessional changes need to be made. By referring them off to the Standing Orders Committee, they will report back to the House and there will be further debate at that point. We certainly have looked at the recommendations and there are a number of procedural aspects to implementation. We want to ensure that the standing orders clearly understand those procedural aspects to changes.

I would like to touch on some of the recommendations in detail. On the matter of portfolio scrutiny committees which relates to recommendation 4, we propose that this matter be referred to the Standing Orders Committee to draft terms of reference for these committees. It is requested that the Standing Orders Committee will report back to the House on the Terms of Reference. As I said, at that point we can continue the debate.

I note that the proposal to establish portfolio scrutiny committees has its basis in a discussion paper that was put forward to the Assembly in 2015 by the then Speaker. As I noted in that paper many other legislatures have committees that regularly consider legislation before parliament. The proposal to establish these scrutiny committees is one that the government strongly supports. There has been consideration around how to future proof such committees, the realities of government agencies is that from time to time the realignment of responsibilities becomes necessary.

It is therefore envisaged that these scrutiny committees would be around social and economic so we could ensure that issues do not fit neatly into them. It is anticipated that it would be considered by the Standing Orders Committee as part of the developing the terms of reference that they could establish the names. These groupings and focus provide the required flexibility to respond to changes in department structures and responsibilities whilst future proofing this.

If you look at an issue within my portfolio of health for example, you can look at an issue and it may be more of an economic review needed or it could also be a social impact policy scrutiny. We need to ensure that we certainly cater for that.

The proposed assignment of portfolios as detailed in recommendation 4 is not supported but we certainly are looking forward to moving that to the Standing Orders Committee. The way we felt as a government is once legislation was introduced to the parliament it is envisaged that the chairs of the committees would meet to determine the focus of the bill and refer it to the appropriate scrutiny committee.

We are certainly willing to work with these committees as a government and as the Leader of Government Business. Perhaps if they met on a Thursday lunchtime in the break they could address the legislation that had been introduced that sittings and then work out what is the focus of that legislation. There may be the occasion that a second-reading speech would be done after the luncheon break on a Thursday but I am sure arrangements could be made to cater for that so that we are not keeping members here who may be from out of Darwin, unnecessarily, but we certainly allow the chairs of the committees to determine the focus of the bill and refer it to the appropriate committee.

The select committee report proposes changes to Standing Orders 176, 177 and 178 to provide for the scrutiny committees to take on all the functions of the subordinate legislation parliamentary accounts and legal and constitutional affairs committees for their assigned portfolios. We support that the current level of functions and powers of these established committees be transferred to the new committees. As such recommendation 14 and a new Standing Order 177 are not supported as the powers of the subordinate legislation committee which are proposed in this recommendation go much further than is currently the case.

We strongly support the allocation of Assembly meeting time on Wednesday for the scrutiny committees to conduct business. These committees are to be established to provide further scrutiny of legislation and are considered Legislative Assembly work. Committee work is Assembly work; the allocation of Assembly meeting time reflects this. These committees will give Territorians and opportunity to directly interact with the legislative Assembly. We acknowledge that the committees will need to hold hearings at other time to hear from as many Territorians as possible.

Committees will retain ability for flexibility should they wish to meet outside of sitting times. I have certainly listened to the debate today around estimates, and in our discussion paper prior to the election we raised the option to changes to the estimates process. I understand that it was the former Labor government who

first introduced estimates in the Northern Territory, and I know the Member for Nelson speaking today reiterated that the process was different and I do recollect former members of the House also explaining that process here in this Chamber. It was the former Labor government who introduced the roll of estimates, and it certainly plays a vital role in providing scrutiny of government budget and expenditure.

We have had that process in place for more than 15 years and we feel it is appropriate to consider improvements. We have talked about it today in the house, so I will not go back over it, but we certainly remember the previous chief minister at estimates in 2015, when he certainly was winding the clock down. Prior to the election we propose that consideration beginning to splitting the estimates process into two separate weeks.

One week would remain as the current time in June, to scrutinise the budget expenditure and output by way of budget considerations. The other portion of the estimates would be moved to later in the year to allow scrutiny of agencies annual reports, perhaps largely tabled in the October sittings and it is proposed to hold a week of annual reports scrutiny in November.

As a government we are strongly supportive of this measure. As we have said with all of this, we certainly will be reviewing in 12-month time, but I feel that it is an opportunity to provide that scrutiny, not only to the budget to the consideration of the appropriation bill, but also really focus on those annual reports because they do largely get forgotten, apart from a few adjournment speeches, and there is a lot of information and hard work that goes into them. It would be proposed that an even split of 30 hours would occur for estimates and annual reports; this will allow an appropriate amount of time for both important focuses of the Assembly.

To ensure there is an appropriated scrutiny of all ministers, it is opposed that the combined time for the chief minister and treasurer can appear before the hearings of both estimates and the agency annual reports would not exceed eight hours, which is currently their time frame for the two weeks. For all other minister the global time limit would be seven hours across both hearings, so the ministerial times would be the same, but they would just be split across the week of annual reports and the week of estimates.

Should the Assembly agree to these amendments and changes, it is proposed that this year's estimates committee would take the new format, so we would have a week in June, a week in October or November, and we would 30 hours allocated to each week, and as I have said the global time for chief minister and treasurer will be eight hours, other ministers would be seven. That could be split perhaps the treasurer have five hours in June and two hours in November, you can work it out there.

As such we would propose to the three sitting days currently assigned in June, and I do not think they are actual sitting days, I think they are actually already nominated for estimates, but they would be moved to November. Petitions, I touched on that before but I will just come back onto it. We would like to see a process that allows petitions to be a part of the process a little bit more, and I think sending that Standing Orders Committee, just the complex debate we have heard within the government benches and committee. It was something talked about when I attended.

In achieving our goal of opening parliament to the people and allocating time to these debates we need to make sure the matters debated in the House are truly representative of the Territory. The Standing Orders Committee will provide that opportunity.

I understand there was a high level of debate at the select committee on this matter. The committee members, as with our government members, representing the diversity in the electorates engaged with that debate and provided for it. We will take that across to the Standing Orders hoping we can come up with a process.

We support the acknowledgement of country. We do this as a caucus already, we acknowledge that we gather on the land in Darwin of the Larakia people and pay our respects. We believe it is appropriate we recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as traditional custodians of the lands we meet on. This is nowhere more true than the Northern Territory. It would be fabulous to have the Northern Territory parliament adopt such recognition.

We have our prayers in the morning; it is a moment for reflection. It would be fabulous to acknowledge the traditional owners who allow us to gather on their land and what a beautiful place it is.

For ministerial reports it is proposed that recommendation 26 be referred to the Standing Order Committee to develop procedures for ministerial reports to be read in the Chamber. It is proposed for ministerial

reports that will be debated in the morning session and may be for important issues that may not warrant a full ministerial statement to be debated in parliament. Notice of the topic for discussion would be given on a previous sittings day and debate would be capped at two hours, providing for important information to be shared.

We have spoken extensively over the past week about the tough economic times we are facing in the Territory. There are a number of recommendations which have budgetary implications and we are unable to support them for this reason.

At recommendation 20 the proposed additional staff to provide committee support. The combined additional budget required to bring recommendation 20 is an additional \$500 000, bringing total recurrent funding for committee support to \$1.2m. However, it is expected the streamlining of committee work from three committees to two committees would provide for adequate committee support from existing resources. We are unable to support recommendation 20.

Parliament House only has infrastructure to record audio and video of a single proceeding. The Scott proposes recommendation 21 that funding be provided to enable independent recording for the Lichfield and Ormiston Rooms but this would again require significant investment and we are unable to support recommendation 21.

The Latimer House Guidelines specify the Commonwealth principles on the accountability and relationship between the three branches of government. The Northern Territory population and Legislative Assembly are noted as a challenge the small size when establishing an independent parliamentary service. The establishment of an office of the legislative Assembly or office of the Clerk as an autonomous instrumentally, we are unable to support that recommendation which was 27.

The SCOPP Report recommends the House committee inquiry into the provision of adequate financial analysis service for members. We believe this is already catered for through the Department of Treasury and Finance, so recommendation 28 is not supported.

The SCOPP recommends the House committee investigate the appropriate level and model of library services. We do not support that recommendation. We feel there is current provision provided through the Department of Tourism and Culture through the Northern Territory library. I would like to acknowledge all the library staff; they helped me in opposition in terms of providing information. We get emails each day, as members, each day advising us they are open during the sittings for us to access.

In relation to amendments to the *Audit Act* the Auditor-General noted the *Audit Act* does not provide the power to audit agencies actual effectiveness, efficiency and economy in meeting objectives. We do not support the recommendations in this report but the select committee recommended amendments to the *Audit Act* to provide the power to the Auditor-General that recommendation 16. We believe the recommendation and amendments to the act are not supported, we feel the best process for any such change would be through the relevant minister.

We recognise these are significant changes for running of the Northern Territory Parliament. In implementing these changes we need to make sure as a government and parliament we get it right. We support recommendation 30 which provides for a review of all adopted recommendations after 12 months of operation.