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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

STANDING ORDERS COMMITTEE

REPORT
ON
CONSIDERING APPROPRIATION BILL
IN
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
AND
TIME TAKEN IN DIVISIONS

AUGUST 1992

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

STANDING ORDERS COMMITTEE

SIXTH REPORT

AUGUST 1992

1. MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEE

1.1 On 4 December 1990 the Standing Orders Committee was appointed with the following membership:

Mr Speaker
Mr Coulter
Mr Poole
Mr Bell
Mrs Hickey.

1.2 On 8 October 1991 Mr Coulter was discharged from further attendance on the Committee and Mr Setter was appointed to be a Member of the Committee.

1.3 At its meeting on 14 May 1992, Mr Speaker Dondas was elected Chairman of the Committee.

2. APPROPRIATION BILL - COMMITTEE PROCEDURE

2.1 On Tuesday 19 November 1991, the Assembly passed the following motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Ede:

"That the following matter be referred to the Standing Orders Committee:

- (1) the most appropriate procedure for considering in detail the Departmental Estimates contained within the Appropriation Bill; and
- (2) the Committee report to the Assembly in time to effect any recommended changes before consideration of the 1992-93 Budget."

The question of the most appropriate procedure to be followed when proposed Departmental expenditure contained in an Appropriation Bill is to be considered in Committee of the Whole has been the subject of your Committee's deliberations in the previous two reports. In particular, your Committee has been concerned at the increasing time taken in such consideration.

The following Table sets out the time taken in considering Departmental estimates over the last seven years:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Time taken</u>
1985	4 hours 10 minutes
1986	5 hours 40 minutes
1987	10 hours 10 minutes
1988	10 hours 30 minutes
1989	13 hours 58 minutes

1990
1991

13 hours 44 minutes
26 hours 05 minutes

Unfortunately, procedures previously recommended by your Committee have not resulted in a reduction in time. Indeed, over the years the length of time taken has not even been contained.

At its meeting on 14 May 1992, the Committee had before it a Discussion Paper prepared by the Clerk of the Assembly which discussed a number of options of procedures which could be followed when considering the Appropriation Bill in Committee of the Whole.

The Committee resolved that the Discussion Paper be forwarded to all Members of the Legislative Assembly and that a draft motion be taken back to the Parliamentary Parties for consideration. The draft motion provided for: Members to advise Ministers, on a confidential basis, of proposed questions at least one week prior to consideration of the Appropriation Bill in Committee of the Whole; Ministers to have answers to those questions forwarded by the Clerk to the Members who asked the questions, on a confidential basis, at least 24 hours prior to consideration in Committee of the Whole; all questions and answers to relate to matters of finance and/or fact; written questions to be appropriately incorporated in Hansard and Ministers to answer written questions in Committee of the Whole relating to a Department's estimates seriatim; a period of 20 minutes and no longer to be set aside for supplementary questions and answers when all answers to written questions relating to a Department had been given.

The next meeting of the Committee was held on 18 August 1992 at which Members reported the considerations of the

Parliamentary Parties on the proposed motion. Opposition Members stated that the preferred position of their party was to have the proposed Departmental expenditure considered by an Estimates Committee. This proposition was rejected by the Government Members of the Committee. After further discussion, it was determined that consideration of the matter be postponed until the views of the Parliamentary Parties had again been sought on possible amendments to the motion.

The matter was again considered by your Committee on 20 August 1992. Unfortunately, after hearing reports from the Members on the further consideration by the Parliamentary Parties, it was considered that no agreement could be reached on the matter.

Your Committee therefore reports that it is unable, at this time, to provide the Assembly with a new and improved procedure for the consideration in detail of the Departmental Estimates contained in the Appropriation Bill which would be acceptable to Government and Opposition Members. Your Committee will keep the matter under review.

Your Committee therefore recommends: That for this year at least the practice set out in the Standing Orders and the procedures relating to prior notice of questions which were in place for the consideration of the Appropriation Bill 1991-92 be adhered to for the consideration in Committee of the Whole of the Appropriation Bill 1992-93.

3. TIME TAKEN IN DIVISIONS

At the meeting held on Tuesday 18 August 1992, the

Chairman tabled correspondence between the Deputy Chief Minister, the Honourable Barry Coulter, MLA, and himself relating to the time taken in Divisions in which Mr Coulter drew attention, specifically, to Divisions which are called the one following the other with no intervening debate and to a paper attached to his letter prepared by the Office of the Senate relating to Electronic Voting.

Your Committee gave the matter consideration and, considers that the question of timing of Divisions will again require review prior to the completion of the new Parliament House.

Your Committee therefore further recommends that the Assembly agree to the following motion:

"That, notwithstanding anything contained in the Standing Orders and unless otherwise ordered, the following amendment to Standing Order 161 be adopted on a trial basis as a Sessional Order:

'Add at the end:

'(2) When successive Divisions are taken and there is no intervening debate after the first Division, the Bells for the ensuing Division shall be rung for one minute only.'".

NICK DONDAS

Chairman

20 August 1992