



AUSTRALASIAN STUDY OF PARLIAMENT GROUP

NEWSLETTER – SEPTEMBER 2011

The Australasian Study of Parliament Group (ASPG) is a politically non-partisan body established to encourage and stimulate research, writing, teaching and discussion about parliamentary institutions, particularly those in Australasia and the South Pacific.

The ASPG has Chapters in all States and Territories of Australia and in New Zealand. Its membership consists of parliamentarians, parliamentary officers, academics, teachers, journalists, students and other interested individuals. For further information refer to the ASPG website www.aspg.org.au.

Welcome

Welcome to the latest issue of the ASPG Newsletter. This is a twice-yearly publication in which the Chapters are urged to tell all ASPG members of their activities and submit items of particular interest to current and prospective members. You can also make use of the Membership Application form at the back of the Newsletter which allows new members to join and existing members to renew their membership.

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Editorial

The topic of this year's conference, "The Parliament v. the Executive - Who wins?" is most appropriate given the circumstances of a hung parliament in Canberra, recent changes in Queensland, and Government minorities in Upper Houses. It is also a time when many voters question the efficacy of parliaments, standards of parliamentary behaviour and the substance of government policy. It is also a time when occurrences throughout the world have thrown huge responsibilities on both Parliament and the Executive. The Global Financial Crisis, natural disasters of extraordinary proportion and civil unrest in many countries have created both tensions and questions. It has also highlighted the lack of knowledge on the part of most people as to how parliaments work and what should be our expectations. It seems that an adversarial situation has arisen and evidence suggests that this is unhelpful to say the least. The doctrine of separation of powers as articulated by the French social commentator and political thinker Montesquieu advocated constitutionalism, the preservation of civil liberties, the abolition of slavery, gradualism, moderation, peace, internationalism and social and economic justice with due respect to national and local tradition. He also believed in justice and the rule of law; detested all forms of extremism and fanaticism; put his faith in the balance of power and the division of authority as a weapon against despotic rule by individuals or groups or majorities and approved of social equality, but not to the point which threatened individual liberty. Montesquieu is credited with being the ideological co-founder of the American Constitution. This begs the question: Do we need to

go back to the drawing board rather than tinker at the edges?

Special Feature

Lyn Lovelock retires as Clerk of the Legislative Council in New South on 7 October 2011 and sat in the Chamber for the last time on 16 September. She gives us her reflections on an outstanding career in the following article.



Reflections of a Clerk

When I first came to work for the NSW Legislative Council in 1987 I entered a different world. The management of the Parliament was entirely male, secretaries were called amanuenses, external recruitment until then had only occurred at the entry level, and promotion was based on seniority rather than merit. So when the Clerk died in office in 1971, every member of staff moved up one place in the hierarchy and a new junior officer was recruited.

Even in 1987, the place seemed a little archaic. Perhaps I should have been less surprised by this – considering that during my first meeting with the then Clerk I was asked, as an unmarried, childless woman of 30, what my intentions were in that regard, since maternity leave was not something which would be viewed favourably. I was also instructed that woman did not wear trousers in the office! Despite this rather inauspicious beginning (and after having gone out and somewhat defiantly bought a pant suit) I accepted appointment to the Council staff as a mid-level manager, a decision I have only occasionally had cause to regret.

Being a Clerk is a rather unusual job. Most non-parliamentary people have no idea what is involved. To many, you are some sort of clerical officer – I still receive fliers inviting me, as a clerical assistant, to attend writing and office administration courses aimed at junior staff – while others just assume that as you work for the Parliament you are either a political staffer or transcribe debates from the House.

All that aside, though, clerking a House of Parliament would have to rank as one of the best, most interesting and inspiring positions around. Where else do you get to work alongside such a wide variety of members, giving advice and shaping tactics, seeking out novel solutions to difficult problems, ensuring that practice accords with constitutional requirements, and new precedents do not come with unintended and unwanted consequences? The field of parliamentary practice is both fascinating and challenging.

It has been particularly challenging promoting community engagement with the Parliament and its work. I believe that it is an unfortunate and alarming situation that members of Parliament are held in such so low regard by the public. I have found members, in the main, to be very hard working and principled people, with a genuine desire to provide good government to the people they represent. While I acknowledge that there have been members who not only push the envelope but who have actively engaged in corrupt conduct, this is true of almost any profession. Yet the exposure of a corrupt doctor or banker, for instance, does not result in the wholesale condemnation of the profession in the way that it does with members of parliament.

The media, and in particular the rabidly ideological talkback radio and TV propagandists must, in part at least, take responsibility for this rather sorry situation. It is all too easy to fire up the masses, to whip up a frenzy of hostility amongst poorly-informed voters towards their elected representatives. It is a tactic of inducing public distrust of government, of undermining confidence in our democratic institutions. Ultimately, as we see all too often at both the state and federal level, the public are disconnecting with the political process, concluding that their elected representatives are all crooks and that government is both too expensive and no good. Within this political disconnect the media, who are neither elected nor accountable, are free to promote their own agendas and to vilify any member who dares to speak out against them.

This is not a situation which, I believe, can be tolerated in a modern and healthy democracy, and I sincerely hope that something happens soon to halt this trend.

I came to the parliament as a relatively young but politically aware woman, with clear views of my place along the political spectrum. During nearly 25 years of parliamentary service, I have aged and mellowed, learned from and passed on knowledge to both

members and staff, and in doing so have re-considered and re-examined, although not necessarily changed, almost every political opinion I have ever held. Clerks sit through impassioned debate on a myriad of subjects. I have seen members brought to tears, both by their own arguments and by those of others. I have personally felt anger and irritation, frustration and glee at the antics of members, and on occasion have struggled to keep myself anchored to the chair and not rise up in protest or support of a particular viewpoint being expressed in the House.

Yet it is the hallmark of any good Clerk that they remain politically and emotionally neutral, both in the House and in all aspects of their work. There are good reasons for this. It is a fundamental principle of parliamentary democracy that the Houses of Parliament are elected by the people through a system of representative government. As Clerks, we serve those who have been elected as members, regardless of whether they are in Government, in Opposition or sit on the cross benches. We must be independent and give our advice without fear or favour, even when that advice proves to be less than convenient to those who have sought it. And we must never betray a confidence or allow personal opinion to influence the advice we give. I set myself a particular yardstick very early on in my parliamentary career – the day I allowed my personal views to influence my advice to a member would be the day I resigned. I am happy to say that such a day never arrived.

It has been an honour and a privilege for me to serve the NSW Legislative Council. I have been fortunate to work for a House which has provided me with so many interesting and formidable challenges, as well as some rewarding highlights. During the time I have served the Council, it has been a leader in the field of review of the Executive and I am proud to have been associated with some of its singular achievements. I have also been privileged to have worked with a truly amazing team of officers, who have given me tremendous commitment, loyalty and support.

I leave Parliament with many friends, both members and staff, a passionate love for democracy, despite its many flaws, and with a desire to continue my work in the field of parliamentary institutional strengthening in countries where democracy is not as securely entrenched as it is in Australia. I also have many stories to tell – although since I am a Clerk, do not expect to be hearing any of them any time soon!

Parliaments of the ASPG

Parliament Houses are amongst our most historic and important buildings in our community and yet they are so much taken for granted. The second parliament of this series is the Victorian Parliament, venue of this year's conference. The material has been provided by the Education Office of the Parliament. We hope you find it interesting.

Parliament of Victoria

Parliament House is one of Melbourne's best known landmarks. Facing the intersection of Spring and Bourke streets, the west facade of the building; sweeping steps, elegant lamps, grand colonnade, suggests solidity and strength.



View from above of the Legislative Council chamber.

Appearances are deceptive. Parliament House is incomplete. The generous vision of nineteenth century architect, Peter Kerr, has not been fully realised.

In 1851, Governor Charles La Trobe instructed the colonial surveyor, Robert Hoddle, to select a site for the colony's new parliament to meet. Hoddle selected a site on the eastern hill at the top of Bourke Street, which at that time, when few buildings were more than two storeys high, commanded a view of the whole city. A competition was held for a design for the building, but all the entries were rejected and the government architect, Charles Pasley, came up with a design of his own.

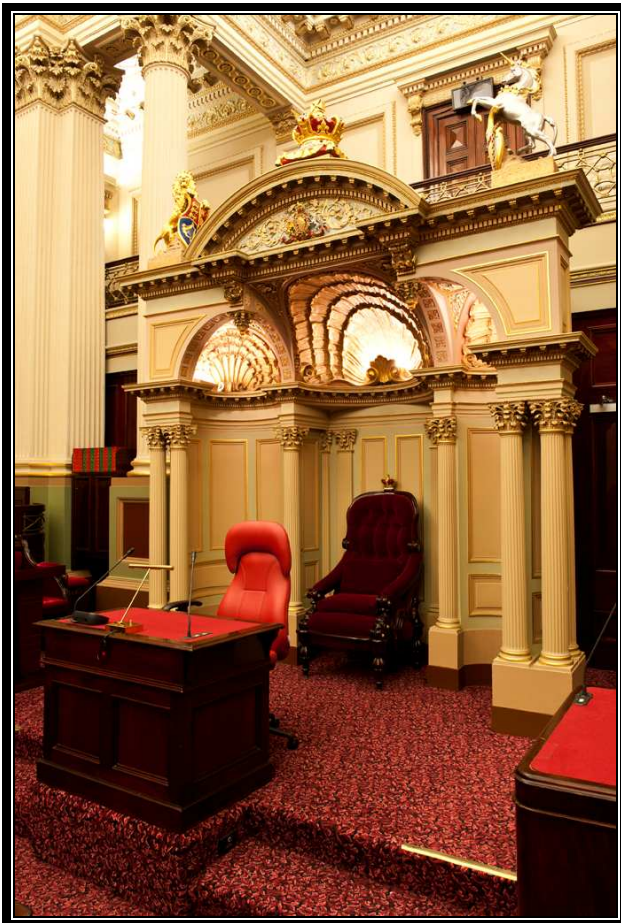
In December 1855 construction began on the site in Spring Street, and the building continued in stages between 1856 and 1929.

The chambers for the Victorian Legislative Assembly and the Victorian Legislative Council were finished in 1856, at which time Bourke Street ran between the two chambers. Building at a rate that now seems extraordinary, the Legislative Council and Legislative

Assembly were sufficiently complete to permit the first Parliament of Victoria to meet there and begin work in November 1856. The work had taken just 10 months.

To colonial Victorians the chambers looked impressive. Two free-standing, bluestone buildings, unconnected and rising three stories tall on the highest part of Melbourne, they dominated the city.

Melburnians were even more impressed by the interiors. Classical decorations, gold-leaf, columns, statuary, burgundy carpets and seating in the Legislative Council, forest-green in the Legislative Assembly duplicating the Westminster colours, added sophistication to an otherwise callow Melbourne. Its citizens were overwhelmed.



Detail of President's Chair, Legislative Council

No sooner were the Chambers complete than work began on the Library. Construction of this eastern wing began in 1858 and was completed in 1860.

This had the effect of joining the two legislative chambers at the rear, thereby forming a 'U-shaped' building.

In 1877-9 work proceeded on the Grand Hall (renamed in 1887 Queen's Hall, after Queen Victoria) and the Vestibule. This had the effect of filling the empty space between the chambers and the Library. Queen's Hall was used for parliamentary receptions and formal banquets, while the Vestibule offered a formal entry to the expanding building. Especially noteworthy in the Vestibule was the intricate mosaic of Minton floor tiles, one roundel of which bore the words from Proverbs 11:14 'Where no Counsel is the People Fall; but in the Multitude of Counsellors there is Safety'.

In the 1880s, at the height of the great boom fuelled by the Victorian Gold Rush, it was decided to add a classical colonnade and portico facing Spring St, which today gives the building its monumental character. This was completed in 1892. The north wing was completed in 1893 and refreshment rooms at the back of the building were added in 1929.

Pasley and Kerr's design included plans for a dome, but these were abandoned when a sharp depression began in 1891, and the dome was never built.

For more information please go to www.parliament.vic.gov.au/about/the-parliament-building/history-of-the-building

Coming events – ASPG National Conference 'The Executive vs Parliament – who wins?'

Location: Parliament House, Melbourne

Dates: Thursday 6 October to Saturday 8 October 2011

Theme: 'The Executive vs. Parliament - who wins?'

For any questions or information, please contact:

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Coming events – Australian Heraldry Society lecture

The Australian Heraldry Society is proud to present a lecture by Professor Stephanie Trigg FAHA of the School of Culture and Communication, University of Melbourne - "The Traditional, The Quaint And The Medieval In Australian Parliamentary Practice".

On Thursday 13 October 2011 at the Parliamentary Theatre, NSW Parliament House, Macquarie St, Sydney. Doors open at 5:45pm, lecture commences at 6:30pm



This illustrated talk explores the medieval component of parliamentary rituals, objects and traditions, especially Federal Parliament's treasured copy of the Magna Carta, and the offices of the Serjeant and the Usher of the Black Rod and their accompanying instruments of authority: the Mace and the Black Rod itself. What is the relationship between the medievalism of such objects and practices and the idea of "tradition" in modern Australian parliamentary practice?

Entry is by gold coin donation and there will also be a raffle. Refreshments will be served beforehand.

Please RSVP by Monday 10 October 2011 by contacting the Hon. Secretary, Stephen Szabo, on 0431 701 055, by e-mail on secretary@heraldryaustralia.org, or by post at PO Box 107, Lawson NSW 2783.

The Purposes of The Australian Heraldry Society are: The advancement of education in the science, art, history, practice and development of heraldry and allied subjects and the encouragement of their study and practice in Australia.

Coming events – 22nd World Congress of Political Science

Research Committee of Legislative Specialists (RCLS - a committee of the International Political Science Association)

In the last issue of the Newsletter we reported establishing a link with the RCLS. A visit to the website www.rcls-ipsa.org will show their link to ASPG and notice of our Annual Conference. In reciprocation we publish this coming event.

22nd World Congress of Political Science
8-12 July 2012
www.ipsa.org/events/congress/madrid2012/congress-theme

Who among you would be interested to participate at the upcoming IPSA World Congress in Madrid and to contribute with a paper to a panel on "Evolutionary morphology of politics", as suggested by Michael Ilyin and Werner J. Patzelt? For further information contact Prof. Dr. Werner J. Patzelt Email: werner.patzelt@tu-dresden.de

Outline of the topic: Time matters. But it also complicates comparative research. Typical challenges like choosing an adequate level of abstraction, coping with the n/v-problem (too few cases for too many variables), and finding ways for adequate data analysis dramatically increase with introduction of temporal variables. They further increase when cross-cultural and cross-historical comparisons are undertaken. And they often become nearly insurmountable when political scientists and historians try to cooperate. The main reason is that political science, since its successful behavioral revolution and even more in the times of rational choice modeling, has developed into the nomothetic direction of science, whereas historians use to claim that individual cases must be approached in an idiographic way: They cannot be brought under generalizing concepts, especially if they are too dissimilar.

But are there valid, even objective indicators for sufficient similarity or too much dissimilarity? Without them, we are lead into never-ending discussions about false analogies and mistaken parallels, and are discouraged about wide-range comparisons. This is an unwelcome state of the art, in particular for those who draw inspiration from Historical Institutionalism and are convinced that comparative research should be cross-historical and not capitulate in view of institutions or political patterns that apparently belong to quite different cultures. Now it seems that the very concept of similarity/dissimilarity is a central source of annoying problems for communication, understanding, and pattern recognition in comparative research. This is apparently true for political science and its attempts to compare, or even classify, political ideas, procedures, and institutions over culture and over time.

Meet a couple of our ASPG personalities



Penny Cavanagh (South Australian Chapter)

Penny Cavanagh is the Education Officer for the South Australian Parliament and an enthusiastic supporter of the Australasian Study of Parliament Group attending the Australasian conferences for many years. She is and was a hard working member of the South Australian chapter assisting in hosting the 2007 conference in Adelaide. As Education Officer she is keen to learn as much as she can about parliamentary practice and procedure and share this knowledge with others.

Penny started her teaching career in Woomera and furthered her studies into the Legal Education field. She is currently Secretary to the Legal Studies Teachers Association in SA and has previously been President. She taught at Waikerie, Nuriootpa in the renowned Barossa wine district and wrote legal studies courses for students in distance education.

Penny won the seconded teaching position as Education Officer Parliament House in 1994. As Education Officer SA Parliament she is responsible for the strategic and creative development, management, administration and promotion of the Parliament of South Australia education program for schools. The program caters for Reception to Year 12 students and teachers and incorporates the aims and strategies of the Parliament and Department of Education and Children's Services.

In 2002 she received a Churchill Fellowship and travelled to Washington, New York – United Nations, Edinburgh and London Westminster “to investigate innovative resources and educational programmes developed by other Parliaments – UK, USA.”

Penny has a Graduate Diploma in the Teaching of Legal Studies, Bachelor of Education and in 2007 completed the Queensland University Technology “Parliamentary Law, Practice & Procedure” Unit.

Therese Arseneau (New Zealand Chapter)

Therese Arseneau has been the convenor of the New Zealand chapter since 2009 – a challenge at times as Therese lives in Christchurch but the branch is based in Wellington. Therese enjoys all things parliamentary and has studied the Parliaments of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the UK. Prior to moving to New Zealand, she was a member of the executive of the Canadian Study of Parliament Group.

Therese is a political scientist with a particular interest in elections and electoral systems. A Canadian by birth, she completed a BA Honours at St Francis Xavier University, Canada, and an MPhil (Politics) and DPhil (Politics) at Oxford University, UK which she attended as a Commonwealth Scholar. She lectures in New Zealand politics and is a Senior Fellow in the School of Political Science and Communication at the University of Canterbury. She co-leads an annual field trip to Parliament for Canterbury's political science honours students.

Therese has been a political and election night analyst for CBC TV and Radio in Canada, and TVNZ and TV3 in New Zealand. She was also a regular panellist on TVNZ's Sunday morning political show Q+A. In 2006 she travelled to the US to observe the mid-term Congressional elections as part of the State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program. She is currently a member of the Electoral Commission's Referendum Expert Advisory Panel. This panel provides advice to the Commission on the content of its public education programme for New Zealand's upcoming referendum on the voting system.

Therese is also Chair of the Board of the Christchurch Symphony Orchestra and Southern Opera, Vice-Chair of the Rangī Ruru Girls' School Board and past-President of the New Zealand Political Studies Association. In her spare time Therese enjoys running, travelling, tramping and camping with Don and their three children.

Around the Chapters

New Zealand

It has been an unusual year for the New Zealand chapter with both the Parliament and ASPG seminars affected by the continuing earthquakes in Christchurch and the surrounding area. The legislative responses to the disaster, their passage through the House, and the powers conferred by them are likely to be the topic for a seminar in 2012.

In May the Urgency Project reported its findings. The project (run by Claudia Geiringer, Polly Higbee, and Professor Elizabeth McLeay) created a database of every use of urgency by the New Zealand House of Representatives between 1987 and 2010. It was conducted under the institutional auspices of the New Zealand Centre for Public Law and the Rule of Law Committee of the New Zealand Law Society and was funded by the New Zealand Law Foundation. A number of past and current members of Parliament were interviewed about what factors motivated them to use urgency, and what factors constrained them from doing so. The three researchers presented some of their findings to an ASPG seminar in April. The seminar was well-attended with a lot of interest from a broad audience.

The second seminar of the year was a reflective look back on the Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) voting system that New Zealand adopted for general elections from 1996. The decisive referendum followed a Royal Commission on the Electoral System. We were lucky enough to have the former Electoral Commission Chief Executive and member of the Royal Commission, Dr Paul Harris, and Radio New Zealand's Political Editor Brent Edwards. Both reflected on what has happened in the nearly 20 years from the original referendum and after 15 years of MMP. At this seminar there was standing room only and extremely positive feedback on the speakers and the topic. A further referendum on the future of New Zealand's electoral system will be held in conjunction with November's general election.

The third seminar focused on the wide-ranging constitutional review announced by the Government at the end of 2010 and what it could do to reform and improve Parliament. Dr Jonathan Boston and Amy Adams MP gave their opinions on what this would include. Options included a number of possible electoral-constitutional reforms, including the term of Parliament, whether it should be fixed or not (or semi-fixed as in Sweden), whether New Zealand needs a constructive vote of no-confidence, and whether a provision to enable non-MPs to be appointed as Ministers is needed. Grant Robertson MP offered comments and chaired the session.

With the general election scheduled for 26 November, the final seminar of the year is due to be held in September before the House rises. We have enjoyed a successful year with seminars very well attended and intend to continue this into next year.

- Andrea O'Brien

New South Wales

Replica Black Rod for the Legislative Council Chamber



Steven Reynolds, Usher of the Black Rod and former Clerk of the Parliaments, John Evans, with the replica Black Rod.

Every day the chamber and support staff gives talks to school groups and tour groups on the role of the Legislative Council. When questions are asked about the Black Rod visitors are always told to look at it in display in the cabinet as they exit out to the foyer. But now at the request of the Education and Community Relations Section visitors will be able to get a closer look.

The former Clerk of the Legislative Council, John Evans, who is an accomplished woodworker was commissioned to make a replica suitable for school groups (seen below presenting the replica to Stephen Reynolds. Using the dimensions of the actual Black Rod, John carved and painted a replica made out of rosewood from the far North Coast of NSW. The replica rod has already been used several times and can be found in the Chamber when the House is not in session.

- Stephen Reynolds

A new Parliament, a new Government and new practices and procedures

At the March 2011 general election, the Liberal/National Coalition swept to power, taking 69 out of the 93 seats in the Legislative Assembly. In the Legislative Council, however, where half the House was up for election, no one party won an absolute majority, with the Coalition holding 19 of the 42 seats in the House.

After the election, two petitions were lodged with the Court of Disputed Returns over election results. The first of these alleged that there had been a miscount

by the Electoral Commission for the final two seats in the Legislative Council, but was withdrawn. The second, which claimed a number of irregularities and/or illegal practices related to 'fraudulent how to vote cards' in the seat of Wollongong, was dismissed by the Court.

The opening of the new 55th Parliament has already seen a number of 'firsts'. The Parliament was opened according to Commission in the usual way and the two Houses proceeded to elect their Presiding Officers. The Assembly elected its first female Speaker. Subsequently, in a new procedure, Her Excellency the Governor attended Parliament House where both newly elected Presiding Officers and the members of each House were presented to the Governor. In another first, the Governor addressed both Houses jointly in the Legislative Council Chamber regarding the new Government's legislative program.

A number of sessional orders were also adopted which changed the routine of business in both Houses, particularly the days on which the Houses sit and the business to be conducted. During the preceding Parliament, the Assembly sat from Tuesday to Friday, however there was no Question Time, divisions or quorum calls held on the Friday. Under the new routine of business, the Assembly follows a two-week four day pattern, sitting Tuesday to Friday in the first week, and Monday to Thursday in the second week. Question Time is now held on every sitting day. The Council initially adopted a fortnightly sitting pattern similar to that of the Assembly, before moving in the spring sitting period to a regular Tuesday to Friday sitting week, with Friday set aside for private members' business. In the previous parliament, the Council routinely sat Tuesdays to Thursdays, but not Friday.

One of the initiatives introduced by the new Government was for the Assembly to discuss petitions with 10,000 or more signatures once a week. Sessional orders now provide for this discussion to take the place of the matter of public importance on the third sitting day. This initiative has proved popular, with eight such petitions being lodged to date. Ministers are also required to table a written response to petitions containing 500 or more signatures.

In the Council, sessional orders have been amended to introduce greater flexibility in the bringing forward and management of items of private members business before the House. Another initiative was the introduction of time limits on government bills in the

House. This followed a highly controversial debate on the new Government's public sector wages policy during which two speakers spoke for almost 6 hours continuously, and the Government ultimately applied the guillotine to close down the debate. This was the first application of the guillotine since 1906.

The new Parliament also passed an amendment to the Constitution Act to prevent the prorogation of Parliament prior to Australia Day in an election year. This followed the controversial prorogation of the 54th Parliament in late December 2010, seemingly in an attempt by the Government of the day to avoid a parliamentary committee inquiry into its Gentrader transactions.

The Assembly committee system has also undergone a major restructure. In addition to traditional committees such as Public Accounts, Legislation Review, the Standing Committee on Road Safety and several committees with oversight functions, the Assembly now also administers three new specialist standing committees that examine issues relating to legal affairs, social policy and state and regional development, as well as five new portfolio committees that cover community services, economic development, environment and regulation, law and justice and transport and infrastructure. The Council committee system has been re-established in its usual form from past Parliaments, although there has been some consternation concerning the appointment of Government chairs to some of the General Purpose Standing Committees. In the past, the General Purpose Standing Committees have tended to have non-Government chairs.

- Cheryl Samuels and Stephen Frappell

Northern Territory

Electoral Cycle

Thursday 25 August marked one year out from the Northern Territory's next general election. Whilst the parties are in election mode, officers of the Assembly are preparing for the induction of incoming Members, separation of outgoing Members and the associated changes in Electorate Office staff.

Constitutional Convention

In March next year, NT citizens will vote in local government elections. At the same time, they will vote for 50 delegates (plus reserves) to participate in a Constitutional Convention run over 10 days in April. Sitting members of the Legislative Assembly, Senators and Members of the House of Representatives are

ineligible to nominate to be elected as a delegate and candidates who nominate as delegates will not be allowed to represent any political party. The idea of the Convention is to come up with a proposed constitution for the Northern Territory to better arm the NT to discuss terms and conditions of statehood with the Commonwealth. The proposed constitution is expected to be put to a referendum in 2014 (well separated from the general electoral cycle). On 1 September, the bipartisan NT Constitutional Convention Committee announced, in conjunction with the NT Government, that 16 and 17 year-olds will not only be allowed to vote in delegate elections but will also be eligible to nominate for election as a delegate. The now defunct Statehood Steering Committee put a great deal of effort into educating senior secondary students about what statehood would mean for the Territory so it will be interesting to see how this youth strategy plays out. The Legislative Assembly has an Office of Statehood which is making the necessary arrangements for the Convention in conjunction with the Northern Territory Electoral Commission.

New Select Committee

By resolutions of the Assembly on 17 and 18 August, a Select Committee on Youth Suicide was established and is to report by the first sitting after February 2012. Government Members on the Committee are Ms Scrymgour (Chair), Ms Walker and Mr Gunner (nominated by the Leader of Government Business). Opposition Members are Ms Purick and Mr Styles (nominated by the Leader of the Opposition). Ms Anderson (Independent) was nominated as a Committee Member in the terms of an amending motion moved by Dr Burns and agreed to by the Assembly on 18 August 2011.

- Robyn Smith

Queensland

As part of recent historic reforms to the Parliament a new system of portfolio-based committees was established on 16 June 2011. The reforms originate from a review of the parliamentary committee system by the Parliament's Committee System Review Committee, which reported in December last year. The new committee system replaces the previous committee system that had operated since 1995.

Each of these new committees is aligned to specific areas of government responsibility and have specific powers to examine Bills introduced into the Parliament as well as government expenditure. The portfolio committees are Finance and Administration

Committee; Legal Affairs, Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services Committee; Industry, Education, Training and Industrial Relations Committee; Environment, Agriculture, Resources and Energy Committee; Community Affairs Committee; Health and Disabilities Committee; Transport, Local Government and Infrastructure Committee. As well as the portfolio committees, there is an Ethics Committee and the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee continues.

Most Bills once introduced will now be referred to the portfolio committee for the relevant subject area. The committee can call for submissions, hold public hearings and consult with stakeholders about the Bill. The committee will then table a report on its consideration of the Bill, prior to the Bill being debated and voted on by Members of Parliament. The new portfolio committees will also undertake the annual estimates process, part of the Parliament's budget review process.

The most controversial element of the new committee structure is the establishment of a Committee of the Legislative Assembly which has a membership of senior executive positions from Government and Opposition. It takes all authority from the Speaker except in the Parliamentary Chamber. It assumes control of the Standing Orders, parliamentary administration and the management of the parliamentary buildings. The Speaker is permitted to attend meetings when standing orders are being considered but has no voting rights. This aspect of the reforms is the subject of two papers, one for and one against at the Annual Conference.

Your contribution – March 2012 issue

The deadline for submissions for the next issue is 15th February 2012. Contributions and comments should be forwarded to the editor at gavelr@bigpond.com

We would like to introduce 'Letters to the Editor' in subsequent edition so if you wish to raise a matter or make a comment please forward your letter to the editor at gavelr@bigpond.com. Name and address must be provided although on request may be withheld. Letters should be no more than 300 words.

Help build our membership – sign up a new member. The greater the membership, the more we can do for you. If every member signed up one new colleague we would double our membership. Take the challenge!

Membership

The ASPG provides an outstanding opportunity to establish links with others in the parliamentary community. Membership includes:

- Subscription to the ASPG Journal *Australasian Parliamentary Review*;
- Concessional rates for the ASPG Conference; and
- Participation in local Chapter events.

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- Journal Subscriptions A\$70

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