

Keeping the Executive Honest: The Modern Legislative Council Committee System

by David Clune. Legislative Council of NSW, Sydney, 2013, 74pp (PDF available on the Legislative Council website and printed version from the Legislative Council Office)

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This stylish monograph commemorates the 25th anniversary of the introduction of a NSW Legislative Council Standing Committee system. It is good news that the President of the Council, Hon Don Harwin MLC, welcomes it in his Foreword as the first instalment of a major history project. Clearly, those interested in the actual working of parliamentary institutions will value access to former MLCs' recollections of this process of institutional reform.

This is especially true when the interviewers are well-qualified to ask productive questions which induce relevant reminiscences from leading participants. David Blunt, the Clerk of the Parliaments, and David Clune, formerly the NSW Parliament's Historian, are an excellent choice in this respect. In a welcome development, transcripts of the oral history interviews that form the basis of the project will be made available on the NSW Parliament's website.

David Clune is to be congratulated on crafting the interview transcripts into a readable and informative history of the development of the Upper House committee system from 1988 to the present. The Legislative Council deserves praise for producing such a high quality publication. The monograph contains a number of valuable Appendices. The First gives comprehensive biographical details and shows the interviewees were appropriate choices. The complete list of Standing Committee inquiries in Appendix B demonstrates the scope of the new system. 'Keeping the Executive Honest' is a worthy challenge, but it is just as important to focus on checking, and hopefully contributing to, executive effectiveness. Interviews providing case studies of particular inquiries and their outcomes could illustrate the characteristics of effective inquiries. Are the proper procedures observed in the follow up by governments to committee reports? What is the pattern of government and bureaucratic response to reports? How often do they affect legislation or administrative practice? These and similar questions should be explored in future monographs – also with meaty appendices, please.