



Legislative Assembly of New South Wales

# Standing Orders and Procedure Committee

Report 6/57 – October 2021

Modernisation and reform of practices and procedures: ePetitions Review

Interim Report







LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

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Modernisation and reform of practices and  
procedures: ePetitions Review

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The motto of the coat of arms for the state of New South Wales is “Orta recens quam pura nites”. It is written in Latin and means “newly risen, how brightly you shine”.

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# Membership

<b>CHAIR</b>	The Hon. Jonathan O'Dea MP
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## Terms of reference

The Standing Orders and Procedure Committee has been appointed to inquire into, and report on any matter relating to the standing orders or procedures of the House and its committees.

## Speaker's foreword

Electronic petitions, or ePetitions, have been a real success story for the Legislative Assembly since they were introduced in August 2020. New South Wales residents can now bring their issues to the attention of the Parliament easily and quickly. The timing was fortunate – at a time when so many in our community are not able to move around and collect signatures on a paper petition, they can still access ePetitions.

In the Committee's interim report, tabled in October 2019, we recommended a process to be adopted to permit the Legislative Assembly to receive ePetitions. The information technology infrastructure to permit ePetitions was developed and, on 29 July 2020, the House adopted sessional orders to permit ePetitions. The first ePetition was open for signatures on 10 August 2020.

The Committee resolved to undertake a review of the operation of ePetitions and the associated sessional orders, to be completed within twelve months of the sessional orders being in operation. This report summarises the review and makes findings and recommendations for the information of the House and the community more broadly.

ePetitions have been well-received by the community they exist to serve. There are no major changes proposed to the ePetitions process, but opportunities to enhance their impact will be actively considered.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the excellent work of staff from the Department of the Legislative Assembly and the Department of Parliamentary Services. While it is clearly a team effort to design and implement a new process, I particularly thank Simon Johnston and Krista Meulengracht for their contribution.

Finally, I express my thanks to members of the Committee from all parties for their continued collaborative approach to these reforms.



**The Hon. Jonathan O'Dea MP**

Chair



# Recommendations

## Recommendation 1 \_\_\_\_\_ 7

That the sessional orders and business process be amended to allow ePetitions to be open for periods of either three weeks, twelve weeks (three months) or twenty-four weeks (six months).

## Recommendation 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 13

That the Department of the Legislative Assembly send an email to signatories when the ePetition closes rather than when the ePetition is received.

## Recommendation 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 13

That the Department of the Legislative Assembly continue to implement opportunities for improved engagement with signatories.

## Recommendation 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 15

That the Department of the Legislative Assembly communicate with signatories of a 20,000 signature ePetition to advise them of a debate where applicable. The communication would provide a hyperlink to the Parliament's webcast to the debate itself on the day and to a recorded broadcast after the event.

# Terminology

<b>Announced</b>	The Clerk (or the Speaker for 10,000 signature paper petitions and 20,000 signature ePetitions) announces the petitions that have been lodged with the Clerk through the Table Office, or in the case of ePetitions, after the ePetition closes for signatures.
<b>The Committee</b>	The Standing Orders and Procedure Committee.
<b>The Department</b>	The Department of the Legislative Assembly.
<b>Petitioner</b>	A person who creates an ePetition on the Parliament of New South Wales' website.
<b>Presented</b>	When a paper petition is provided to the Clerk through the Legislative Assembly's Table Office it is said to be 'lodged' or 'presented' by the presenting Member. <sup>1</sup> ePetitions are considered lodged once the petition is no longer open for signatures.
<b>Presenting Member</b>	The Member who has agreed to present the petition in the House.
<b>Received</b>	Once the petition has been announced in the House it is considered received, unless a motion is moved and agreed to the next sitting day that the petition 'not be received'. <sup>2</sup>
<b>Review period</b>	The period from 1 August 2020 to 30 April 2021, the first nine months of operation of ePetitions.
<b>Signatories</b>	The people who have signed their name to a petition.
<b>Submitted</b>	When a prospective petitioner submits an ePetition to the Parliament's website for the Department's review.
<b>Supporters</b>	The minimum five people required for an ePetition to be considered valid and opened to the public for signature. <sup>3</sup>
<b>Tabled paper</b>	A petition that has been received by the House is referred to as a 'tabled paper' in the House records.

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<sup>1</sup> Sessional Order 123A sets out the procedure for how Member is to present ePetitions.

<sup>2</sup> Standing Order 124.

<sup>3</sup> Sessional Order 121A(4) specifies that at least five people must support the ePetition before it is open to the public for signatures, with the petitioner and supporters all residents of New South Wales.

# Chapter One – The Operation of Electronic Petitions in New South Wales

## Background into ePetitions and this Review

- 1.1 Many Australian and international parliaments have the capacity to receive electronic petitions. Some of those electronic petitions are more digital than others. Until August 2020, however, the NSW Parliament did not have that capacity. Hard copy paper petitions were the only way to petition the Parliament.
- 1.2 In August 2020, the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales began accepting electronic petitions (ePetitions), using a fully electronic (end-to-end) process recommended by the Standing Orders and Procedures Committee in a report tabled in October 2019.<sup>4</sup> ePetitions complement hard-copy paper petitions, which continue to serve an important role.
- 1.3 On 29 July 2020, in an addendum to its Interim Report 3/57, the Committee resolved to undertake a review of the operation of ePetitions. The scope of the review was set out as follows:
- a) The Committee will review the operation of ePetitions following the adoption of the sessional orders by the House and consider whether changes are needed in relation to:
    - The threshold number of electronic signatures required to trigger a debate in the House (20,000 for ePetitions; 10,000 for paper petitions).
    - The adequacy of requirements to identify signatories as residents of New South Wales and issues relating to privacy.
    - The resource implications for the Department of the Legislative Assembly of administering the ePetitions process.
    - Any other relevant matters.
  - b) The Committee will complete a review of the operation of ePetitions within twelve months of the sessional orders being adopted by the House.<sup>5</sup>
- 1.4 On 24 June 2021, the Department of the Legislative Assembly provided a review paper for the consideration of the Committee, which included a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the operation of ePetitions from 1 August 2020 to 30 April 2021.
- 1.5 This report sets out the Committee's findings and recommendations, including a recommendation to make a minor change to the sessional orders regulating ePetitions. The Committee is satisfied that ePetitions are operating as intended,

<sup>4</sup> 'Modernisation and reform of practices and procedures: ePetitions', [Report 2/57](#), tabled in Oct 2019.

<sup>5</sup> The review was outlined in an [addendum](#) to [Report 3/57](#) (June 2020), tabled in July 2020.

with only minor changes required to improve the process and enhance the reach and impact of ePetitions.

### **The current process for receiving ePetitions**

- 1.6 The process for receiving petitions (both paper petitions and ePetitions) is set out in Chapter 9 of the Consolidated Standing and Sessional Orders. In developing it, the Committee considered processes from a range of Australian and international parliaments.
- 1.7 Petitioners create their ePetitions directly online through the Parliament's website. To create a petition, the petitioner must be a resident of New South Wales, must provide their identity and contact information, and the email contact of at least five people who will support the petition. They must also identify one Member of the Legislative Assembly who they wish to 'present' the petition.
- 1.8 After a petition is created, the Department of the Legislative Assembly reviews the ePetition to ensure that it meets the requirements for petitions set out in the Standing and Sessional Orders. This stage can involve editing the petition text, in consultation with the petitioner.
- 1.9 Once the ePetition has been reviewed, two more steps are required before the ePetition is open for signature:
- Confirmation (via email) of the support of at least five people. Petitioners are asked to provide the names and email contact details of a minimum of five and a maximum of ten people to assist them to meet this threshold. Signatories must be residents of New South Wales.
  - Confirmation (via email) that the identified Member is prepared to present the ePetition once it has closed for signatures.
- 1.10 Once an ePetition has been reviewed for compliance and has the support of at least five people and a presenting Member, the ePetition is open for signatures. The time period that an ePetition can remain open is currently either one week, three weeks or twelve weeks. As part of this review, the Committee has recommended that the timeframe be extended to a maximum of 24 weeks. This is discussed in further detail in Chapter Two.
- 1.11 The ePetition is closed for signatures after the specified time period has ended. What happens next will depend on the number of signatures that an ePetition has attracted.
- 1.12 All closed petitions, no matter how many signatures, are automatically listed for presentation on the next Legislative Assembly sitting day. Once the petition is announced (by the Clerk or the Speaker) on the sitting day in which it is presented, it is considered 'received' unless a motion is moved and agreed that it be 'not received'. The petitions are sent to the relevant Minister for information and/or response. The Minister who has the responsibility for the portfolio within which the topic of the petition falls is considered the relevant Minister.

- 1.13 If a petition has 500 or more signatures, the relevant Minister must respond to the petition within 35 calendar days.
- 1.14 If an ePetition has more than 20,000 signatures (or 10,000 for a paper petition) it will be debated in the House. The threshold for a debate is an issue that arose as part of this review, and is discussed in Chapter Two.
- 1.15 Unlike paper petitions, ePetitions present an opportunity for the Department to engage with the community by providing information on the progress of the petition. For example, currently, once an ePetition has been received by the House, the Department emails the signatories with an update on its status. As part of this review, the Committee considered ways that the Department can increase its engagement with the public throughout the ePetition process. This is discussed further in Chapter Three.

## Chapter Two – The Review

### Methodology

- 2.1 On 25 March 2021, the Committee confirmed a methodology for the review into the operation of ePetitions, which included:
- A quantitative analysis of ePetitions for the first one, three and six months, including comparisons with paper petitions.<sup>6</sup>
  - A qualitative analysis based on surveys of petitioners and presenting Members.
- 2.2 To undertake its quantitative analysis, the Department used its ePetitions database to access information about ePetitions submitted. The gathered data includes:
- The total number of ePetitions and paper petitions **submitted**, and information about the number of ePetitions that were considered to be non-compliant.
  - The reason that an ePetition was considered non-compliant.
  - The number of petitions **received** by the House.
  - The category that a received petition fell into (less than 500 signatures, between 500 but below the threshold for a debate, or petitions which reached the threshold for a debate).
- 2.3 This information, and data on the Parliament's website traffic, was used to produce the statistics in this report.
- 2.4 In addition to the statistical analysis, presenting Members and petitioners who had created petitions were surveyed for their feedback on the ePetition process. Additional feedback was provided by Members and their staff at information sessions, by email and through regular contact with staff of the Department.
- 2.5 The survey was kept short to encourage participation – five questions for petitioners and three questions for Members – and focused on the ease with which petitioners and Members could navigate the process.

### The number of ePetitions received

- 2.6 In total, 121 ePetitions were submitted to the Department's website during the nine month reporting period.

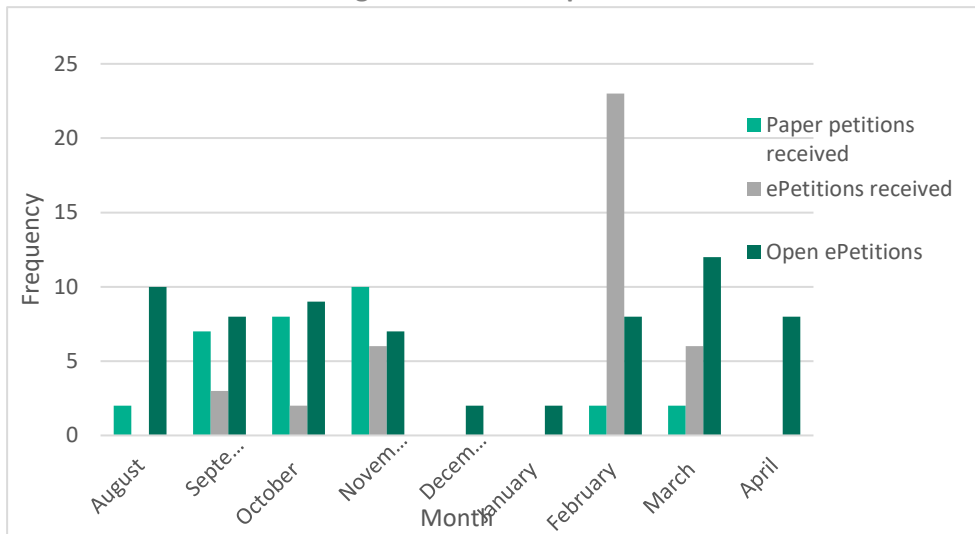
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<sup>6</sup> Quantitative analysis was extended to include information available for the first nine months of operation.

2.7 Of these, 66 were successfully open for signature and, by the end of the reporting period, 40 ePetitions had been received in the House. This compared to 31 paper petitions received during the same period.

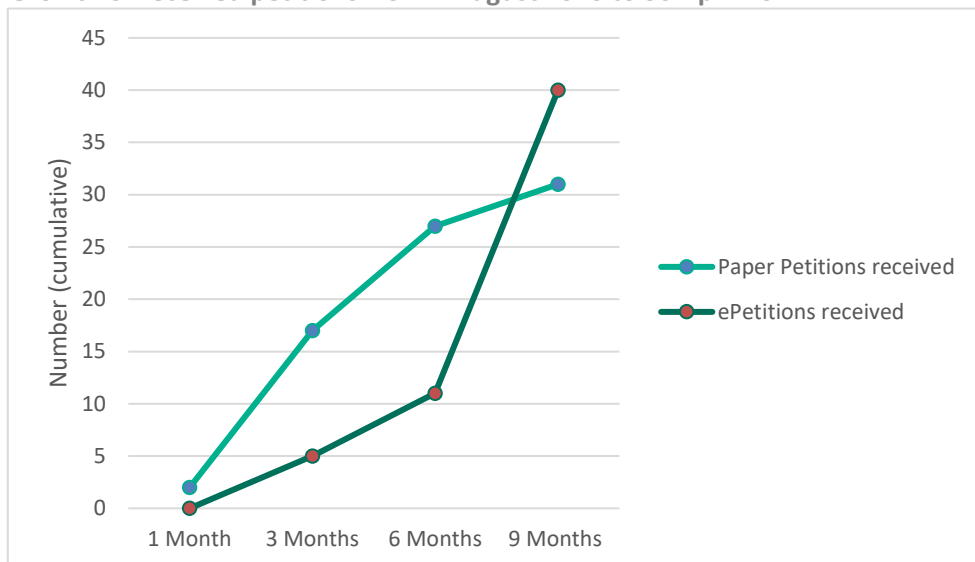
2.8 The month of February saw an increase in the amount of ePetitions received in the House. This is attributed to a higher circulation of open petitions over the three months prior, during which the Assembly was not sitting and was not able to receive petitions.

**Petitions received from 1 August 2020 to 30 April 2021**



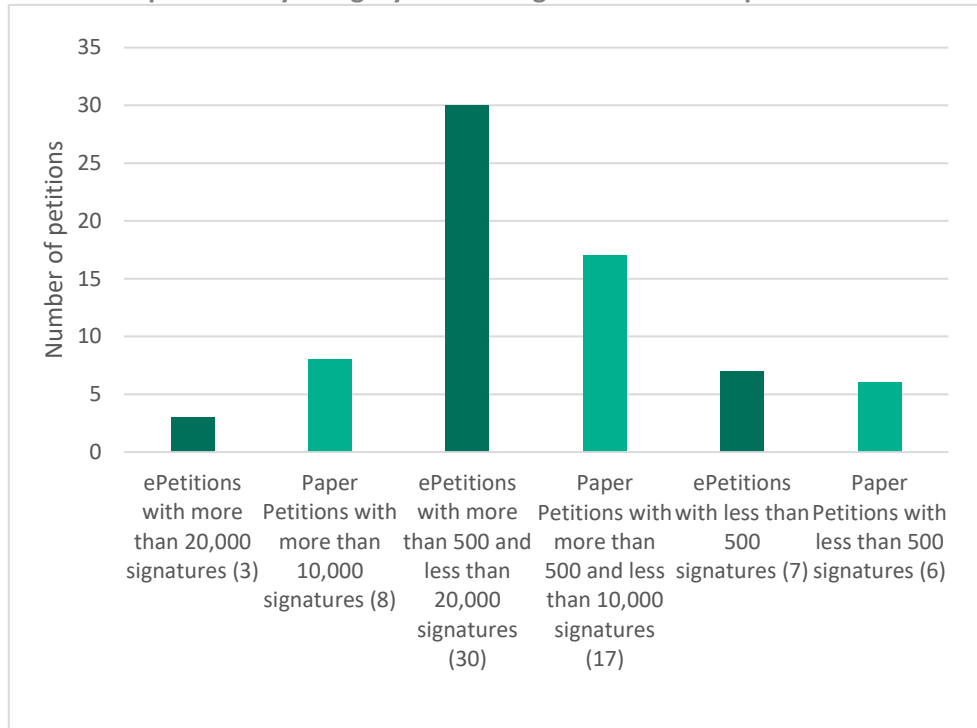
2.9 Over the period of nine months, the number of received ePetitions grew at a much higher rate than those of paper petitions.

**Growth of received petitions from 1 August 2020 to 30 April 2021**



2.10 There are three distinct categories of petition recognised by the standing and sessional orders – petitions of less than 500 signatures; petitions of between 500 and 10,000 (or 20,000 for ePetitions) signatures; petitions of more than 10,000 (20,000 for ePetitions) signatures. The most common petition category in the reporting period was petitions over 500 signatures.

Number of petitions by category from 1 August 2020 to 30 April 2021



### Threshold for an ePetition debate

- 2.11 The current threshold to trigger a debate in the Legislative Assembly is 10,000 signatures for paper petitions, and 20,000 signatures for ePetitions. The higher threshold for ePetitions was introduced in consideration of the relative ease of access to an ePetition compared to a paper petition with the anticipated result that electronic petitions would attract more signatures more quickly than paper petitions.
- 2.12 As part of its review, the Department of the Legislative Assembly surveyed petitioners and presenting Members for their feedback on the process. Some of the feedback received included requests to reduce the threshold of 20,000 signatures needed to debate an ePetition in the House.
- 2.13 During the nine month review period, a total of 40 ePetitions were received, compared to 31 paper petitions. Of the total petitions received, three ePetitions and eight paper petitions reached the threshold for a debate in the House. The first of these ePetitions was tabled on 13 October 2020 and was debated in the House on 18 February 2021.
- 2.14 If the debate threshold for ePetitions was the same as that for paper petitions (10,000 signatories), eight ePetitions would have met the threshold for debate. This would have given a combined total of 16 petitions eligible for debate during the review period alone.
- 2.15 If the debate threshold for ePetitions had been 15,000 signatures instead of 20,000, five ePetitions would have been eligible for debate. This would have given a combined total of 13 petitions eligible for debate during the nine month review period.



- 2.16 In a typical parliamentary year there are 16 sitting weeks, which provides 16 opportunities for debates in the House (debates are scheduled on Thursdays at 4pm). The Committee noted if the threshold were to be lowered:
- there may not be enough opportunities for debate in a parliamentary year because of an increase of petitions scheduled for debate; and
  - debates would likely be less timely as they may occur significantly after the petition has closed for signatures.

- 2.17 The Committee therefore considers that the current threshold of 20,000 signatures for an ePetition should be maintained.

### **Timeframes for an ePetition to be open**

- 2.18 The Committee acknowledged the feedback received from some presenting Members and ePetitioners that the current maximum timeframe is too short. Currently, the sessional orders specify that ePetitions can remain open for a period of either one, three or twelve weeks.
- 2.19 The Committee agreed that amending the sessional order timeframes to three weeks, twelve weeks (three months) and twenty four weeks (six months) would provide greater flexibility for petitioners. In addition, the longer maximum timeframe would help petitioners achieve the 20,000 signatures required for a debate.

### **Recommendation 1**

**That the sessional orders and business process be amended to allow ePetitions to be open for periods of either three weeks, twelve weeks (three months) or twenty-four weeks (six months).**

### **Opportunities for presenting Members to comment**

- 2.20 Currently, Members who have agreed to present a petition (presenting Members) can only comment as part of the process if the petition has reached the threshold for a debate in the House. This requirement is consistent for both paper petitions and ePetitions.
- 2.21 Some feedback received from the survey of Members, and during information sessions, indicated a desire for Members who present ePetitions to be provided with an opportunity to comment in writing on all petitions they have agreed to present. Such a comment would be considered as part of the petitions process for the purposes of the records of the House.
- 2.22 Proponents of this suggestion noted that as a consequence of the ePetition infrastructure, Ministers providing a response to ePetitions of more than 500 signatures were having advice about that response sent to all those petitioners who opted to receive updates on the progress of the ePetition. The presenting Member has no similar opportunity.
- 2.23 The Committee considered whether to permit such a comment. The Committee noted that:

- If new sessional orders were to be adopted to permit comment by the presenting Member, they should apply equally to paper petitions and ePetitions.
- Members currently have a range of options to address the issues raised in a petition and in the Minister's response, including Private Members' Statements, a substantive motion, or a question (written or oral). Members can also continue engaging with the community directly through social media and other methods. The 'comment' would be an additional option.

2.24 The Committee was divided on the merit of providing for a presenting Member comment. However, after deliberation, the Committee resolved not to amend the sessional orders to allow for a comment by Members presenting a petition.

### **Security of the ePetition process**

2.25 The current process for creating or signing an ePetition incorporates security measures that are intended to strike a balance between security and accessibility.

2.26 ePetitioners are required to provide their contact details (name, email, physical address and phone number) and those of their supporters, which are used by Department staff to verify details of the petition content. Signatories to an ePetition are required to provide a valid email address, confirm that they are residents of New South Wales and complete a Google reCAPTCHA verification. ePetitions are submitted on the Parliament's website, which is geo-blocked to Australia. This ensures that signatories are located at least within Australia.

2.27 The Committee considered that the current security measures were sufficient to protect the ePetition process, having regard to the following factors:

- There was no indication during the review period that there had been any systematic misuse of the ePetition process.
- While it is possible to increase the security of the website, any additional security measures would make it more difficult to sign the petition; and
- The consequences of even a major misuse of the ePetition process are relatively minor. They include the risk that an ePetition might be debated in the House, where it would otherwise not have reached the threshold for debate.

2.28 The Committee agreed that the current process for creating and signing an ePetition incorporates sufficient security measures to strike an appropriate balance between security and accessibility.

### **The impact of ePetitions on paper petitions**

2.29 As noted in the table below, there was a significant decrease (54%) in the total amount of petitions received in 2020 compared to 2019. It is difficult to determine how much of this decrease is a result of the introduction of ePetitions,

and how much is a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which greatly affected the possibility of movement and social interaction needed for the collection of signatures for paper petitions.

- 2.30 A comparison with three other legislatures in Australia which had no changes in the kinds of petitions able to be received demonstrates that there was a decrease of between 14% and 30%, which is reasonable to assume is the result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Legislature	2019	2020	Percentage decrease
Legislative Assembly of New South Wales (paper and ePetitions)	184	84	54%
Legislative Assembly of Victoria (paper petitions)	179	125	30%
Legislative Assembly of Queensland (paper and electronic petitions)	218	156	28%
Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory (paper and electronic petitions)	29	25	14%

- 2.31 During the reporting period, the NSW Legislative Assembly ranked third out of the six Australian legislatures that receive electronic petitions, in terms of the number received.<sup>7</sup> The Legislative Assembly of Victoria, the Parliament of South Australia, the Parliament of Western Australia and the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory do not receive electronic petitions.

### The impact of the ePetition process on the Department's workload

- 2.32 The Department's quantitative analysis indicates that ePetitions were increasingly popular during the review period. During that period, 66 ePetitions were open for signature, 40 of which were received by the House. This compared to 31 paper petitions received by the House in the same period. A significant percentage (43%, or 52 ePetitions) created during the reporting period were non-compliant for a variety of reasons.
- 2.33 The administration of ePetitions, including verifying the identity of petitioners and their supporters, determining whether ePetitions are compliant, and answering enquiries about the ePetition process, is undertaken by the staff of the Department of the Legislative Assembly. This has resulted in an increase in workload for the Department approximately equal to one additional full-time equivalent parliamentary officer at Clerk Grade 7/8 level. This workload has been spread across a range of positions within the Department.

<sup>7</sup> The NSW Legislative Assembly received 40 ePetitions; the Legislative Council of Victoria received 52 and the Legislative Assembly of Queensland received 83.

- 2.34 The increased workload has been met through re-allocation of duties and changes to the prioritisation of tasks across the Department.

## Chapter Three – Engagement with stakeholders

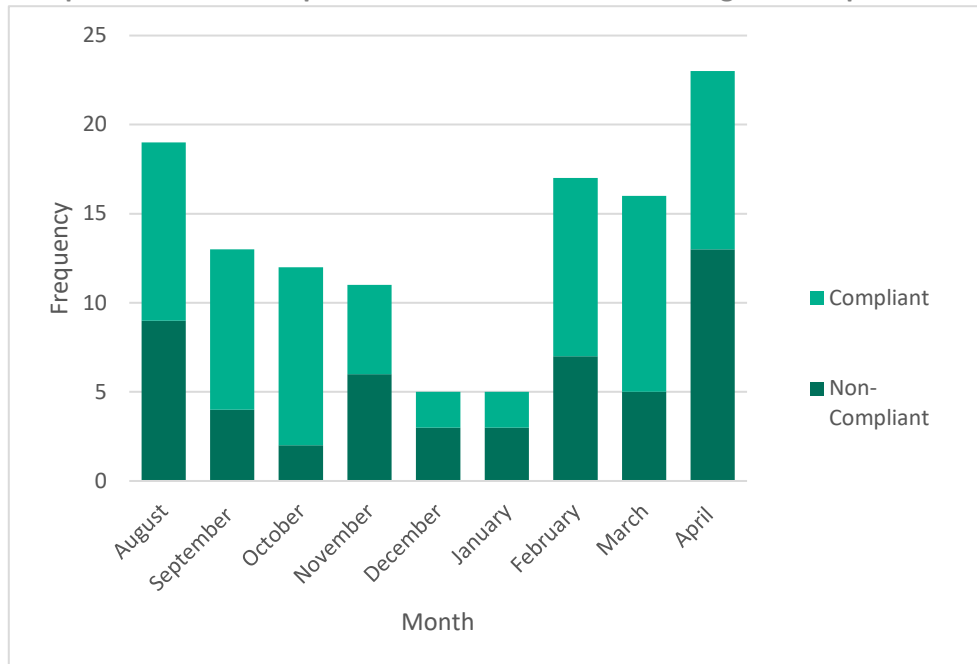
### How easy did stakeholders find the ePetition process?

#### Non-compliant ePetitions

3.1 Of all ePetitions created in the reporting period, 43% (or 52 ePetitions) were non-compliant. Where an ePetition was non-compliant, the reasons were:

- The ePetition did not secure the support of at least five supporters (56%, or 29 ePetitions).
- The nominated Member did not agree to present the ePetition or did not respond to the request to present the ePetition (33%, or 17 ePetitions).
- Other – including that the petition did not meet the requirements, and that the petitioner did not wish to proceed (11%, or 6 ePetitions).

Compliant and non-compliant ePetitions received from Aug 2020 – April 2021



3.2 The high percentage of non-compliant petitions may decrease in future as petitioners provide more than the minimum number of possible supporters. A minimum of five supporters is required for the ePetition to comply and the system allows for the details of up to ten possible supporters to be provided. Many petitioners only provide the minimum five supporters, which means that if even one supporter does not support the petition within the timeframe, the petition is non-compliant.

- 3.3 Similarly, non-compliant petitions as a result of the Member not agreeing to present or not responding may decrease as Members and their electorate office staff become more familiar with the ePetition system and more responsive to the automated emails received as part of the process. While petitioners are encouraged to contact Members before the petition is created, this is not required and Members may therefore have no knowledge of the petition before the automated email is received.

### **Compliant ePetitions**

- 3.4 The Department surveyed petitioners and Members involved in ePetitions which were successfully opened to the public, and received by the House.
- 3.5 Overall, the survey results were overwhelmingly positive in terms of ease of access and use. 82% of petitioners and 88% of Members found the overall process of ePetitions was either 'very easy' or 'easy'.
- 3.6 In terms of the specific steps in creating and obtaining support for an ePetition, 80% of petitioners said they found it 'very easy' or 'easy' to create an ePetition and 95% of petitioners found it either 'very easy' or 'easy' to obtain both the support of a Member and five 'supporters'. Members found the process of agreeing or disagreeing to present an ePetition simple, with 88% saying that it was 'very easy' or 'easy'.
- 3.7 In terms of 'share-ability', 86% of petitioners and 80% of Members said it was 'easy' or 'very easy' to share their ePetition on social media. Feedback received from both petitions and Members indicated that improving the design and image of the URL would enhance the sharing of ePetitions on social media.
- 3.8 When asked whether they would recommend ePetitions to a friend, 76% of petitioners said that they were 'likely' or 'very likely'.

### **Improving the Department's engagement with Petitioners**

- 3.9 The ePetitions process provides an opportunity for direct contact with thousands of signatories. During the reporting period, 281,586 people signed an ePetition on the Parliament's website. Approximately 42% of signatories opt to receive updates on progress of the ePetition they have signed.
- 3.10 Signatories, if they have opted to receive updates, are advised by email once the ePetition they signed is received in the House and once a Government response (if required) has been received. Signatories are provided with a link to share the ePetition on their social media accounts.
- 3.11 There are opportunities for the Department to continue to improve public engagement with signatories. Some petitioners have given feedback through the survey to:
- improve the attractiveness of the URL when sharing an ePetition on social media;

- enhance the content in emails sent to signatories such as videos about petitions, newsletter banners and graphics, and hyperlinks to other relevant information on the Parliament's website.

3.12 Throughout the reporting period, there have been occasions where an ePetition has closed for signatures weeks or months before the next available sitting day (when it has then been received by the House). This can result in a delay in petitioners being updated on the status of their petition, and some confusion by petitioners who may not understand the difference between a petition closing, and a petition being received.

3.13 The Committee makes the following recommendations for the Department of the Legislative Assembly.

### Recommendation 2

**That the Department of the Legislative Assembly send an email to signatories when the ePetition closes rather than when the ePetition is received.**

### Recommendation 3

**That the Department of the Legislative Assembly continue to implement opportunities for improved engagement with signatories.**

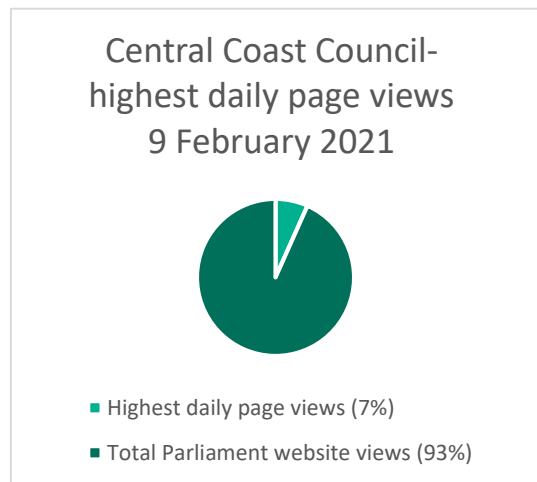
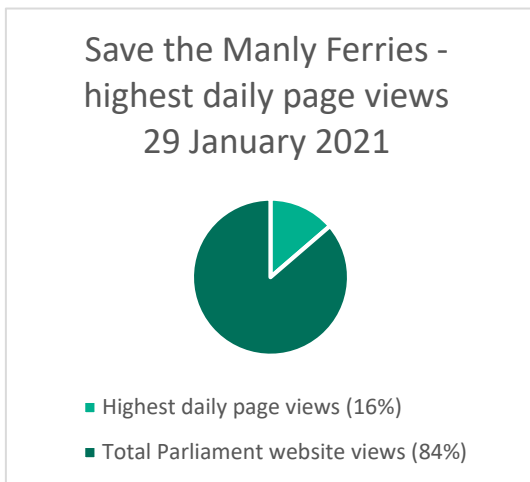
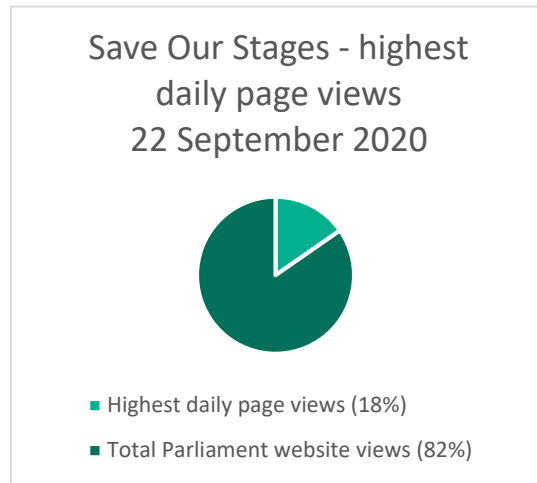
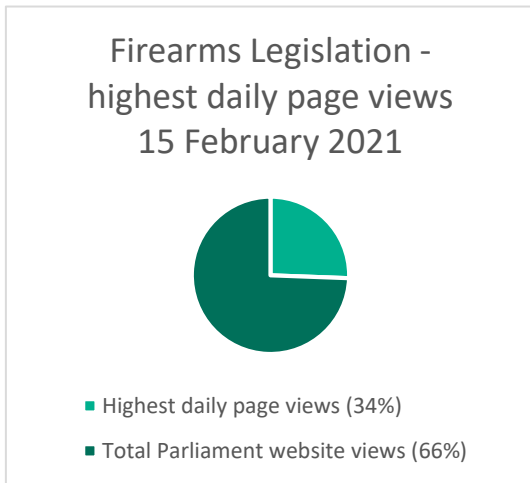
## Enhancing the public's awareness of the Parliament of New South Wales

3.14 ePetitions have been responsible for a significant increase in traffic to the Parliament of New South Wales website. The tables below provide comparative information to demonstrate the impact on the website statistics of the 20,000 signature petitions received in the reporting period. One additional ePetition received just outside the reporting period is included, for interest.

3.15 Each 20,000 signature ePetition in the reporting period is compared with other Parliament website page views for the time the ePetition was open, and the day the ePetition received its highest views.

Descriptions	Firearms Legislation	Save Our Stages	Save the Manly Ferries	Central Coast Council
ePetition Start Date	9/02/2021	21/09/2020	23/11/2020	5/02/2021
ePetition End Date	4/05/2021	12/10/2020	15/02/2021	26/02/2021
Number of ePetition days	85	22	85	22
Number of ePetition signatories	28,456	27,734	22,074	21,422
Total Parliament website views during the period	2,103,291	522,031	1,439,554	795,416
Total ePetition page views during the period	98,763	32,637	45,106	38,059
Percentage views for the time period	5%	6%	3%	5%
Average daily page views	1,161	1,484	531	1,730

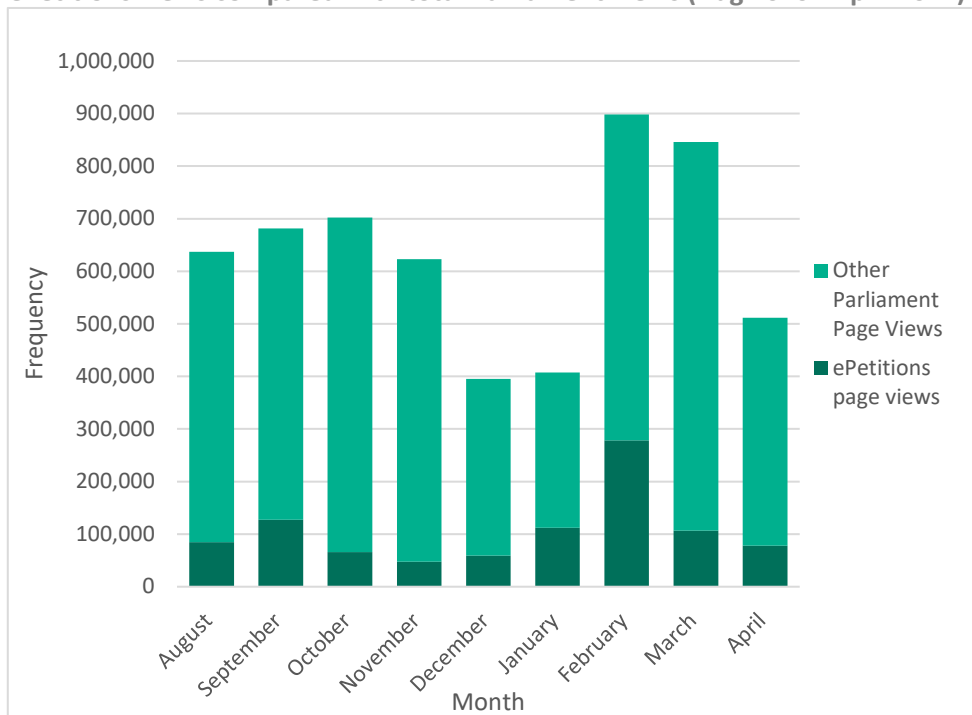
Highest daily views for ePetition	Firearms Legislation	Save Our Stages	Save the Manly Ferries	Central Coast Council
Date	15/02/2021	22/09/2021	29/01/2021	9/02/2021
Number of page views	21,887	14,212	3,584	6,031
Total Parliament website views	63,659	78,472	22,591	84,290
Percentage views for the highest daily views	34%	18%	16%	7%





3.16 Total ePetitions webpage views compared with the total Parliament webpage views for each month:

ePetitions views compared with total Parliament views (Aug 2020 - April 2021)



3.17 During the reporting period, ePetition debates were packaged and posted to the Parliament of NSW YouTube channel, and signatories sent an email with a link to the YouTube video. The YouTube video provides an alternative to viewing the debate live on the Assembly's webcast. While the numbers are not large in absolute terms, they are significant in comparison to other YouTube videos on the Parliament's channel – the third most popular video, 'The Role of the Legislative Assembly', has 3,837 views collected since May 2019.<sup>8</sup>

3.18 The Committee believes the practice of advising petitioners of the debate in the Assembly and providing a link to the live broadcast and, after the debate, a link to the packaged debate, is a valuable way of improving access to information for petitioners and other community members with an interest in the issue.

**Recommendation 4**

**That the Department of the Legislative Assembly communicate with signatories of a 20,000 signature ePetition to advise them of a debate where applicable. The communication would provide a hyperlink to the Parliament's webcast to the debate itself on the day and to a recorded broadcast after the event.**

<sup>8</sup> The three most popular YouTube videos are related to the Covid19 pandemic and have significantly more views than the rest of the Parliament's videos. For example, the most watched YouTube video 'NSW Government's management of the Covid19 Pandemic' has over 62,000 views.

## Chapter Four – Technical issues and their solutions

4.1 A number of minor technical issues were identified once the ePetitions system went live in August 2020. This table lists the issues and the solutions applied.

Issue	Solution
Closed ePetitions that were not yet announced in the House and received were not being displayed on the website (because they had no formal status, having not been received by the House).	A 'Closed ePetitions' section listing all closed ePetitions was created on the website. This enables people to see closed petitions even where they have not yet been received by the House.  See Recommendation 2.
Parliamentary Information Management System (PIMS) users (i.e. Assembly House and Procedure staff) not able to directly reactivate a non-compliant ePetition- required contact with system developer.	PIMS users can now reactivate non-compliant ePetitions.
No capacity to assign debate dates for 20,000 signature ePetitions if future dates have not yet been determined. This will always occur at the end of a calendar year, before the sitting dates for the next calendar year are known.	System now has the capability to send an automated email to signatories when the petition is received to advise that a debate will occur, and a subsequent email once the date is determined.
Public could not sign ePetitions during website outages.	A message is prominently displayed on the Parliament's website and on the ePetition page informing of the outage.  Note that outages are not occurring as a consequence of high traffic due to ePetitions. During the development of the ePetition system, the website was load tested and found to be capable of supporting far higher load than it has yet received.

## Appendix One – Proposed Sessional Order Change

<i>Current standing order</i>	<i>New sessional order</i>
<p>121A. An electronic petition must:</p> <p>(1) Be in English.</p> <p>(2) Contain the request of the petitioner expressed in no more than 250 words.</p> <p>(3) Be respectful, decorous, and temperate in its language, and not contain irrelevant statements.</p> <p>(4) Be supported by at least five people before it is open to the public for signatures, with the petitioner and all signatories residents of New South Wales.</p> <p>(5) Be open for signatures for a period of one, three or twelve weeks.</p> <p>(6) Be received only as the petition of the parties signing the same.</p>	<p>121A. An electronic petition must:</p> <p>(1) Be in English.</p> <p>(2) Contain the request of the petitioner expressed in no more than 250 words.</p> <p>(3) Be respectful, decorous, and temperate in its language, and not contain irrelevant statements.</p> <p>(4) Be supported by at least five people before it is open to the public for signatures, with the petitioner and all signatories residents of New South Wales.</p> <p>(5) Be open for signatures for a period of three, twelve or twenty four weeks.</p> <p>(6) Be received only as the petition of the parties signing the same.</p>

## Appendix Two – Extracts from Minutes

### **Minutes of Proceedings of the Standing Orders and Procedure Committee Meeting No. 16 (57<sup>th</sup> Parliament)**

12:00pm, Wednesday 29 July 2020  
Room 814/815, Parliament House

#### **Members present:**

The Hon. Jonathan O'Dea MP, Speaker (Chair)  
Mr Greg Piper MP  
The Hon. Mark Speakman MP  
Mr Lee Evans MP  
Mr Michael Daley MP  
Mr Ryan Park MP  
Mrs Leslie Williams MP  
Mr Mark Coure MP  
Ms Anna Watson MP

#### **Officers in attendance:**

Ms Helen Minnican, Clerk  
Mr Simon Johnston, Director, House and Procedure  
Mr John Young, Director, House and Procedure  
Ms Carly Maxwell, Clerk Assistant, House and Procedure

#### **Other attendees (by previous resolution of the Committee)**

Mr Paul Blanch, Office of the Speaker  
Mr Mitch Wright, Office of the Leader of Opposition Business

The Chair opened the meeting at 12.05pm.

#### **1. Apologies**

Ms Steph Cooke MP and Mr Adam Crouch MP.

#### **2. Minutes of previous meeting**

Agreed, on the motion of Mr Piper, seconded Mr Park: that the minutes of meeting 15 be adopted.

#### **3. ...**

#### **4. Petitions and ePetitions**

The Speaker advised the Committee that an addendum to the Committee's interim report 3/57 'Modernisation and reform of practices and procedures: ePetitions sessional orders' had been prepared to provide for a review of the operation of ePetitions.

The Speaker's Office and Clerk will prepare information and resources on the ePetitions process for the use of Members in their electorates following the Monday 10 August 'go live' date.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Speakman, seconded Mr Piper, that the Addendum to the Interim report 'Sessional Orders for ePetitions' be adopted, with any changes required to make it clear that the review of the sessional orders be completed within 12 months.

The Clerk briefed the Committee on the current practice of providing copies of tabled paper petitions, which include petitioners' personal details, to Members; and the practice of providing supervised opportunities to inspect tabled paper petitions to members of the public.

Discussion ensued.

The Speaker requested that a further information detailing current practice in other jurisdictions and the application of relevant personal information and privacy legislation be prepared by the Clerk for the Committee's consideration at the next meeting.

5. ...

**6. Next meeting**

Wednesday, 16 September at 12pm (venue tbc).

There being no further business, the Committee adjourned at 12.31pm.

**Minutes of Proceedings of the Standing Orders and Procedure Committee Meeting No. 17  
(57<sup>th</sup> Parliament)**

12:00pm, Wednesday 16 September 2020  
Room 814/815, Parliament House

**Members present:**

The Hon. Jonathan O'Dea MP, Speaker (Chair)  
Mr Greg Piper MP  
The Hon. Mark Speakman MP  
Mr Lee Evans MP  
Mr Michael Daley MP  
Mrs Leslie Williams MP  
Ms Anna Watson MP  
Ms Steph Cooke MP  
Mr Adam Crouch MP  
Mr Mark Coure MP (from 12.30pm)

**Officers in attendance:**

Ms Helen Minnican, Clerk  
Mr Simon Johnston, Director, House and Procedure  
Mr John Young, Director, House and Procedure  
Ms Jenny Whight, Senior Procedure Officer

**Other attendees (by previous resolution of the Committee)**

Mr Paul Blanch, Office of the Speaker

Mr Mitch Wright, Office of the Leader of Opposition Business

Ms Georgia Luk, Office of the Speaker

The Chair opened the meeting at 12.00pm.

**1. Apologies**

Mr Ryan Park MP.

**2. Minutes of previous meeting**

Agreed, on the motion of Mr Evans, seconded Mr Piper: that the minutes of meeting 16 be adopted.

**3. ...**

**4. ePetitions**

The Speaker invited Mr Simon Johnston, Director, House and Procedure to provide an update to the Committee on ePetitions activity.

Discussion ensued.

Action: Consider process changes that would be required to permit the presenting Member to communicate with petitioners in conjunction with the response from the Minister (where applicable).

**5. ...**

**6. ...**

**7. Next meeting**

Wednesday 14 October at 1.15pm.

There being no further business, the Committee adjourned at 12.40pm.

**Minutes of Proceedings of the Standing Orders and Procedure Committee Meeting No. 18 (57<sup>th</sup> Parliament)**

1:15pm, Wednesday 14 October 2020

Jubilee Room, Parliament House

**Members present:**

The Hon. Jonathan O'Dea MP, Speaker (Chair)

Mr Greg Piper MP

The Hon. Mark Speakman MP

Mr Lee Evans MP

Mr Michael Daley MP

Ms Anna Watson MP

Ms Steph Cooke MP

**Officers in attendance:**

Ms Helen Minnican, Clerk

Ms Carly Maxwell, Clerk-Assistant, House and Procedure

Mr Simon Johnston, Director, House and Procedure

Mr John Young, Director, House and Procedure

**Other attendees (by previous resolution of the Committee)**

Mr Paul Blanch, Office of the Speaker

Ms Georgia Luk, Office of the Speaker

The Chair opened the meeting at 1.18pm.

**1. Apologies**

Mr Adam Crouch MP, Mr Ryan Park MP, Mrs Leslie Williams MP and Mr Mark Coure MP.

**2. Minutes of previous meeting**

Agreed, on the motion of Mr Daley, seconded Mr Evans: that the minutes of meeting 17 be adopted.

**3. Access to personal details contained in paper petitions**

...

The Committee noted the current procedure for the receipt and publication of a response from the relevant Minister to a petition signed by 500 or more persons. The Committee agreed to consider changes to the standing and sessional orders to similarly provide for the receipt and publication of a comment from the presenting Member to such petitions. Clerk to provide briefing paper to the Committee for the next meeting.

**4. ...**

**5. ...**

**6. Next meeting**

Wednesday 11 November at 1.15pm.

There being no further business, the Committee adjourned at 1.32pm.

**Minutes of Proceedings of the Standing Orders and Procedure Committee Meeting No. 19  
(57<sup>th</sup> Parliament)**

1:15pm, Wednesday 11 November 2020

Room 814/815, Parliament House

**Members present:**

The Hon. Jonathan O'Dea MP, Speaker (Chair)

Mr Greg Piper MP

Mr Lee Evans MP  
Ms Anna Watson MP  
Mr Mark Coure MP

**Officers in attendance:**

Ms Helen Minnican, Clerk  
Mr Simon Johnston, Director, House and Procedure  
Mr John Young, Director, House and Procedure

**Other attendees (by previous resolution of the Committee)**

Mr Paul Blanch, Office of the Speaker  
Ms Georgia Luk, Office of the Speaker  
Mr Alex Gibson, Office of the Leader of the House

The Chair opened the meeting at 1.19pm.

**1. Apologies**

The Hon. Mark Speakman MP, Mr Ryan Park MP, Mrs Leslie Williams MP, Mr Michael Daley MP, Ms Steph Cooke MP, Mr Adam Crouch MP.

**2. Minutes of previous meeting**

Agreed, on the motion of Mr Piper, seconded Mrs Watson: that the minutes of meeting 18 be adopted.

**3. ...**

**4. Provision for publication of comment from Member presenting petition containing 500 or more signatures**

The Speaker referred Members to the briefing paper included in the meeting papers. The Speaker noted that the Committee could indicate a

- Number of words
- Not a debate
- Acknowledgement and thanks
- Brief referral to the issue
- Not a response to the Minister and the response.

Discussion ensued.

The Committee resolved, on the motion of Mrs Watson, seconded Mr Coure: that, the Committee note the information provided and consider the proposed options as part of the review of the ePetitions sessional orders to be concluded by August 2021, on the basis that any change to the current process will require a sessional order change and a change to the business system process.

**5. ...**

**6. ...**

**7. ...**



## **8. Next meeting**

To be determined after 2021 sitting days – 1.15pm on Wednesdays.

There being no further business, the Committee adjourned at 1.32pm.

## **Minutes of Proceedings of the Standing Orders and Procedure Committee Meeting No. 20 (57<sup>th</sup> Parliament)**

12:00 noon, Thursday 25 March 2021  
Jubilee Room, Parliament House

### **Members present:**

The Hon. Jonathan O'Dea MP, Speaker (Chair)  
The Hon. Mark Speakman MP  
Mr Greg Piper MP  
Mr Lee Evans MP  
Mr Ryan Park MP  
Mr Michael Daley MP  
Mr Adam Crouch MP  
Mr David Mehan MP (on behalf of Ms Anna Watson MP)

### **Officers in attendance:**

Ms Helen Minnican, Clerk  
Ms Carly Maxwell, Clerk-Assistant, House and Procedure  
Mr Simon Johnston, Director, House and Procedure  
Mr John Young, Director, House and Procedure  
Mr Ben Foxe, Manager, House and Procedure

### **Other attendees (by previous resolution of the Committee)**

Mr Paul Blanch, Office of the Speaker  
Ms Georgia Luk, Office of the Speaker

The Chair opened the meeting at 12:07 pm.

## **1. Apologies**

Ms Steph Cooke MP, Mr Mark Coure MP, Ms Anna Watson MP and the Hon. Leslie Williams MP.

The Committee resolved, on the motion of Mr Daley: That, pursuant to Standing Order 295(1), Mr David Mehan MP, Deputy Opposition Whip, be authorised to attend the meeting.

## **2. Minutes of previous meeting**

The Committee resolved, on the motion of Mr Piper, seconded by The Speaker: That the draft Minutes of Meeting No. 19 be confirmed.

## **3. ...**

## **4. Review of the ePetitions sessional orders**

The Speaker referred the Committee to the briefing paper included in the meeting papers.

Discussion ensued.

The Committee resolved, on the motion of Mr Piper, seconded by Mr Park: That, the Committee note and approve the proposed review process as outlined in the briefing paper.

5. ...

6. ...

7. ...

**8. Next meeting**

Proposed for the next sitting in May 2021.

There being no further business, the Committee adjourned at 1:02pm.

**Minutes of Proceedings of the Standing Orders and Procedure Committee Meeting No. 22  
(57<sup>th</sup> Parliament)**

1:00 pm, Friday 23 July 2021

Held via Webex videoconferencing

**Members present (all by Webex):**

The Hon. Jonathan O'Dea MP

The Hon. Leslie Williams MP

Ms Steph Cooke MP

Mr Mark Coure MP

Mr Adam Crouch MP

Mr Michael Daley MP (from 1.21pm)

Mr Lee Evans MP

Mr Ron Hoenig MP

Mr Greg Piper MP

The Hon. Mark Speakman MP

Ms Anna Watson MP

**Officers in attendance (all by Webex):**

Ms Helen Minnican, Clerk

Ms Carly Maxwell, Deputy Clerk

Mr Simon Johnston, A/Clerk-Assistant, House and Procedure

Mr John Young, Director, House and Procedure

Mr Ben Foxe, Manager, House and Procedure

**Other attendees (by previous resolution of the Committee, and all by Webex)**

Ms Georgia Luk, Office of the Speaker

Mr Amer Nasr, Office of the Leader of the House

Mr Ben Sheath, Office of the Government Whip

Mr Dylan Parker, for Office of the Manager of Opposition Business

Mr Speaker opened the meeting at 1:02 pm.

**1. Minutes of previous meeting**

The Committee resolved, on the motion of Mr Coure, seconded by Mr Crouch: That the draft Minutes of Meeting No. 21 be confirmed.

The Chair advised the Committee that, on 23 June 2021, Mr Hoenig had been appointed to serve on the Committee in place of Mr Park.

2. ...

3. ...

**4. Inquiry – Modernisation and reform of Legislative Assembly practices and procedures, and the operation of the House and its committees**

...

*Review of the ePetitions process*

The Speaker referred the Committee to the report of the review of the ePetitions process, as circulated.

Discussion ensued, particularly relating to the recommendation that the tabling member be permitted to add a comment in relation to the petition on the website.

The Committee agreed to defer further consideration of the ePetitions review to the next meeting.

...

5. ...

6. ...

7. ...

**8. Next meeting**

Proposed for the end of August 2021.

There being no further business, the Committee adjourned at 2:03pm.

**Minutes of Proceedings of the Standing Orders and Procedure Committee Meeting No. 23 (57<sup>th</sup> Parliament)**

11:30 am, Tuesday 24 August 2021

Held via Webex videoconferencing

**Members present (all by Webex):**

The Hon. Jonathan O'Dea MP

The Hon. Leslie Williams MP

Ms Steph Cooke MP (from 12:27 pm)  
Mr Mark Coure MP  
Mr Adam Crouch MP  
Mr Michael Daley MP  
Mr Lee Evans MP  
Mr Ron Hoenig MP  
Mr Greg Piper MP  
The Hon. Mark Speakman MP  
Ms Anna Watson MP

**Officers in attendance (all by Webex):**

Ms Helen Minnican, Clerk  
Ms Carly Maxwell, Deputy Clerk  
Mr Simon Johnston, A/Clerk-Assistant, House and Procedure  
Mr John Young, Director, House and Procedure  
Mr Ben Foxe, Director, House and Procedure  
Ms Jenny Whight, Senior Parliamentary Officer, House and Procedure

**Other attendees (by previous resolution of the Committee, and all by Webex)**

Mr Paul Blanch, Office of the Speaker  
Ms Georgia Luk, Office of the Speaker  
Mr Amer Nasr, Office of the Leader of the House  
Mr Ben Sheath, Office of the Government Whip

By concurrence of the Committee, Mr Scott Fuller, Senior Program Manager, Digital Transformation, Department of Parliamentary Services, attended the meeting for item three.

Mr Speaker opened the meeting at 11:32 am.

**1. Apologies**

Mr Crouch advised Ms Cooke would be an apology.

**2. Minutes of previous meeting**

The Committee resolved, on the motion of Mr Piper, seconded by Mr Coure: That, the draft Minutes of Meeting No. 22 be confirmed.

**3. ...**

**4. ...**

**5. Inquiry – Modernisation and reform of Legislative Assembly practices and procedures, and the operation of the House and its committees**

...

*Review of the ePetitions process*

The Speaker referred the Committee to the report of the review of the ePetitions process, as circulated.

Discussion on the report of the review of the ePetitions process resumed from the previous meeting.

Ms Cooke joined the meeting at 12:27 pm.

Mr Crouch moved, seconded by Mr Coure: That, Recommendation Three of the report be omitted:

**"Recommendation Three – opportunities for Members to comment**

That presenting Members be given an opportunity to provide a comment on the ePetition at the time that the ePetition is presented. The comment would be considered a part of the ePetition for the purposes of the records of the House, and published on the Assembly's website in the same way as a response from a Minister.

The sessional orders would require that the comment be no more than 250 words, address the petition request, and be 'respectful, decorous, and temperate' in its language (the same requirement as for petitions). For consistency, the same opportunity should be provided for paper petitions."

And the following recommendation be inserted instead:

**"Recommendation Three**

That Parliamentary staff communicate with signatories to an ePetition to advise them of the date of their ePetition's take-note debate and provide a link to the debate. Following the debate, Parliamentary staff communicate with signatories to an ePetition to provide a link to the recorded broadcast and Hansard record of the debate on their ePetition."

The Committee divided.

Ayes: O'Dea, Cooke, Coure, Crouch, Evans, Speakman, Williams.

Noes: Daley, Hoenig, Piper, Watson.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mr Crouch moved, seconded by Mr Coure: That, the report of the review of the ePetitions process, as amended, be agreed to by the Committee.

The Committee divided.

Ayes: O'Dea, Cooke, Coure, Crouch, Evans, Speakman, Williams.

Noes: Daley, Hoenig, Piper, Watson.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

...

6. ...

7. ...

8. ...

9. ...

**10. Next meeting**

Proposed for mid September 2021.

There being no further business, the Committee adjourned at 1:01 pm.

**Minutes of Proceedings of the Standing Orders and Procedure Committee Meeting No. 24  
(57<sup>th</sup> Parliament)**

12 pm, Tuesday 23 September 2021

Held via Webex videoconferencing

**Members present (all by Webex):**

The Hon. Jonathan O'Dea MP

The Hon. Leslie Williams MP

Ms Steph Cooke MP

Mr Mark Coure MP

Mr Adam Crouch MP

Mr Michael Daley MP

Mr Lee Evans MP

Mr Ron Hoenig MP

Mr Greg Piper MP

The Hon. Mark Speakman MP

**Officers in attendance (all by Webex):**

Ms Helen Minnican, Clerk

Ms Carly Maxwell, Deputy Clerk

Mr Simon Johnston, A/Clerk-Assistant, House and Procedure

Mr John Young, Director, House and Procedure

Mr Ben Foxe, Director, House and Procedure

Ms Amanda Alam, Manager, House and Procedure

**Other attendees (by previous resolution of the Committee, and all by Webex)**

Mr Paul Blanch, Office of the Speaker

Ms Georgia Luk, Office of the Speaker

Mr Amer Nasr, Office of the Leader of the House

Mr Ben Sheath, Office of the Government Whip

By concurrence of the Committee, Mr Scott Fuller, Senior Program Manager, Digital Transformation, Department of Parliamentary Services, attended the meeting to speak to item six.

Mr Speaker opened the meeting at 12:04 pm.

**1. Apologies**

Ms Anna Watson MP.

The Committee agreed that, pursuant to Standing Order 295(1), Mr David Mehan MP, Deputy Opposition Whip, be authorised to attend the meeting.

**2. Minutes of previous meeting**

The Committee resolved, on the motion of Mr Piper, seconded by Mr Speakman: That, the draft Minutes of Meeting No. 23 be confirmed.

**3. ...**

**4. Inquiry – Modernisation and reform of Legislative Assembly practices and procedures, and the operation of the House and its committees**

...

*Review of the ePetitions process*

The Speaker referred the Committee to the Chair's draft report, as circulated.

Discussion ensued.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Coure, seconded by Mrs Williams: That,

- a) Paragraph 3.9 of the ePetitions report be amended to omit 'x' and insert instead '42';
- b) The draft report, as amended, be adopted as the report of the Committee;
- c) The Chair and Committee staff be permitted to correct stylistic, typographical, consequential and grammatical errors; and
- d) The report be signed by the Chair and presented to the House and that once tabled, be published on the Committee's website.

Mr Coure moved, seconded by Mrs Williams: That, the draft report concerning the formalisation of Sessional Orders to Standing Orders be amended to recommend that the petition sessional orders be formalised as standing orders.

Discussion ensued.

Question put.

The Committee divided.

Ayes: Cooke, Coure, Crouch, Evans, O'Dea, Speakman, Williams.

Noes: Daley, Hoenig, Piper.

Mr Mehan advised that he agreed with those members voting in the negative.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

...

**5. ...**

6. ...

7. ...

There being no further business, the Committee adjourned at 1:45 pm.