



The 7 steps an inquiry follows

1 Setting up an inquiry

In most cases, the Legislative Council or a Minister refers inquiries to a standing committee. A standing committee may also inquire into matters raised in the annual report of a relevant government agency or in petitions, although this latter power is rarely used. The terms of reference define the scope of an inquiry and are determined by the Legislative Council or the Minister responsible for referring the inquiry.

2 Calling for submissions

A committee will often start its inquiry by calling for submissions from the public and relevant organisations. The inquiry's terms of reference are usually advertised in the appropriate newspapers and on the NSW Parliament's Internet site. People or organisations with specialist knowledge or representative views may be invited to make a submission.

3 Holding public hearings to gather the facts

After the committee has examined all the submissions, witnesses may be invited to give oral evidence. This allows committee members to speak directly to people about matters relevant to an inquiry and seek clarification or further details about issues raised in a submission.

Members of the public may observe these hearings, although sometimes they occur in private (*in camera*).

4 Consulting the community

In addition to calling for submissions and taking evidence, committees may canvass public opinion on the issues raised by an inquiry in a number of other ways. These include seminars, conferences, study tours, workshops and round-table discussions.

5 Reporting to Parliament

After considering all the submissions, evidence and its own research, the committee produces a report. This is tabled in the Legislative Council and includes the committee's findings and recommendations. Standing committees try to produce unanimous reports. But if a committee cannot achieve consensus, a minority or dissenting report or statement is sometimes presented. The tabling of a report provides an opportunity for all members of the Legislative Council to debate the findings. The committee's formal involvement in an issue effectively ends with the tabling of its report.

6 Making the report publicly available

Committee reports are public documents and are widely distributed. A copy of a report or a summary is sent to everyone who made a submission, appeared as a witness, or requests a copy from the committee office. Committee reports are also available at the State Library in Sydney, university libraries and on the NSW Parliament's Internet site.

7 Responding to the recommendations

After a report is tabled, the Government must respond to the Legislative Council within six months, outlining its recommendations for action. The Government is not obliged to implement the committee's recommendations but must explain why it has decided not to carry out some or all of them.

A copy of the Government's response is sent to everybody who made a submission or gave evidence. Others can get a copy through the committee office or from the NSW Parliament Internet site (*details on back cover*).

Contacting the committees

Law and Justice Committee

Telephone (02) 9230 3311

Fax (02) 9230 3371

Email: lawandjustice@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Social Issues Committee

Telephone (02) 9230 3078

Fax (02) 9230 2981

Email: socialissues@parliament.nsw.gov.au

State Development Committee

Telephone (02) 9230 2641

Fax (02) 9230 2981

Email: statedevelopment@parliament.nsw.gov.au

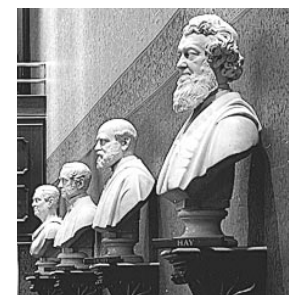
Getting more information

Standing committees of the Legislative Council is one of a series of three brochures about standing committees.

The other two brochures are:

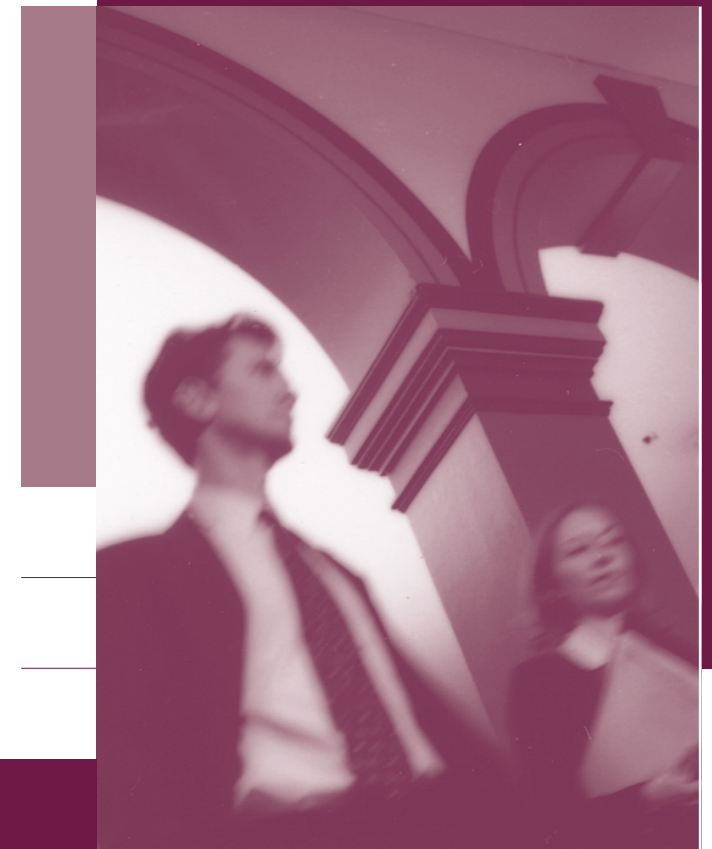
- **Making a submission**
Your chance to have your say
- **Committee hearings**
Giving your evidence in person

You will also find a selection of committee reports, inquiry transcripts, hearing schedules and other information about committees on the NSW Parliament's Internet site at www.parliament.nsw.gov.au



Standing committees

Taking Parliament to the people



The NSW Parliament is made up of the Legislative Council (Upper House) and the Legislative Assembly (Lower House). Both Houses have parliamentary committees, which inquire into issues of importance to the people of NSW.

Parliamentary committees are appointed by one or both Houses. They are made up of members of Parliament. Their membership generally reflects the membership of the House from which they are drawn.

Examining issues in detail

The work of Parliament has become more complex. Our MPs have to consider an increasing range of issues and legislation. At the same time, more people in the community expect to participate in the democratic process. Committees allow MPs to examine an issue in more detail and with greater public input than if the matter was considered by the House as a whole.

Standing committees in the Legislative Council

Committees are an important part of the Legislative Council because of the Council's role in reviewing legislation and acting as an effective check and balance on the Government.

Standing committees are one of several different types of committees which can be formed by the Legislative Council. They are established for the life of the Parliament, that is for four years, or until the next general election.

They investigate and report on:

- proposed legislation,
- government activities, or
- matters of public policy.

Each standing committee includes several members of the Legislative Council with representatives of the Government, Opposition and Independents. They strive to operate in a non-partisan manner.

Currently there are standing committees dealing with:

- Law and Justice,
- Social Issues, and
- State Development.

Legal and constitutional issues are the primary focus of the **Law and Justice Committee**.

This includes law reform, family law, criminal and administrative law and parliamentary matters. This committee also looks at issues concerned with the police, Attorney General, industrial relations, emergency services, corrective services, fair trading and juvenile justice.

The **Social Issues Committee** examines matters relating to the social development of people in New South Wales. Areas covered include arts, citizenship, urban affairs and planning, Aboriginal affairs, housing, health, education and training, community services, ageing, disability services, women, gaming and racing, sport and recreation.

The **State Development Committee** considers opportunities for growth and development throughout New South Wales. Portfolio areas include Treasury, state development, the Olympics, transport and roads, information technology, energy, forestry, Western Sydney, agriculture, land and water conservation, environment, local government, regional development, rural affairs, public works and services, small business, tourism, mineral resources and fisheries.

Standing Committees benefit the community by producing better laws, more informed policy-making and greater government accountability.

Committees provide an important opportunity for individuals and groups to put their views directly to parliamentarians. Members of the public can:

- make submissions,
- give oral evidence,
- attend public hearings, and
- obtain copies of committee reports.

Committees hold meetings throughout NSW to ensure that all interested parties are consulted.

Making government accountable

Parliamentary committees can insist that ministers and senior public servants explain and justify certain actions or decisions, including decisions about budgets. They also encourage government agencies to make more information publicly available.

Promoting public debate

Committees promote public awareness and debate on issues under consideration by Parliament. They provide a public forum for differing views to be presented, enabling MPs to assess the relative merits of those views.

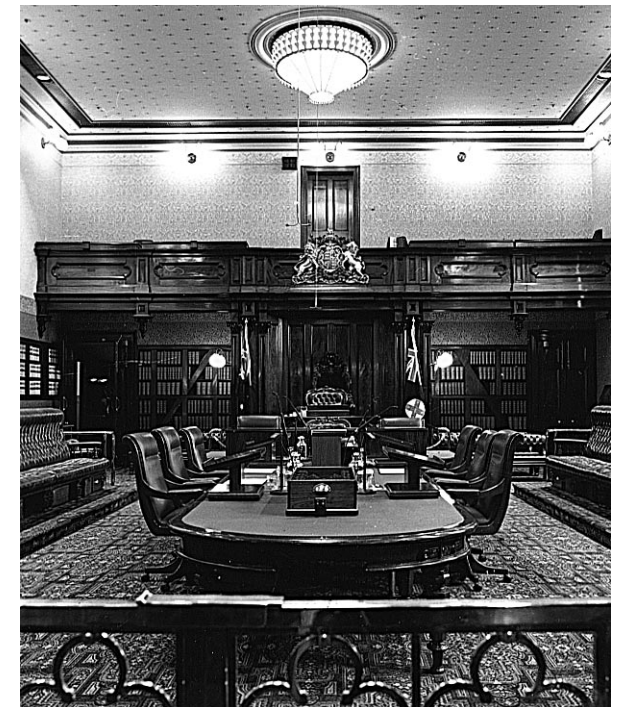
Encouraging detailed analysis

Committees tend to be small and flexible. Being specialised and focused, their members can concentrate on a particular issue in depth. They help parliamentarians draw on the expertise of interest groups, academics, business leaders, public servants and members of the public.

Protecting you from being sued

Parliamentary committees are an extension of the Parliament. A committee's proceedings, including the presentation of submissions and evidence, are protected by parliamentary privilege. This means that your submission and any oral evidence you give before a committee can be made freely and honestly without any threat of legal action for defamation.

Your submission and evidence to a committee become the property of the committee. This means you cannot publish or disclose it without the committee's authorisation. Parliamentary privilege only extends to submissions or evidence that is published by a committee.



Legislative Council Chamber