

INQUIRY INTO E-PETITIONS

Organisation: Legislative Assembly Queensland
Name: Hon Peter Wellington MP
Date received: 23 May 2017



17 May 2017

The Hon John Ajaka MLC
President
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr President

I refer to your letter of 13 April 2017 requesting a submission in relation to the operation of e-petitions in the Queensland Parliament.

The genesis for the adoption of e-petitions was the Queensland Government's Restoring Integrity Good Government Plan which was released in 2001 which included a commitment to trial the feasibility of accepting petitions on-line. Following a 12 month trial e-petitions became a standard feature in Queensland Parliament from November 2003.

Please find **enclosed** a copy of an Article by our Clerk, Neil Laurie, in *The Parliamentarian* in 2003 which details the factors that guided the decision to accept e-petitions in Queensland.

The procedures by which e-petitions are accepted are set out at Chapter 21 of the Standing Orders (copy **enclosed**) but may be summarised as follows:

- The potential petitioner provides the draft text of the e-petition on a form and includes information regarding sponsorship by a Member of Parliament, or a request for the Clerk to sponsor the petition, to the petitions officer;
- The petitions officer and the Clerk check the draft petition for conformity with the Standing Orders and once compliant the petitions officer posts it to the petitions website for the period of time requested (minimum one week – maximum 6 months);
- Persons wishing to join the e-petition then visit the petitions website and electronically acknowledge their support for the petition by providing their name, address and e-mail address.
- Once the period has elapsed a paper copy is printed and tabled in the House on the next sitting day or at the request of a member or a principal petitioner on a particular sitting day;

Parliament House
George St Brisbane Queensland 4000 Australia

Phone + 61 7 3553 6700
Fax + 61 7 3553 6709
Email speaker@parliament.qld.gov.au
Web www.parliament.qld.gov.au

- The Clerk then refers the petition to the Minister responsible for the administration of the subject matter for a response within 30 days;
- The Ministerial response is then e-mailed to signatories of the e-petition who on joining the e-petition elected to receive the response; and
- The e-mail details of signatories are then deleted.

Following the introduction of e-petitions there was a noted pattern of increase in the total number of petitions received in the Queensland Parliament and an upward trend in the number of signatories joining petitions (see Figures 1 and 2 in the **enclosed** Procedural Research Paper of April 2008).

It is clear that e-petitions provides an additional opportunity for citizen input into the parliamentary and government processes. The **enclosed** petition activity report for the financial years since e-petitioning was introduced to the present shows there has been 959 e-petitions in addition to the 1562 paper petitions.

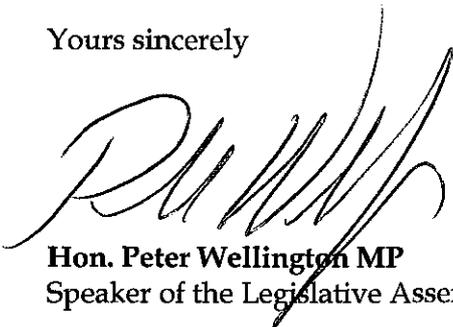
The average number of signatories since the 2004-05 year for e-petitions is 1375 compared to 940 for paper petitions. There is also strong support for the notion that the e-petitions system has increased transparency through the ability to e-mail signatories the results of ministerial responses to the petitions.

The petitions website and associated e-petitions system was developed in-house by the Parliamentary Service. The design and implementation costs in 2002/03 were approximately \$80,000 (comprising of hardware and software and the notional time of an in house developer).

I trust this submission is of assistance to your inquiry.

Should you require any further detail regarding the e-petitions process in Queensland please don't hesitate to contact the Clerk, Neil Laurie at Neil.Laurie@parliament.qld.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Hon. Peter Wellington MP
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Queensland

Enc.

E-petitions Trial

A new process in Queensland

Mr Neil Laurie, in Brisbane.

In August 2002 the Legislative Assembly of Queensland approved sessional orders that established "E-petitions", an innovative model of online petitioning.

Mr Laurie is the Clerk of the Legislature of Queensland.

The genesis for E-petitions was the Queensland government's *Restoring Integrity* good government plan, released on 21 January 2001, which included a commitment to trial the feasibility of the Queensland Parliament accepting petitions online. Following the government's election victory it sought to implement this element of the plan.

The Parliamentary Service, with assistance from the E-Democracy Unit within the Community Engagement Division of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, developed the practical working E-petition model. The Parliamentary Service is responsible for ongoing maintenance of the petitions website (including E-petitions). Evaluation of the project is managed by the E-Democracy Unit, with recommendations flowing out of the evaluation to be developed and approved jointly by both the Parliamentary Service and the E-Democracy Unit. The project is being funded by the E-Democracy Unit for the term of the trial, although no additional funding or resources have been provided to the Parliamentary Service at this stage for day to day maintenance.

E-petitions are located on a dedicated page of the Queensland Parliament's website. From this website Queenslanders can locate E-petitions, find out information about the status of E-petitions, and if it is a current one join the E-petition. Alternatively, with the assistance of a sponsoring Member of Parliament, individuals can become principal petitioners and start an E-petition.

The E-petitions process has not replaced the traditional petitions process. Rather, sessional orders now provide for two types of petitions: E-petitions and traditional paper petitions.

The E-petitions process

In terms of process, the significant difference between the E-petitions process and the traditional petitions process, is that the Parliament via its website "hosts" the petition and before it can be "hosted" it must be sponsored by a Member and checked for conformity with sessional orders by the Clerk.

The E-petitions process involves four key stages.

Opening an E-petition: This involves the provision of information about E-petitions (and the petitioning process), finding a sponsoring MP, lodgement of E-petitions, checking for conformity with the Clerk and publishing of the E-petition to the Petitions website.

Joining an E-petition: This process includes locating the E-petitions site and current E-petitions,

signing an E-petition (electronic acknowledgement) and receiving acknowledgment after the process.

Closing an E-petition: This involves the closing of the E-petition, the tabling of the E-petition, the response development and the logging of the response.

Disposal of details and deletion of an E-petition: This process includes emailing the E-petition response to signatories who supplied their email details, the deletion of the personal details of signatories and the deleting of closed tabled E-petitions at the end of the then current Parliament.

In addition to the introduction of E-petitions, the 26 August sessional orders, placed significant responsibilities on the Clerk to ensure the publication of information about, not only E-petitions, but also paper petitions and ministerial responses to all petitions. As a result, the petitions website is now a central access point for information relevant to the petitioning processes (both paper and E-petitions).

The site is linked prominently from the Parliament website's main page



Parliament House in Brisbane.

with an "E-petitions" button and featured within its menu structure. The site is consistent with the Parliament website's look and feel.

The website

The Petitions website includes:

- A record of current E-petitions – including subject matter, precise wording, eligibility, principal petitioner's name and contact details, current number of signatures (tally) and closing date;
- A record of closed E-petitions – including subject matter, precise wording, eligibility, principal petitioner's name and contact details, sponsor's name (MP) (included after tabling), number of signatures collected, closing date, and current status (ie date tabled and referred to Minister; or date Minister's response tabled and a link to the response);
- A record of tabled paper petitions including subject matter, precise wording, number of signatures collected, closing date, principal petitioner's name and contact details, eligibility and current status (ie. date tabled, date referred to Minister, or date Minister's response tabled and a link to the response), and
- ministerial responses to tabled paper petitions (if a response is tabled).

Support material on the site includes:

- Paper Petitions – General information, Rules, Form for Paper Petitions,
- E-petitions – General information, Rules, Proposal Form, Conditions of Use message,
- Feedback forms,
- Petitions Website User Survey,
- E-petitions Process User Survey,
- Link to existing MPs database (includes phone, email and mail contact details),
- Privacy statement,
- Send a link" function (to send page links to friends) and
- Responsiveness

As stated above, ministerial responses to tabled E-petitions are now posted on the website. When joining an E-petition, signatories are provided with

Title	Signatures	Date	Status	Response
Use of the address	55	22/01/2004	No	No
Call for a review of the current process and what steps will be taken to improve it	10	06/01/2004	No	No
Supporting Small Business Enterprise Development and doing general separation	20	19/12/2003	No	No
Consideration of the 60/60 Welfare Bill, Alleviating Burden	49	01/12/2003	No	No
Call for a review of the current process and what steps will be taken to improve it	176	30/11/2003	No	No
Ministerial Responses to E-petitions	111	05/11/2003	No	No
Supporting Small Business	403	03/11/2003	No	No

Information about the Parliament of Queensland's E-petitions process can be found on its website at <http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/petitions/>

E-Petition request form

This form may be used when seeking to obtain a Member of Parliament's sponsorship of a proposed E-Petition for posting on the Queensland Parliament web site.

Please ensure this form is completed in full and signed prior to forwarding to the MP's office.

Member of Parliament's Details*: (to be completed by Principal Petitioner)

Name _____
 Address _____
 Postcode _____

Principal Petitioner's Details: (to be completed by Principal Petitioner)

Name _____
 Address _____
 Postcode _____

Note: The name and address of the Principal Petitioner will be published on the web site in accordance with the Sessional Orders of the Queensland Parliament.

Telephone office hours _____
 Email _____

the option to supply their email address to receive an automatic notification when a ministerial response is posted in relation to that E-petition. The joining form also outlines the alternative options of regularly monitoring the site or searching Hansard records to locate whether a response has occurred. After a response to an E-petition is posted on the website, an email notification is generated from the Parliamentary Service to the E-petition signatories. The email provides a link to the response and informs that their details

are being deleted from electronic storage.

If no response is posted within six months of the date the E-petition was tabled, an email notification will be generated from the Parliamentary Service to the E-petition signatories. The email informs that no response has been posted yet, suggests checking the site at a later stage in case a response is posted and also informs that their details are being deleted from electronic storage in accordance with the data retention policy.

Current	Closed (to be tabled)	Closed and tabled	Total	Average no. of signatures - Tabled E-petitions	Total signatures	No. of ministerial responses
10	2	14	26	465	7,701	13

Major issues raised during development

Authentication

The government's commitment to an E-petitions system stated that it would give consideration to the potential for collecting valid and verifiable personal details. It was quickly realized, however, during development that the collection of valid and verifiable personal details was an inherent problem, whether paper-based or electronic. In the case of traditional petitions to the Queensland Parliament, the validity of the personal details provided has always been accepted at face value – that is, no verification procedures were ever undertaken unless there was a suggestion of fraud.

Whilst several authentication options were considered in scoping the E-Petitioning commitment, it was identified that there is currently no means to authenticate petitioners' personal details in an online environment that is universally available or equitable (i.e. does not exclude eligible petitioners). As a result, the E-petitions system in the first instance does not provide any level of real authentication. However, a committee of three Members representing the government and opposition did suggest that a requirement be that signatories to E-petitions supply an email addresses be mandatory. This was adopted, but in reality is an illusory authentication method (petitioners could supply any email address since they are not checked).

Security and unique ID generation

The E-petitions system needed to provide and convey security to its users to ensure that people felt comfortable using the system and providing their personal details. There also had to be

some safeguard to computer hacking and fraud etc. In order to prevent people mass-joining E-petitions with an automatic submission program, the system was designed so as to automatically generate a unique ID to be used in each E-petition submission. The ID is displayed prior to the "sign on petition" submission screen, and must be included in the submission form. The generating program monitors the IDs issued, and each ID may only be used once.

E-petitions data retention policy

As detailed above, the personal details collected from signatories of an E-petition are deleted after an email notification is generated to its signatories (who have supplied their email addresses for notification). The email notification occurs when a ministerial response is posted within six months of the date the E-petition is tabled; or a ministerial response is not posted within six months of the date the E-petition was tabled.

As a result, electronic records relating to each E-petition is stored for a maximum of six months after the tabling date. The Parliamentary Service will not keep, generate or supply to Members or departments data lists of email addresses from the E-petitioning processes.

The names and address details of signatories are not available on the website, however printed copies of the tabled E-petition are available on request to the public, as has always been the case with traditional petitions.

Technical details

The petitions website and associated E-petitions system was developed in-house by the Parliamentary Service in collaboration with and financed by the

E-Democracy Unit.

The E-petitions web interface primarily consists of the signing interface that enables residents of Queensland to sign an E-petition and the administration interface that enables Queensland Parliamentary Service personnel to administer the E-petitions process.

The E-petitions web interface was developed in accordance with the E-petitions business requirements developed and agreed to by the Queensland Parliamentary Services and the E-Democracy Unit.

The front pages are HTML, its program is written in CGI script (C++) and is designed to be hosted by a Microsoft SQL server database.

The E-petitions administration interface has also been developed in HTML to enable additions and modification to the backend SQL server database to be carried out via the Queensland Parliament's Internet or intranet. In effect, any person, anywhere in the world could administer the E-petitions database provided they had an Internet connection and the correct logon user name and password.

The E-petitions signing interface and the administration interface consist of a series of HTML form pages that interact with the petitions CGI script. The HTML pages and CGI script reside on the Parliamentary Internet web server. In addition to the HTML pages and CGI script, there are a number of Javascript files that are used for data validation.

Design and implementation costs

Initial design and implementation cost was about \$80,000. However, the greatest component of this related to hardware purchase (server), software (Microsoft SQL server licenses) and the notional time of an in-house software developer. If jurisdictions already possessed adequate servers and appropriate licenses, then implementation costs would be minimal.

No. tabled	Average no. of signatures	Total signatures	No. of ministerial responses
94	850	79,867	77

Ongoing resource requirements

In order to reduce the amount of time involved with maintaining the E-petitions system and to deter human error, the E-petitions processes was designed to be as automated as possible. For online processes that are not automated, an E-petitions administration interface provides access to update the E-petitions system for non-technical Parliament staff (i.e. staff in the Clerk's Office).

The automated E-petitions processes include:

- Joining an E-petition,
- A running tally of signatories for each E-petition,
- Closure of an E-petition in accordance with its closing date (This involves the information moving from the current E-petitions listing to closed E-petitions, and the format of the individual E-petition moving from the current E-petition to the closed E-petition template),
- Deletion of the personal information of an E-petition's signatories after an email response to its signatories has been generated and
- User evaluation and feedback of website and E-petitions system.

E-petition manual processes outside of the system include:

- Processes prior to publishing an E-petition online, and
- Processes involved with tabling an E-petition outside of updating the status of the closed E-petition through the E-petitions administration interface.

Evaluation thus far

There have been human resource implications for the Parliamentary Service. As explained above the processes are not completely automated and require some data input. It is, however, apparent that the major resource implication for ongoing maintenance is not the maintenance of E-petitions itself, which is mostly automated, but the posting of ministerial responses. A detailed assessment of time is being undertaken, and there are large fluctuations and many variables, but total maintenance is currently estimated at between .25 and .4 of a full-time equivalent.

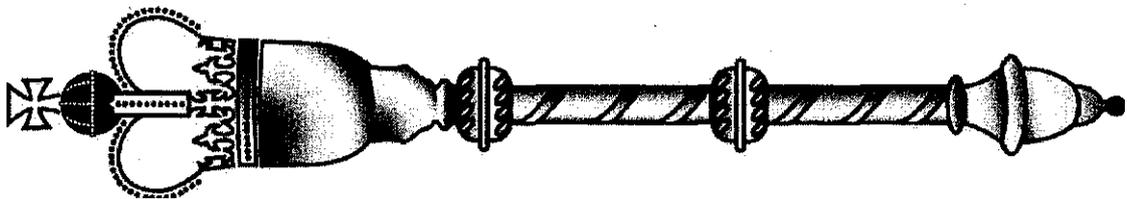
The usage of the Petitions website (including E-petitions) and its operational impact is being monitored for a 12-month trial period. The E-Democracy Unit is monitoring usage frequency and other user information (including demographics and their feedback relating to electronic petitions) over the course of the trial. Several mechanisms are built into the petitions website to assist with the gathering of this information,

including web statistics, feedback and online surveys.

Feedback to date has been very positive, with very few technical or other problems encountered. The tables below provide an overview of the sort of information gathered in the period from 26 August 2002 to 31 July 2003. The tables reveal that E-petitions are only totaling about 21 per cent of all petitions and nine per cent of all signatures. However, this is a relatively good achievement in less than one year of operation.

A major outcome of the entire process has been the increased responsiveness to petitions generally. Each month the percentage of petitions being responded to by Ministers grows. Currently 75 per cent of petitions have received responses during the period. This is much higher than in previous years. The higher profile of responses on the website – or to be more correct, the absence of any response – is likely to be the reason for this increase in ministerial responses.

It is emphasized that the E-petitions process is a complimentary process to the traditional petitioning process. E-petitions add to the democratic process and aims to increase public participation in parliamentary processes by using new technologies. From this point of view it is unobjectionable.



CHAPTER 21 PETITIONS

119. Types of petitions

- (1) The following requirements and provisions set out in this chapter relate to the petitioning of the Legislative Assembly (“the House”).
- (2) The House shall recognise two types of petitions:
 - (a) Paper petitions; and
 - (b) Electronic petitions (E-Petitions).
- (3) A paper petition is a petition:
 - (a) in the correct form, stating a grievance and containing a request for action by the House;
 - (b) fairly written or printed, and free from erasures and interlineations;
 - (c) physically signed by at least one person on the sheet on which the petition is written or printed;
 - (d) either lodged by a member with the Clerk, or lodged by a principal petitioner directly with the Clerk for presentation to the House.
- (4) An electronic petition (“E-Petition”) is a petition:
 - (a) in the correct form, stating a grievance and containing a request for action by the House;
 - (b) either sponsored by a member, or sponsored by the Clerk on behalf of a principal petitioner, and lodged with the Clerk for publication on the Parliament’s Internet Website for a nominated period (“posted period”); and
 - (c) persons may elect to indicate their support of the petition (“join the petition”) by electronically providing their name, address (including postcode), email address and signifying their intention to join the petition.
- (5) The posted period for an E-Petition is to be a minimum of one week and a maximum of six months from the date of publication on the Parliament’s Internet Website.
- (6) The member sponsoring the E-Petition must provide the Clerk with the details of the petition in the correct form; the posted period and a signed acknowledgment that they are prepared to sponsor the E-Petition.
- (7) Once published on the Parliament’s Internet Website an E-Petition cannot be altered.
- (8) Only one E-Petition dealing with substantially the same grievance and requesting substantially the same action by the House shall be published on the Parliament’s Internet Website at the same time.
- (9) Once the posted period for an E-Petition has elapsed, a paper copy of the petition shall be printed by the Clerk in full (including the names, addresses and email addresses of the persons who joined the petition) and presented to the House in the name of the member that sponsored the E-Petition.
- (10) An E-Petition published on the Parliament’s Internet Website, but not presented to the House prior to the dissolution of the Parliament, shall be presented to the subsequent Parliament and becomes a petition of the subsequent Parliament.
- (11) An E-Petition cannot be sponsored after the dissolution of the Parliament.

120. Correct form for all petitions

- (1) All petitions shall be in the following correct form:

PETITION

TO: The Honourable the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly of Queensland.

The Petition of (a) citizens of Queensland

or

(b) residents of the State of Queensland

or

(c) electors of the Division of ...

draws to the attention of the House

(State Grievance)

Your petitioners, therefore request the House to

(State action required)

Name and address of principal petitioner

(Here follows the Signatures)

(2) The text of the grievance and action required in each petition shall not exceed 250 words in total.

121. General rules for petitions

(1) A petition shall be in the English language, or if in another language shall be accompanied by an English translation, certified by the member who sponsors or lodges it to be a true and correct translation.

(2) A petition of a company must be made under its common seal (if the company has a common seal).

(3) Letters, affidavits, or other documents may not be attached to a petition and, in the case of E-Petitions, no reference to Universal Resource Locators (URLs) or other links or web based references are permitted in the petition.

(4) A petition must be respectful, decorous and temperate and not contain any unparliamentary language or otherwise offend any rule or practice of the House.

(5) Application shall not be made by a petition for any grant of public money, nor for compounding debts due to the Crown, nor for the remission of duties payable by any person, unless it is first recommended by the Governor.

(6) In respect of paper petitions, signatures shall be written upon the petition itself, and not pasted upon it, or otherwise affixed or transferred to it.

(7) Persons must sign paper petitions by their names or marks, and by no one else's, except in case of incapacity from sickness.

(8) Persons must join an E-Petition by filling out their correct details and personally agreeing to join the E-Petition, and by no one else, except in case of incapacity from sickness.

(9) A person cannot sign or join the same paper petition or E-Petition more than once.

(10) The correct form of the petition (including the name, address and, in the case of an E-Petition the email address, of the principal petitioner) must appear on each page of the petition to be presented to the House.

122. Presentation of petitions to the House

(1) At the appointed time in the order of business of the House the Speaker will ask the Clerk to read the list of petitions lodged.

(2) Every petition presented to the House in accordance with (1) is deemed to have been received by the House unless a motion that it not be received is moved immediately and agreed to.

123. Duties and powers of the Clerk and Speaker regarding petitions

(1) The Clerk may return a paper petition not in substantial conformity with these Standing Orders to the member or principal petitioner who lodged the petition.

- (2) The Clerk may decline to publish an E-Petition on the Parliament's Internet Website not in conformity with these Standing Orders and advise the sponsoring member accordingly.
- (3) The Clerk or a member may seek a ruling from the Speaker about the conformity of any petition with these Standing Orders.
- (4) The Speaker or the Clerk may allow a petition not in strict compliance with these rules to be presented or published, but only if the non-compliance is minor and relates to the form of the petition and not its substance.
- (5) The Clerk shall ensure that the details of all petitions received after these Standing Orders are adopted, together with all ministerial responses received are published on the Parliament's Internet Website. The details may be removed after the dissolution of each Parliament.
- (6) The Clerk is authorised to create and maintain an appropriate Internet Website on which to publish electronic petitions, paper petitions, responses to petitions and explanatory information and do all things necessary in order to give effect to these Standing Orders.
- (7) The Clerk must dispose of all electronic personal data related to the posting and joining of an E-Petition within six months after an electronic petition is printed and presented to the House.

124. Instructions to members lodging or sponsoring petitions

- (1) A member, or the Clerk if acting on behalf of a principal petitioner, when lodging a paper petition shall place their name and signature at the beginning of that petition and indicate the number of petitioners.
- (2) A member, or the Clerk if acting on behalf of a principal petitioner, when lodging or sponsoring a petition shall take care that it is in conformity with these Standing Orders.
- (3) If a member, or a principal petitioner desires a paper petition to be presented on a particular sitting day, the member or principal petitioner must lodge the petition with the Clerk at least two hours prior to the time set for the commencement of the meeting of the House on that sitting day.
- (4) If a member, or principal petitioner desires a number of petitions to be presented on a particular sitting day, the member or principal petitioner must request the Clerk to hold any petitions lodged or sponsored for presentation on a particular day.'

125. Petitions referred to a Minister and responses tabled and published

- (1) The Clerk shall refer a copy of the material parts of every petition presented to and received by the House to the Minister responsible for the administration of the matter which is the subject of the petition.
- (2) The Minister may forward the Clerk's advice to another Minister for response.
- (3) The Minister shall forward a response ("ministerial response") to a petition to the Clerk within 30 days and the Clerk shall:
 - (a) table the response;
 - (b) forward a copy of the response to the member who presented the petition;
 - (c) forward a copy of the response to the principal petitioner; and
 - (d) ensure the response is published on the Parliament's Internet Website.
- (4) If the House is not sitting when the Clerk receives a ministerial response to a petition, the response is deemed to be tabled when it is received by the Clerk.
- (5) The details of all ministerial responses to petitions received by the Clerk and deemed to be tabled and the day they are received by the Clerk must be included in the Record of Proceedings on the next sitting day.
- (6) If a Minister can not comply with subsection (3), the Minister shall:

PART 4 – GENERAL PROCEDURE

- (a) within 30 days after the petition is presented, forward to the Clerk an interim response and the Minister's reasons for not complying within 30 days; and
- (b) within 3 months after the petition is presented, forward to the Clerk a final response.

Procedural
research paper
1/08

April 2008

Chamber
and Procedural
Services Office

Contents:

Introduction
Petitioning process
Facts and figures
What happens after a petition is
tabled?
Timeliness of responses
Should responses have a time
limit?
What happens in other
jurisdictions?
Conclusion



Queensland
Parliament

Petitions

This paper provides an analysis of the evolution of the petitioning process in the Queensland Parliament, with particular emphasis on the last ten years. This analysis includes the impact of electronic petitioning, along with the subsequent administrative action that follows the presentation of a petition to the Parliament.

Introduction

Petitioning is one of the traditional forms by which citizens can make requests direct to Parliament. A petition is a formal request signed by at least one person and placed before the Parliament with the object of persuading the Parliament to take some particular action.

Members of the community have had the right to petition the Queensland Parliament in the traditional paper manner since 1860. In 2002, the Queensland Parliament introduced electronic petitioning as an alternative to the traditional method.

The Parliament of Queensland was the first in Australia to introduce electronic petitioning. The on-line model of petitioning (known as e-petitions) began as a trial in August 2002, as part of a package of e-democracy initiatives on the part of the Government. After an evaluation of the trial and amendments to Standing Orders made on 27 November 2003, e-petitions became a permanent feature. E-petitions complement, rather than replace, paper petitions.

When e-petitions were introduced a dedicated website was established. It provides information on all petitions since August 2002, including e-petitions currently open and available to join, each paper petition and e-petition closed and presented and any responses received by the relevant Minister.

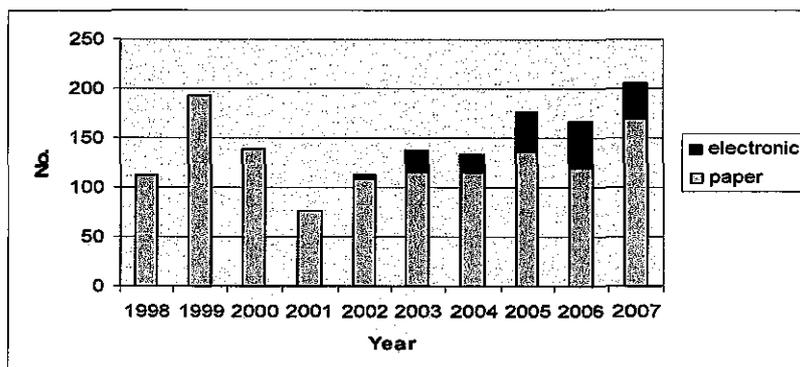
Petitioning process

The general principles for both paper petitions and e-petitions are similar. However, there are some differences in the process for e-petitioning. For example, a Member of Parliament must first sponsor an e-petition before it can be posted on the website to collect signatures, whereas a paper petition is presented to a Member of Parliament for tabling once all signatures have been collected.¹ Petitions may only be tabled in Parliament if they have been lodged with the Clerk and if they are in conformity with the Standing Orders.²

Facts and figures

Petitioning brings the voices of the community into the Parliament. Figure 1 indicates that the number of petitions tabled is generally increasing, along with growth in the number of e-petitions.

Figure 1 Breakdown of petitions received – 1998 to 2007



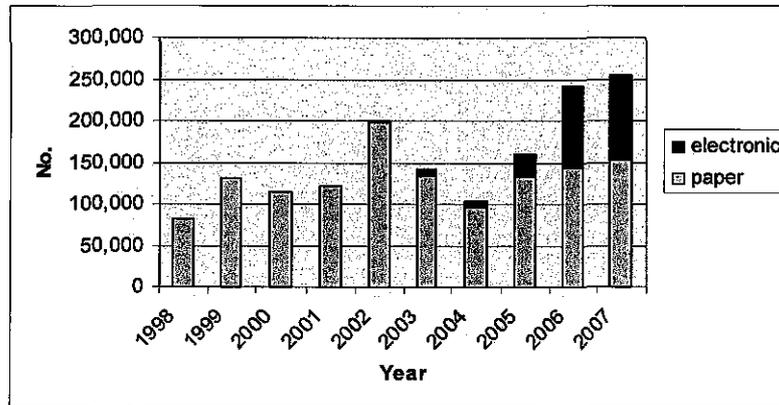
Source: Chamber and Procedural Services Office

¹ The rules and procedures for petitions are provided in Chapter 21, Standing Orders 119 to 125 of the Standing Rules and Orders of the Legislative Assembly. An electronic copy of the Standing Orders may be accessed via the Parliament's website at <http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/view/legislativeAssembly/documents/procedures/StandingRules&Orders.pdf>.

² In accordance with Standing Order 122, petitions are presented to the House by the Clerk of the Parliament. A petition is deemed to be received by the House unless a motion that it not be received is moved immediately and agreed to. Non-conforming petitions may be tabled by Members, but will not be formally received by the House.

While some petitions are signed by as few as one signatory, others attract a larger audience. There has been an upward trend in the number of signatories joining petitions in recent years, with e-petitions contributing to this as indicated in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Breakdown of petitioners for petitions tabled – 1998 to 2007



Source: Chamber and Procedural Services Office

A number of single petitions have attracted a large number of petitioners, as can be seen in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 Details of the largest single paper petitions tabled since 1860

Date tabled	Member presenting	No. of petitioners	Subject of petition
31 August 1916	Mr Kirwan	86,918	Requesting that the hours of sale of liquor in bars should not be altered
9 October 1996	Mr Bredhauer	89,489	Requesting that the decision to privatise cleaning in Queensland Schools be reversed
12 November 1996	Mr Santoro	412,490	Requesting that shopping hours should not be reduced

Source: Chamber and Procedural Services Office

Table 2 Details of the largest single e-petitions tabled since 2002

Date tabled	Member sponsoring	No. of petitioners	Subject of petition
19 April 2006	Mr Nuttall	62,232	Requesting the introduction of daylight savings in Queensland
13 November 2007	Mr Stevens	77,074	Requesting an immediate referendum to introduce daylight savings in Queensland

Source: Chamber and Procedural Services Office

It is important to note that several petitions on the same subject matter, both in paper and electronic form, may be tabled over a period of time, the sum of which may have a large number of signatories. Of course, the number of signatories to a petition should in no way be a reflection of the importance of the issue raised by the petitioners.

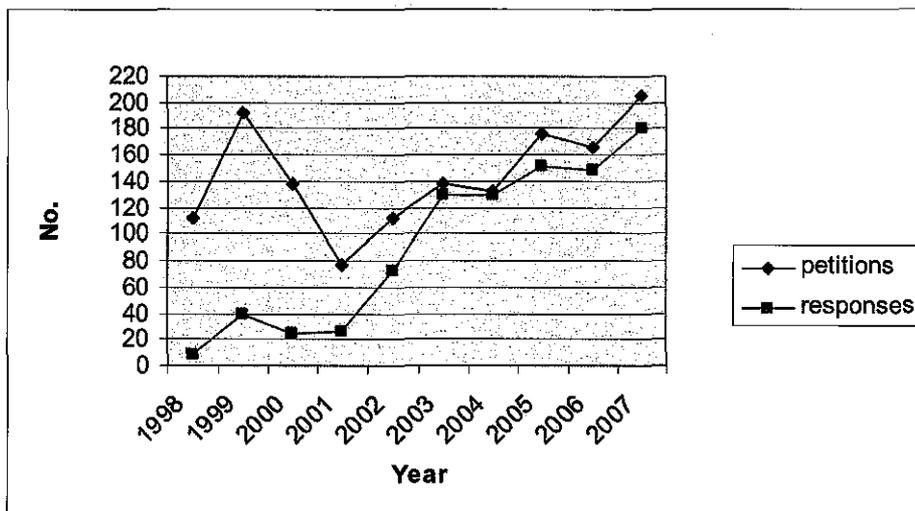
What happens after a petition is tabled?

Once petitions are tabled and received by the House, the Clerk refers a copy of the material parts to the Minister responsible for the administration of the subject matter.³ There is no mandatory requirement for Ministers to respond. However, a formal mechanism to enable the tabling of ministerial responses has been in place since 21 March 1995.⁴

Once a response has been tabled, it is forwarded to the Member who presented the petition and is also published on the petitions website. Both the fact of any response received and the content of such response can be ascertained from the website. Similarly, the absence of any response is also apparent from the website. In the case of e-petitions, an advisory email is also generated to signatories to the e-petition (where they have opted to be so advised). This email includes a link to the response, which enhances accessibility for subscribers to the e-petition.

Since e-petitioning was introduced in late 2002, the number of tabled ministerial responses has increased significantly. Prior to this, few petitions received a ministerial response, when compared with the number of petitions tabled. Figure 3 indicates the relationship between the number of petitions received and the number of responses tabled. The majority of petitions tabled now receive a formal ministerial response.

Figure 3 Comparison between petitions tabled and responses received – 1998 to 2007*



Source: Chamber and Procedural Services Office

Note: *Includes data for responses received to 8 April 2008

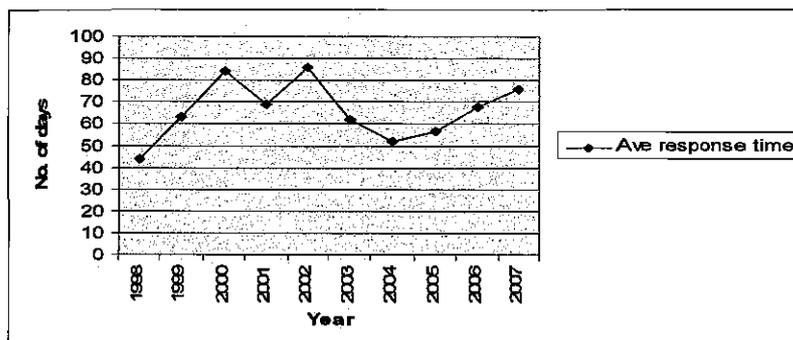
Timeliness of responses

Prior to the introduction of e-petitioning, ministerial responses to petitions were not only less likely to be tabled, as indicated in Figure 3 above, but they were also generally less likely to be tabled in a timely manner.

Figure 4 indicates the average number of days taken to respond to petitions tabled, for those petitions that have received a response. For each year, on average, responses are received within a three month timeframe. While the average response times since 2003 compare favourably to earlier periods, an upward trend is emerging.

³ Only petitions tabled in conformity with Standing Orders are referred to the responsible Minister.

⁴ This was originally in the form of Sessional Orders, agreed to from time to time. Prior to this time, the Standing Orders allowed the Minister to take appropriate action or make comment in the House. Standing Order 125 now applies.

Figure 4 Timeliness of responses to petitions – 1998 to 2007*

Source: Chamber and Procedural Services Office

Note: *Includes data for responses received to 8 April 2008

Should responses have a time limit?

There is a formal mechanism enabling Ministers to table responses to petitions. However, it is not mandatory and therefore no time limit is imposed. In contrast, Ministers are required to table responses to parliamentary committee reports and questions on notice within a specified timeframe.

With respect to committee reports, s 107 of the *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001* provides that Ministers must respond to certain reports within three months after the report is tabled. If the Minister can not comply, they must table an interim report within three months, stating the reasons why they can not comply and table a final response within six months after the report is tabled.

In relation to answers to questions on notice, Standing Order 114 provides that answers shall be submitted within 30 calendar days.

It could be argued that there is a need for a time limit for petition responses if the upward trend identified in Figure 4 continues.

What happens in other jurisdictions?

A survey of practices in other Parliaments across Australia and New Zealand elicited responses from 15 Houses of Parliament. Of those Houses surveyed, four currently have some process involving referral of petitions to a committee. Details are provided in Table 3 below.

Table 3 Details of referral process for jurisdictions surveyed

Jurisdiction	Referral process
Australian House of Representatives	Referred to the Standing Committee on Petitions. The role of the committee is to receive and process petitions, and inquire into and report on any matter relating to petitions and the petitions system. ⁵
Australian Senate	Petitions are brought to the notice of the appropriate legislative and general purpose standing committee.
New Zealand Parliament	Referred to the most appropriate select committee for consideration and report.
Western Australia – Legislative Council	Referred to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs, which has the function of inquiring into and reporting on all petitions tabled.

Source: Information provided to the Chamber and Procedural Services Office from the relevant jurisdictions via e-CATT Info-share

⁵ The Standing Committee on Petitions was established in February 2008. The establishment of a petitions committee followed a report on petitioning by the Standing Committee on Procedure. This report may be accessed via the Australian Parliament's website at <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/proc/petitioning/report.htm>.

Of the remaining eleven Houses that responded to the survey, nine have a process in which petitions are referred to government in some manner.

In a small number of jurisdictions, a time limit for a response is prescribed. Such timeframes range from 12 sitting days to four months. In some cases, the time limits for responses are set from the time a committee reports on the petition. No Parliament imposes sanctions for failure to respond within the specified timeframe. However, some jurisdictions identify the failure to respond. For example, in the Western Australian Legislative Council, all outstanding Government responses to committee reports are listed on the Notice Paper.

Conclusion

A recent report of a commonwealth parliamentary committee identified a number of principles that underpin petitioning. These include that 'petitions sent to the House should be addressed by the House' and that 'Governments should respond'.⁶

The manner in which petitions are dealt with across Australasian jurisdictions is varied, but most Houses have processes in place to ensure that they are considered in some way.

Petitioning in the Queensland Parliament remains an important mechanism for community views to be expressed. Since the introduction of e-petitioning, which has increased the prominence of petitions through the website publication, more Ministers are formally responding to petitions.

The value of any response is in its content and timeliness. The content of responses is outside the scope of this paper. However, timeliness of responses may need to be addressed if emerging trends continue.

⁶ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, *Making a difference: Petitioning the House of Representatives*, House of Representatives, Canberra 2007, p. 6.

PETITION STATISTICS

Petition Activity Report – Financial Years

Petitions

	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-16	2016-17*
No. of posted E-Petitions	16	33	53	32	71	50	95	95	90	116	79	72	94	80
No. of tabled Paper Petitions	109	120	142	128	164	129	126	135	113	99	65	64	97	71
No. of tabled E-Petitions	20	26	48	40	60	55	79	95	95	110	91	68	103	69
Total no. of Petitions (tabled)	129	146	190	168	224	184	205	230	208	209	156	132	200	140
Average no. of signatures tabled E-Petitions	0	628	1,878	714	1,920	1,134	3,622	1,627	364	888	991	728	1,649	1,736
Average no. of signatures Paper Petitions	1,088	863	1,191	952	913	724	1,113	1,075	727	936	838	962	1,117	809
No. of signatures tabled E-Petitions	0	16,337	90,164	28,594	115,221	62,377	286,202	154,640	34,581	97,698	90,258	49,508	170,907	119,810
No. of signatures Paper Petitions	118,668	103,655	169,258	121,865	149,748	93,415	140,303	145,223	82,253	92,738	54,518	61,630	108,441	57,499
Total no. of signatures (tabled)	118,668	119,992	259,422	150,459	264,969	155,792	426,505	299,863	116,834	190,436	144,776	111,138	279,348	177,309

Ministerial Responses

	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-16	2016-17*
Combined paper and e-petition responses	N/A	51	155	147	208	139	222	241	205	207	166	131	190	142

* 2016-2017 statistics to date – 11 May 2017