

*Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs — Seventeenth Report — “Overview of Petitions”*

Resumed from 26 November 2009.

*Motion*

**Hon BRIAN ELLIS:** I move —

That the report be noted.

The seventeenth report provides an overview of the petitions considered by the Legislative Council’s Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs from 1 July 2008 to 30 June 2009. I was not on the committee at that stage, but as Chair of the committee I appreciate the work, time and effort that previous members of the committee put in during the reporting period. In that reporting period, 34 petitions tabled in the Legislative Council were referred to the committee, and 19 petitions carried over from the previous reporting period lapsed when the thirty-seventh Parliament was prorogued on 7 August 2008. Nine of those 19 petitions were re-tabled during the thirty-eighth Parliament and referred to the committee during the reporting period. The committee finalised 21 petitions during the reporting period. As at 30 June 2009, 13 petitions were the subject of ongoing committee inquiries.

Chapter 3 of the report summarises the committee’s inquiries and evidence received in relation to each of the 21 petitions the committee finalised during the reporting period. The summary of each petition outlines issues raised during the committee’s consideration of the petition and may not refer to all the correspondence and evidence received during the course of the committee’s inquiries into the petition. However, as the report states, this is an overview. I suppose part of the problem with the time that has passed since this report was presented is that some of these petitions probably have lost some of their relevance. Consequently, in the future, the committee will report more regularly to keep the public informed and to keep the reports more relevant. The Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs receives a substantial number of petitions. Sometimes by the time the committee’s annual report is tabled and we have discussed the report, the general public and the petitioners have lost interest in the matter and the report is no longer relevant. The committee intends to report more regularly, even though the reports might be smaller.

In conclusion, the committee thanks the former members and the present and former staff members of the committee for their contributions to the work of the committee during the reporting period. This report also indicates that petitions continue to be a popular method of informing members of Parliament about a wide range of issues that concern the public. I commend the report to the house.

**Hon COL HOLT:** I will say a few words about the seventeenth report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs. I was appointed to that committee in May last year. Many of the petitions contained in this report pertain to the period before my appointment. To date, my experience on the committee has been very positive and I have been very encouraged by the way committee members from both sides of the house have worked together on some of the issues. We have identified a number of issues that we have taken through to the inquiry stage. It is important for members of Parliament to examine in depth the petitions that are presented to this house. We must look closely at the issues that have concerned people so much that they have presented to Parliament a petition containing a number of signatures. I thank the previous members and staff of the committee who were involved in the production of this report and the chair of the committee, Hon Brian Ellis. I welcome the inclusive way that he handles the committee. I have been very encouraged by not only the outcomes of the report and what is written in the report, but also the process the committee goes through. It is very pleasing for the community when Parliament decides to look at certain issues. The petition process focuses the government and can bring about change. Members of the committee are very conscious that people sign a petition for a reason and that it is fair and good to go through this process. I understand that an almost record number of petitions have been presented to the committee. We need to consider why we are being presented with so many and how we can best serve the people who want certain issues addressed. There may be other ways to tackle an issue before it reaches the petition stage, which can potentially slow down a resolution of the issue. That could create more work for the committee, but it is about achieving an outcome for the petitioners. We must consider whether there is a better way to achieve the outcome that the petitioners hope for. I encourage members who are interacting with constituents who are thinking about presenting a petition to assist their constituents to pursue other avenues to achieve the desired outcome before presenting a petition, because that might not be the best way to get a timely outcome. As Hon Brian Ellis said, this report was tabled in November last year and we are only just dealing with it now. Some of the petitions were probably initiated 18 months before the report was tabled. Therefore, it has been potentially two-and-a-half years since some of the petitions were presented. I encourage members to think about the best way they can serve their constituents who are thinking about presenting a petition.

**Hon KATE DOUST:** I seek the call, but I see that it is close to that time of the afternoon when the house is suspended. I am not sure whether I should continue my remarks or wait until we come back later this afternoon.

**The CHAIRMAN:** We can certainly do just that. Noting the time, I will leave the chair until the ringing of the bells.

**Committee interrupted, pursuant to temporary orders.**

[Continued on page 7986.]

*Sitting suspended from 4.15 to 4.30 pm*