

41ST PARLIAMENT



Procedure and Privileges Committee

Report 4

Amended Sitting Schedule for  
the Legislative Assembly

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Presented by  
Mr Stephen Price MLA  
June 2022

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Deputy Chair	Mr Peter Rundle MLA Member for Roe
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# Procedure and Privileges Committee

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## *Amended Sitting Schedule for the Legislative Assembly*

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### **Report No. 4**

Presented by

**Mr Stephen Price MLA**  
**Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Assembly**

Laid on the Table of the Legislative Assembly on 22 June 2022



# Amended Sitting Schedule for the Legislative Assembly

## Background

The Procedure and Privileges Committee (the Committee) is responsible under Standing Order 284 for reviewing procedures and practices in the Legislative Assembly Chamber to ensure they run efficiently and effectively to progress the business of the Government, the Opposition and the House. Given the parliamentary working environment can involve late nights and is frequently stressful and deadline-driven, the Committee has decided to examine measures that could enhance working conditions and work-life balance for members and parliamentary staff as they conduct parliamentary business.

## Work-Life Balance Versus Late Nights

The Committee, over a number of parliaments, has been mindful that long sitting hours can be physically and mentally taxing for members of Parliament and parliamentary staffers, and that sitting late into the night is not family friendly nor is it the optimum time to consider legislation.

The sitting schedule for the Legislative Assembly spans approximately 19 weeks per year, in which the House sits on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays for approximately seven hours each day.<sup>1</sup> The nominal sitting hours are from 2.00 pm to 10.00 pm on Tuesdays, with a one-hour dinner break between 6.00 pm and 7.00 pm; from noon until 7.00 pm on Wednesdays; and from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm on Thursdays, with a one-hour luncheon break from 1.00 pm to 2.00 pm.<sup>2</sup> The Committee notes that over the past six years there have been 56 occasions on which the Legislative Assembly sat beyond 10.00 pm, including 12 instances when the House sat beyond midnight, with the latest finish time being logged at 5.21 am. While there have been considerably fewer late nights since the commencement of the 41st Parliament, there were five occasions in 2021 when the Parliament rose after 10.00 pm and there have been two occasions thus far in 2022. A table summarising when the House has sat later than 10.00 pm, since the commencement of the 40th Parliament in 2017, appears at Appendix 1.

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<sup>1</sup> The Legislative Assembly also sits for three days of Estimates each year, with these days being longer than standard 7.5 hours.

<sup>2</sup> Legislative Assembly Standing Order 19 designates the days and times when the House will meet, but not when the sittings will conclude.

The Committee reviewed the 2022 sitting schedules of the other Australian parliaments and notes that the Parliament of Western Australia sits for considerably more weeks per annum than all of the other State or Territory parliaments. The Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of New South Wales, for example, is scheduled to sit for 16 weeks this year, the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of Victoria for 14 weeks, and the unicameral Parliament of Queensland for 13 weeks. The Territory legislatures will be sitting for 10 and 12 weeks respectively. A comparative table of the Australian parliaments' sitting days can be found at Appendix 2.

The Committee also observes that the Parliament of Western Australia is one of the few Australian parliaments which still schedules late sitting nights, with the majority of the other parliaments concluding business by 8.30 pm, and with a number concluding around 6.00 pm. A comparative table of the Australian parliaments' sitting hours can be found at Appendix 3.

Given the Parliament of Western Australia provides the most generous schedule of sitting days and times for the conduct of parliamentary business, the Committee considers there is scope to propose a slight adjustment to the sitting schedule which will promote the House to conclude its business at a reasonable hour on Tuesday nights, without necessarily resulting in a reduction in the overall time available to conduct business.

The Committee proposes that the House sits one hour earlier on Tuesdays, i.e. from 1.00 pm, rather than 2.00 pm; that the House dispenses with the dinner break; and that the House concludes business at 7.00 pm instead of 10.00 pm. By starting an hour earlier, and forgoing the one-hour dinner break, the House would claw back two hours of the three hours surrendered by not sitting from 7.00 pm to 10.00 pm. There would, accordingly, only be a diminution of one hour in the time routinely scheduled to conduct business on a sitting Tuesday. A 7.00 pm conclusion, however, would enable all members and staff to have some personal time or family time at the end of the working day, thus appreciably improving everyone's work-life balance. Starting earlier on a Tuesday and finishing earlier also makes sense because members are already at Parliament earlier in the morning for Party Room meetings. This makes for an extraordinarily long day on a Tuesday.

The Committee notes that Question Time would still be scheduled for 2.00 pm each day. The Order of Business would remain Acknowledgement of Country, prayers, petitions, papers for tabling, giving notices of motion, brief ministerial statements and so on as per the Notice Paper. This would enable a prompt start to Question Time as already occurs on Wednesdays and Thursdays.

To provide a straightforward means of bringing business to a close at 7.00 pm on Tuesday evenings, one option could be that members' 90-second statements be transferred from

their current slot on Thursdays from 12.50 pm to 1.00 pm, to Tuesdays from 6.50 pm to 7.00 pm. If this option were adopted, at the conclusion of members' 90-second statements at 7.00 pm, the House would rise.

The Committee is mindful, however, that there may be occasions when the Government will need the House to sit later than 7.00 pm on Tuesdays. Under the option highlighted above, this right is not affected. If the Government required the House to continue for a short period of time after 7.00 pm — for example, to conclude a matter of public interest debate vote, or to third read a bill — then business could simply be brought back on by the Leader of the House at 7.00 pm. This situation already occurs on sitting Wednesday nights, when the House typically rises at 7.00 pm following the conclusion of private members' business, but does on occasion sit beyond 7.00 pm to deal with pressing matters of business. On 10 May 2022, for example, the House sat briefly after 7.00 pm to complete consideration in detail and the third reading of the Planning and Development Amendment Bill 2022.

For those occasions when the Government anticipates that the House will need to sit for an extended period, and that a scheduled dinner break would be advisable, then the Leader of the House could provide some advance notice of the Government's intention to sit late. The Speaker could then inform the House before Question Time on that Tuesday that a late sitting will take place following a dinner break from 6.00 pm to 7.00 pm. On these occasions, if the above option to shift members' 90-second statements to Tuesdays is adopted, then the Committee recommends they be brought forward an hour and take place from 5.50 pm to 6.00 pm.

The Committee unanimously proposes that the amended sitting schedule for Tuesdays be trialled for the duration of the spring session in 2022.

## **Recommendation**

The Committee recommends —

That the House adopt a Temporary Order for the remainder of 2022 to the following effect:

That the House amend its regular sitting hours on Tuesdays from 1.00 pm to 7.00 pm.



**HON MICHELLE H ROBERTS MLA  
CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE  
22 JUNE 2022**



## Appendix One

### Legislative Assembly Post-10.00 pm Sitting Times 2017 – Present

<b>Legislative Assembly Post-10.00 pm Sitting Times: 2017 – Present</b>					
<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>
23/05/17 11.13 pm	13/02/18 10.42 pm	2/04/19 10.08 pm	18/02/20 11.18 pm	22/06/21 10.07 pm	17/05/2022 10.43 pm
13/06/17 10.01 pm	10/04/18 10.10 pm	9/04/19 1.30 am	19/02/20 11.04 pm	9/11/21 10.29 pm	14/06/2022 10.11 pm
20/06/17 10.05 pm	8/05/18 11.07 pm	7/05/19 11.36 pm	10/03/20 10.43 pm	16/11/21 10.53 pm	
15/08/17 10.25 pm	15/05/18 11.18 pm	14/05/19 11.11 pm	16/04/20 10.26 pm	17/11/21 11.58 pm	
12/09/17 10.54 pm	16/05/18 10.01 pm	15/05/19 10.24 pm	19/05/20 10.32 pm	23/11/21 11.38 pm	
10/10/17 10.18 pm	12/06/18 10.33 pm	11/06/19 1.56 am	26/05/20 11.54 pm		
17/10/17 10.03 pm	21/08/18 12.31 am	25/06/19 12.35 am	23/06/20 10.18 pm		
7/11/17 10.21 pm	18/09/18 11.41 pm	26/06/19 11.40 pm	25/06/20 12.38 am		
21/11/17 10.22 pm	6/11/18 10.06 pm	13/08/19 12.48 am	11/08/20 11.37 pm		
28/11/17 10.26 pm	20/11/18 10.17 pm	14/08/19 10.25 pm	13/08/20 10.38 pm		
		28/08/19 12.09 am	18/08/20 10.39 pm		
		3/09/19 1.07 am	13/10/20 10.47 pm		
		4/09/19 12.24 am	14/10/20 10.07 pm		
		5/09/19 5.21 am			
		17/09/19 12.09 am			
		18/09/19 12.04 am			



## Appendix Two

### Comparative Table

#### Australian Parliaments — Number of Sitting Weeks and Days in 2022

<b>Comparative Table: Australian Parliaments — Number of Sitting Weeks and Days in 2022</b>		
<b>House</b>	<b>No. of Sitting Weeks</b>	<b>No. of Sitting Days</b>
<b>Federal House of Representatives</b>	17 (Election year: normally 20 weeks)	64
<b>Federal Senate</b>	14 (Election year: normally 20 weeks)	51
<b>WA Legislative Assembly</b>	19	57
<b>WA Legislative Council</b>	19	57
<b>NSW Legislative Assembly</b>	16	45
<b>NSW Legislative Council</b>	15	42
<b>VIC Legislative Assembly</b>	14	39
<b>VIC Legislative Council</b>	13	39
<b>SA House of Assembly</b>	11 (Election year: normally 16 weeks)	33
<b>SA Legislative Council</b>	12 (Election year: normally 16 weeks)	36
<b>TAS House of Assembly</b>	15	45
<b>TAS Legislative Council</b>	17	53
<b>QLD Legislative Assembly</b>	13	40
<b>NT Legislative Assembly</b>	10	30
<b>ACT Legislative Assembly</b>	12	35



# Appendix Three

## Comparative Table Australian Parliaments — Number of Sitting Hours in 2022

Comparative Table: Australian Parliaments — Number of Sitting Hours in 2022					
HOUSE	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Federal House of Representatives	10.00 am – 8.00 pm	12.00 noon – 8.00 pm	9.30 am – 8.00 pm	9.30 am – 5.00 pm	
Federal Senate	10.00 am – 10.30 pm <i>Break: 6.30 pm – 7.30 pm</i>	12.00 noon – 7.20 pm*	9.30 am – 8.00 pm	9.30 am – 6.00 pm	
WA Legislative Assembly		2.00 pm – 10.00 pm <i>Break: 6.00 pm – 7.00 pm</i>	12.00 noon – 7.00 pm	9.00 am – 5.00 pm <i>Break: 1.00 pm – 2.00 pm</i>	
WA Legislative Council		2.00 pm – 10.25 pm <i>Break: 6.00 pm – 7.00 pm</i>	1.00 pm – 7.00 pm	10.00 am – 6.00 pm <i>Break: 1.00 pm – 2.00 pm</i>	
NSW Legislative Assembly		12.00 noon – 8.30 pm <i>Break: 6.30 pm – 8.00 pm</i>	9.30 am – 8.30 pm <i>Break: 6.30 pm – 8.00 pm</i>	9.30 am – 6.30 pm <i>Break: 6.30 pm – 8.00 pm</i>	
NSW Legislative Council		2.30 pm – 10.30 pm	10.00 am – 10.30 pm <i>Break: 1.15 pm – 2.15 pm</i>	10.00 am – 10.30 pm <i>Break: 1.15 pm – 2.15 pm</i>	
VIC Legislative Assembly		12.00 noon – 7.00 pm* <i>[Adjournment debate can go for up to one hour]</i>	9.30 am – 7.00 pm* <i>[Adjournment debate can go for up to one hour]</i> <i>Break: 1.00 pm – 2.00 pm</i>	9.30 am – 5.00 pm* <i>[Adjournment debate can go for up to one hour]</i> <i>Break: 1.00 pm – 2.00 pm</i>	
VIC Legislative Council		11.30 am – 10.00 pm* <i>[Adjournment debate can go for up to one hour]</i> <i>Break: 1.30 pm – 2.00 pm</i> <i>Break: 6.30 pm – 7.30 pm</i>	9.00 am – 6.30 pm* <i>[Adjournment debate can go for up to one hour]</i> <i>Break: 1.00 pm – 2.00 pm</i>	10.00 am – 10.00 pm* <i>[Adjournment debate can go for up to one hour]</i> <i>Break: 1.00 pm – 2.00 pm</i> <i>Break: 6.30 pm – 7.30 pm</i>	9.00 am – 4.30 pm <i>Break: 1.00 pm – 2.00 pm</i>
SA House of Assembly		11.00 am – adjournment <i>[Usually adjourns around 5.30 pm – 6.00 pm]</i>	10.30 am – adjournment <i>[Usually adjourns around 5.30 pm – 6.00 pm]</i>	11.00 am – adjournment <i>[Usually adjourns around 5.30 pm – 6.00 pm]</i>	
SA Legislative Council		2.15 pm – adjournment <i>[Usually adjourns around 6.00 pm]</i>	2.15 pm – adjournment <i>[Usually adjourns around 6.00 pm]</i>	2.15 pm – adjournment <i>[Usually adjourns around 6.00 pm]</i>	
TAS House of Assembly		10.00 am – adjournment <i>[Usually adjourns around 6.45 pm]</i> <i>Break: 1.00 pm – 2.30 pm</i>	10.00 am – adjournment <i>[Usually adjourns around 6.45 pm]</i> <i>Break: 1.00 pm – 2.30 pm</i>	10.00 am – adjournment <i>[Usually adjourns around 6.15 pm]</i> <i>Break: 1.00 pm – 2.30 pm</i>	
TAS Legislative Council		11.00 am – 7.30 pm* <i>Break: 1.00 pm – 2.30 pm</i>	11.00 am – 7.30 pm* <i>Break: 1.00 pm – 2.30 pm</i>	11.00 am – 7.30 pm* <i>Break: 1.00 pm – 2.30 pm</i>	
QLD Legislative Assembly		9.30 am – 7.30 pm <i>Break: 1.00 pm – 2.00 pm</i>	9.30 am – 6.30 pm <i>Break: 1.00 pm – 2.00 pm</i>	9.30 am – 6.30 pm <i>Break: 1.00 pm – 2.00 pm</i>	
NT Legislative Assembly		10.00 am – adjournment <i>[Usually adjourns around 8.00 pm]</i> <i>Break: 12.00 noon – 2.00 pm</i>	10.00 am – adjournment <i>[Usually adjourns around 8.00 pm]</i> <i>Break: 12.00 noon – 2.00 pm</i>	10.00 am – adjournment <i>[Usually adjourns around 8.00 pm]</i> <i>Break: 12.00 noon – 2.00 pm</i>	
ACT Legislative Assembly		10.00 am – 6.30 pm <i>Break: 12.00 noon – 2.00 pm</i>	10.00 am – 6.30 pm <i>Break: 12.00 noon – 2.00 pm</i>	10.00 am – 6.30 pm <i>Break: 12.00 noon – 2.00 pm</i>	

pm\* — start of adjournment debate



# Appendix Four

## Committee's Functions and Powers

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Legislative Assembly Standing Order 284 provides the following functions, powers and terms of reference to the Procedure and Privileges Committee —

### **Procedure and Privileges Committee**

- 284.** (1) A Procedure and Privileges Committee will be appointed at the beginning of each Parliament to —
- (a) examine and report on the procedures of the Assembly; and
  - (b) examine and report on issues of privilege; and
  - (c) wherever necessary, confer with a similar committee of the Council.
- (2) Membership of the committee will consist of the Speaker and four other members as the Assembly appoints.
- (3) Standing Order 278 will apply except that where possible any report of the committee will be presented by the Deputy Speaker.
- (4) When consideration of a report from the committee is set down as an order of the day it will be considered using the consideration in detail procedure.