

Hon Matthew Swinbourne MLC

Chair

Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs

Legislative Council

Parliament House

PERTH. WA 6000

Dear Matthew, Committee Members and Staff,

Thank you for the invitation to lodge a submission into your Inquiry into the functions, processes and procedures of the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs.

This Inquiry is timely as there has been many changes over the last 35 years of my close involvement with the Legislative Council, and it is opportune that the role of this Committee be reviewed.

The "Environment and Public Affairs" label was attached to the Committee when it was established in the 1990's. This was a period when the Green's and Democrat's Parties first won election to the Legislative Council after the changes to the Electoral System implemented from the General Election in 1989.

The title was adapted to reflect the relatively new diversity in the make up of the Legislative Council membership.

As the years progressed and several other Political Parties won seats in the Chamber, the "novelty" of more diverse representation was superseded and Environmental issues became more "mainstream" rather than the claimed exclusive province of some groups.

In addition, Legislative Assembly Committees more generally follow Portfolio areas such as Finance, Education, Health, Environment while Legislative Council committees more generally follow aspects of scrutiny and review. It is confusing and pointless to have duplication across both Houses of Parliament.

The advent of automatic referral of tabled Petitions to the Committee changed it's main role as this seems to have become it's primary purpose. This is a vital, and very important, distinction from the treatment of tabled Petitions in the Legislative Assembly. This aspect should definitely be maintained as it significantly enhances the advantage to members and constituents through lodging a Petition in the Legislative Council, where it will attract a "desk top review" at least, and in some cases be taken to a major Inquiry status, rather than the Legislative Assembly where there is no compulsion for the Parliament or the Government to take any notice of it. This is consistent with the Legislative Councils role of scrutiny, accountability and policy development as a "House of Review".

Noting all the above, I believe the name of the Committee requires change. Renaming the Committee to the "Petitions Committee", or the "Petitions and Public Affairs" Committee, if it is felt that Public Affairs are not dealt with adequately through other Legislative Council procedures

such as debates, questions, motions with or without notice, etc should be considered by your Inquiry as it would reflect it's evolved role.

In summary, I believe the Committee performs a very important and relevant role in the scrutiny, openness, accountability and public policy debates. It should be retained in mostly it's current form with a name change to more accurately reflect it's purpose.

Best wishes for the Committee and Chambers deliberations on this Inquiry and further work into the future.

Kind Regards,

Hon Barry House AM

Former President of the Legislative Council (2009 – 2017)