

19. Chamber and Assembly precincts

- 19.1. Parliamentary precincts have been defined as ‘any place *de facto* occupied by Members for their parliamentary duties’.¹ The Commonwealth Parliament’s precincts were not defined in a statute until 1988, with the move from the provisional Parliament House to the current building.² Prior to that time, the precincts were taken to be the provisional building, its annexes, verandahs and entrances. Interestingly, the precincts of the Houses of Parliament in Westminster are not defined in statute.
- 19.2. The ACT Legislative Assembly’s precincts were not defined in statute until 2001 (see under the heading ‘Legislative Assembly Precincts Act’ below in this chapter). After the establishment of self-government in 1989, the Assembly met in temporary accommodation in a converted office building. The precincts of the Assembly were taken to be that part of the building occupied by the Assembly, its members and support services.
- 19.3. As *Odgers’* makes clear, the definition of the parliamentary precincts is ‘an administrative matter, which has no connection with the operation of either the ordinary law or the law of parliamentary immunities’.³ Essentially, the parliamentary precincts, whether defined in a statute or defined by convention, are those areas over which the Presiding Officer(s) exercise administrative authority.
- 19.4. Section 15 of the Parliamentary Privileges Act makes it absolutely clear that any law in force in the ACT applies within the precincts of the Commonwealth Parliament. The ordinary criminal law applies within the precincts of parliament and equally the immunity of proceedings in parliament applies wherever those proceedings occur. For example, parliamentary committees frequently meet in a variety of venues and locations away from parliament buildings.⁴
- 19.5. It is, however, a long-established practice that:

... police do not conduct any investigations, make arrests, or execute any process (for example, search warrants) in the parliamentary precincts without consultation with the Presiding Officers.⁵

1 *House of Representatives Practice*, First edn, p 156.

2 *Parliamentary Precincts Act 1988* (Cth) expanded the traditional definition to include adjacent parks, gardens and car parks.

3 *Odgers’*, p 76.

4 An element of some minor contempts is that they occur within the precincts—for example, the service of a summons on a member of parliament on a sitting day.

5 *Odgers’*, p 76.

- 19.6. The Legislative Assembly precincts are governed by similar principles. The Acting Clerk of the Assembly has advised the ACT Police not to serve a summons on a member within the Assembly building,⁶ and police investigations have been conducted within the Assembly at the invitation of the Clerk and after consultation with the Speaker. On 6 March 2002, the Speaker made the following statement to the Assembly:

As indicated in the letter [to all Members], certain actions have been taken following the receipt of information by the Clerk on Wednesday, 27 February. Arising out of a complaint, subsequent investigations and consultation with me, a matter was referred to the Australian Federal Police by the Clerk.

A police investigation was commenced and is still in progress. Two search warrants were executed this morning within the Assembly building. The matters relate to computer security.

As stated in my letter, I can assure members that the Australian Federal Police are aware of the situation in regard to the privileges and immunities that this Assembly and its members enjoy. Suitable arrangements have been put in place in relation to police access to this building.⁷

- 19.7. This statement summarises the practical situation with regard to the precincts of the Assembly. The police were advised of the grounds for suspecting that a criminal offence may have occurred in the Assembly building. An investigation was commenced, in full consultation with the Speaker. The police were thoroughly briefed with regard to parliamentary privilege and the immunities of members, and processes were put in place to deal with any issues of privilege that might arise during the investigation.⁸
- 19.8. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Chief Police Officer of the ACT, on behalf of the Australian Federal Police, and the Speaker, on behalf of the Legislative Assembly, was tabled by the Speaker on 29 May 2007.⁹ The MOU formalised the arrangements that had been developed on an ad hoc basis to deal with past incidents and set out how the police would operate in the Assembly

6 In the First Assembly, police entered the building with the intention of serving a summons on a member but after discussions with the Acting Clerk did not do so.

7 Assembly Debates, 6 March 2002, p 593. The police inquiry did not find that an offence had been committed. However, the circumstances revealed by the inquiry did result in the Legislative Assembly establishing a privileges inquiry. (See Chapter 2: Parliamentary privilege—The powers and immunities of the Assembly, under the heading ‘Conduct of privilege inquiries’.)

8 Select Committee on Privileges, *Unauthorised diversion and receipt of a Member's e-mails*, 13 November 2002. See also MoP, No 10, 7 March 2020, pp 98-100.

9 MoP, No 100, 29 May 2007, p 1017, *Memorandum of Understanding between the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory and the Chief Police Officer for the Australian Capital Territory*, dated 9 November 2006, together with an ACT Policing Practical Guide entitled *Execution of search warrants where parliamentary privilege may be applied and execution of search warrants and interviews with Members of the Legislative Assembly*, June 2006.

precincts in the conduct of investigations, the execution of warrants and the seizure of documents. The MOU was updated in the Ninth Assembly.¹⁰

- 19.9. In February 1996 (the Assembly having moved to its new building in 1994), the sittings of the Assembly were suspended on two occasions because of disorder in the public gallery.¹¹ Arising from these incidents, various questions about the Speaker's powers and responsibilities in maintaining order were referred to the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure. That committee's report considered the legal position of Assembly officials directed to remove a person from the chamber. The report recommended that 'Parliamentary Precincts legislation be enacted by the Assembly to clearly define the precincts and make appropriate provision for their control and management'.¹²
- 19.10. In response to the committee's report, the government introduced the Legislative Assembly (Privileges) Bill 1997. It defined the precincts of the Assembly and created certain offences in relation to failure to comply with a direction to leave the precincts. This bill lapsed with the expiration of the Third Assembly but the provisions in relation to the precincts were reintroduced in largely the same form in a private member's bill—the Legislative Assembly (Privileges) Bill 1998—in the Fourth Assembly.
- 19.11. This bill was, in turn, referred to the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure. That committee's report endorsed, with minor proposed amendments, those parts of the bill relating to the precincts of the Assembly. However, other parts of the bill which sought to define certain of the Assembly's privileges and immunities did not meet with its approval.¹³ The bill was then passed by the Assembly, having been heavily amended, and was retitled the *Legislative Assembly Precincts Act 2001*.¹⁴

10 The Memorandum of Understanding between the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory and the Minister for Police and Emergency Services for the Australian Capital Territory and the Chief Police Officer for the Australian Capital Territory, dated 19 September 2017, incorporating the Functional Governance Standard Operating Procedure for ACT parliamentary privilege and protocols (ACT Policing) was presented in the Assembly. See MoP, No 62, 31 July 2018, p 876.

11 MoP, No 36, 21 February 1996, p 258.

12 Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure, *Standing Order 207*, February 1997, p 8.

13 Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure, *Legislative Assembly (Privileges) Bill 1998*, Report No 9, August 2001.

14 MoP, No 139, 29 August 2001, p 1827. See Schedule 2 to the minutes for the amendments adopted by the Assembly.

Legislative Assembly Precincts Act

- 19.12. The Assembly precincts are defined in s 5(2) of the *Legislative Assembly Precincts Act 2001* to be:
- (a) block 3, section 19, division of City, Canberra Central District; and
 - (b) that part of Civic Square under the public entrance canopy.
- 19.13. The Speaker may also declare that other Territory land can be treated as being part of the Assembly precincts.¹⁵ The Speaker made such a declaration by regulation in 2016 following a large portion of staff of the Office of the Legislative Assembly moving to premises at the North Building.¹⁶
- 19.14. Section 7 of the Act gives the Speaker responsibility for the control and management of the Assembly precincts and empowers the Speaker to take any action necessary, subject to any resolutions of the Assembly, which give directions for the discharge of that responsibility.¹⁷ The Speaker must comply with any direction issued by the Assembly.
- 19.15. Under s 9 of the Precincts Act, the Speaker may direct a person (other than a member) to leave the Assembly precincts, or not to enter the Assembly precincts. The Speaker may use any necessary and reasonable force and assistance to enforce such a direction. In 2003, the Speaker exercised these powers to have a person who was disrupting the proceedings of the Assembly removed from the public gallery and in a subsequent statement provided the following advice to members:

I wish to inform members that, following the removal of a person from the public gallery on Tuesday during question time for disorderly conduct, I have ordered that the person concerned not be readmitted to the precincts as that person has disturbed Assembly proceedings on three occasions.

I have instructed that she not be readmitted until she signs a written undertaking to abide by the relevant standing orders and not create disorder in the precincts. The person attempted to enter the precincts today, but was refused entry. In the event that the person attempts to contact members or their staff for entry, I ask that they abide by my order.¹⁸

15 Precincts Act, s 6(2).

16 See Legislative Assembly Precincts Regulation 2016, in which it is declared that the 'required property' at the North Building venue is to be treated as part of the Assembly precincts for the Act.

17 In 2006, the Precincts Act was further amended to clarify the Speaker's authority over the precincts. Included in the Assembly building are two areas frequently made available to individuals, organisations and groups for meetings, exhibitions et cetera. Prior to the passage of the amendments, the use of these spaces and the fees to be charged were the responsibility of the minister responsible for the management of Territory property. The Speaker now has the authority to grant a licence for the use of any part of the Assembly building and to set the conditions and fees which will apply to any such use.

18 MoP, No 68, 21 August 2003, p 866; Assembly Debates, 21 August 2003, p 3035.

- 19.16. In 2007, the Speaker suspended access to the Assembly precincts by staff of the *The Canberra Times* for a period of one week following a breach of the broadcasting guidelines.¹⁹
- 19.17. The Speaker's authority under the Act is confirmed in standing order 209 and encompasses the meeting of any committee of the Assembly. Under this standing order the chair of a committee may 'require a person to leave ... the place of meeting of the committee and may authorise the removal of the person'.
- 19.18. The Speaker, and anyone acting under the direction of the Speaker, does not incur civil or criminal liability for an act or omission done honestly and without negligence pursuant to the Act. In the Ninth Assembly, the Speaker's functions under s 9 were delegated to:
- the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly;
 - the occupant, or the person performing the duties of Deputy Clerk and Serjeant at-Arms in the Office of the Legislative Assembly;
 - the occupant, or the person performing the duties of Executive Manager, Business Support, in the Office of the Legislative Assembly;
 - the occupant, or the person performing the duties of Manager, Security and Building Services, in the Office of the Legislative Assembly; and
 - the occupant, or the person performing the duties of Principal Attendant in the Office of the Legislative Assembly.²⁰
- 19.19. Contravention of a direction given by the Speaker under this section constitutes an offence punishable by a fine or imprisonment.
- 19.20. The Legislative Assembly building, in common with many Australian parliaments, includes offices for the members of the ACT Executive. The executive area is defined by a written agreement between the Speaker and the Chief Minister. The Precincts Act requires the Speaker to exercise their powers with regard to the executive area subject to any 'limitations and conditions' contained in the agreement.
- 19.21. The agreement, which has been in force in one form or another since 2002, defines the executive area to include:
- ... the area that is, from time to time, occupied by the member elected by the Legislative Assembly as Chief Minister, and those other members appointed as ministers, and their staff. The area includes the office suites allocated, the Cabinet Room, the Executive Meeting Room and two Executive bathrooms, but does not include the corridors or other general areas.

19 Assembly Debates, 27 September 2007, p 2774.

20 Legislative Assembly Precincts (Removal of People) Delegation 2017, NI2017-625.

19.22. The agreement stipulates that there are shared responsibilities for protective security:

Some elements of the protective security arrangements for the Executive are the responsibility of the Executive and other elements are the responsibility of the Office of the Legislative Assembly (the Office). The division of these responsibilities reflects that:

- (a) the Executive is responsible for the security of the information it holds;
- (b) the Executive is responsible for vetting staff that it employs;
- (c) the Office is responsible for the physical security of the Assembly precincts, including:
 - access control systems and screening procedures at the two entrances;
 - the building access pass policy and procedures.²¹

19.23. Pursuant to the agreement the Speaker undertakes to provide a range of services to the executive area, including ordinary building maintenance; curatorial services in relation to artworks; sound and vision, including Assembly and committee broadcasts; access to radio and television services; and mail services. The funding of these services is taken from the Legislative Assembly's appropriation. Minor building works within the executive area require the approval of the Speaker.

Place of meeting

19.24. The Legislative Assembly first met on 11 May 1989 in shared and rented accommodation in the ACT Administration Centre. The time and date for the meeting was set by the Commonwealth Minister for the Arts and Territories, pursuant to paragraph 17(3)(a) of the Self-Government Act.²² The notice did not specify in detail the place of meeting, which was merely described as 'Chamber of the Legislative Assembly, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory' in the *Commonwealth Gazette* notice.²³

19.25. On 9 April 1992, the Assembly agreed to refer the provision of new premises for the Legislative Assembly to the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedures for inquiry and report by the last sitting day of the 1992 autumn sittings.²⁴ The committee's report was presented on 8 September 1992 and was adopted by the Assembly on 10 September 1992.²⁵ The committee's first

21 MoP, No 49, 22 February 2018, p 709.

22 This section provides that where the office of Presiding Officer is vacant, the Commonwealth minister shall, by notice published in the *Commonwealth Gazette*, convene the meeting of the Legislative Assembly.

23 *Commonwealth Gazette*, No S 158, Monday, 8 May 1989.

24 MoP, No 4, 9 April 1992, p 22.

25 MoP, No 25, 10 September 1992, p 137.

recommendation was that the South Building²⁶ be modified and refurbished as the new Assembly premises. Work began on the refurbishment in April 1993 and the first meeting of the Assembly in the new premises occurred on 12 April 1994.²⁷

- 19.26. The Legislative Assembly building includes, in addition to the chamber, office suites for all members, including ministers of the ACT Executive and their staff, committee rooms and public areas.
- 19.27. Following the expansion of the Assembly from 17 to 25 members which occurred in 2016, extensive refurbishments were undertaken at the Assembly building premises in order to accommodate the additional eight members and their staff. Following the expansion of the Assembly, a large number of staff of the Office of the Legislative Assembly were relocated to office accommodation in the North Building.

Chamber

- 19.28. The South Building, which was originally constructed in the late 1950s, was adapted for the Assembly's use by the addition of a legislative chamber placed diagonally across the internal courtyard of the building. The chamber of the Legislative Assembly is thus a modern structure. The furniture is made from Australian timbers and the carpet decoration is based on the *Wahlenbergia gloriosa* (Royal Bluebell), which is the floral emblem of the ACT. The Assembly has not adopted the traditional green colour scheme of 'lower' Houses, instead adopting a blue colour scheme.

Seating

- 19.29. The chamber was originally designed to accommodate up to 22 members, but allowance was made at the planning stage for space for another six members if the need ever arose. The chamber's seating follows contemporary practice, with members seated around a horseshoeshaped arrangement of desks. Members, including ministers, have individual seats behind their own desks and do not sit on open benches, as is the practice for the 'front benches' in the Australian House of Representatives and the British House of Commons.
- 19.30. In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of revised seating arrangements were implemented in order to ensure that members and staff in the chamber could observe the required physical distancing requirements.²⁸

26 The South Building was one of two government office buildings flanking Civic Square in the centre of Canberra. It had previously housed the Commonwealth Department of the Interior, which had had responsibility for the administration of the ACT prior to self-government. Its central location, potential for redevelopment and availability made it an attractive option for a permanent Assembly building.

27 Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure, *Provision of New Assembly Premises*, September 1992, p 15.

28 See, for instance, MoP, No 130, 7 March 2020, p 1934.

- 19.31. The Assembly has adopted the traditional seating arrangement with the Speaker sitting at the head of the chamber at a raised desk. To the Speaker's right are seated government members and to the left opposition members.²⁹ Members of minor parties and independent members sit on the curve of the horseshoe—the crossbenches.
- 19.32. For the first meeting of the First Assembly, initial seating arrangements were determined by ballot and were not regarded as permanent. The Speaker subsequently wrote to each party leader, indicating the allocation of seats to party groups once the composition and groupings within the Assembly became clear.

Table

- 19.33. The chamber was significantly modified in 2016 in order to accommodate the increase in members from 17 to 25, with the installation of a central table at which the Chief Minister, Leader of the Opposition and their respective deputies are seated.³⁰

Clerk's desk

- 19.34. The Clerk and Deputy Clerk are located at a desk immediately in front of the Speaker, at the head of the table of the Assembly. The Clerk sits to the right of the Speaker and the Deputy Clerk to the left. A speech timing clock is located on the Clerk's desk and is connected to two digital timing clocks located on opposite walls of the chamber, thus allowing them to be seen by all members. These indicate to members how much speaking time is allocated to them and how much remains. When two minutes remain, a chime lets members know they are near the end of their time allocation.
- 19.35. The Deputy Clerk controls the ringing of the division bells from the Clerk's desk. Bells are rung throughout the precincts for the following times and reasons:
- for five minutes before the time fixed for the commencement of each sitting and the resumption of a sitting after a suspension; and
 - for four minutes:
 - when a ballot is to be taken—for example, for the election of Speaker, Deputy Speaker or Chief Minister;³¹
 - to summon members to the chamber for the purpose of a vote (a division) of the Assembly;³² and

29 This traditional seating was interchanged for a period in the original temporary accommodation because the structure of the chamber made ministers' access to their offices more convenient when placed to the left of the Speaker.

30 During the COVID-19 pandemic, additional members were seated at the centre table.

31 Standing orders 2, 3 and 266.

32 Standing order 158.

- to summon members to the chamber for the purpose of obtaining a quorum.³³
- 19.36. The broadcasting and audio reticulation buttons are also located on the Clerk's desk. These buttons control the broadcasting of proceedings throughout the building. Broadcasting and Hansard staff are located at the rear of the chamber in a booth to the right of the Speaker. The microphones on each member's desk and sound reinforcement in the chamber are also controlled from the booth.

Mace

- 19.37. Historically, the mace was a weapon. By the 14th century the mace carried by the Serjeants-at-Arms of the English King's bodyguard had become a symbol of royal authority. As the monarch's council evolved into the parliament, so the mace became identified with the authority of the parliament. Since the 17th century the mace and the position of the Serjeant-at-Arms have become common to parliament. Today's mace is a symbol of the authority of the Speaker.
- 19.38. Australian colonial parliaments did not generally adopt the use of a mace at their establishment. The Victorian Parliament was first to adopt the practice in 1857,³⁴ followed, over the years, by the Commonwealth and other state and territory parliaments. The mace is obviously part of the traditional trappings of a parliament, not something necessary for its actual functioning. However, by 2004 the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory was the only mainland legislature without a mace.³⁵

Mace of the Legislative Assembly for the ACT

- 19.39. The Assembly's mace was a gift from the Australian Region of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and was officially presented to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly on 9 July 2004 at the 35th Presiding Officers and Clerks Conference held in Melbourne.
- 19.40. It was designed and manufactured by a local design company. It is 95 centimetres long and weighs approximately 8.5 kilograms. The design is divided into three sections, representing the 'Y plan' that was adopted by the National Capital Development Commission in 1967, to guide the urban development in Canberra. The spine of the mace is made of stainless steel and locally sourced Yellow Box timber. This is not a traditional cabinet-making timber but was chosen to complement the furniture in the Assembly chamber. The mace's detailed carvings, by local craftsman Myles Gostelow, are of the Royal Bluebell.

33 Standing order 33. The four-minute sandglass is also located on the Clerk's desk and is used in addition to the bells when a division is called. Members have that amount of time to make their way to the chamber for the vote.

34 The Victorian Legislative Assembly's mace was stolen in 1891 and never recovered.

35 The then Norfolk Island Legislative Assembly did not have a mace.

Ceremonial use of the mace

19.41. Traditionally the Serjeant-at-Arms is custodian of the mace. The Speaker is preceded by the Serjeant-at-Arms, bearing the mace upon the right shoulder, when the Speaker enters and leaves the chamber at the beginning and end of each sitting. When the Speaker is in the chair the mace is placed on brackets on the Clerk's desk, with its head facing to the government side of the chamber. The mace remains in its position during all suspensions.

Bar of the Assembly

19.42. The bar of the Assembly is situated at the rear of the chamber between the public gallery and the chamber proper. When the Assembly is sitting, only elected members or Assembly staff may venture beyond the bar, thus excluding the entry of 'strangers'. The bar is also the place to which persons may be brought to be addressed by the Speaker or to address the Assembly. See Chapter 18: Witnesses, under the heading 'Appearances before the Legislative Assembly chamber'.

Public gallery

19.43. Visitors may view proceedings in the Assembly chamber from the public gallery at any time when the Assembly is sitting.³⁶ The public gallery has seating for approximately 80 people. The public gallery provides an opportunity for public observation of Assembly proceedings, not participation. Though visitors are welcome to watch proceedings of the Assembly, they must not interject, attempt to communicate with members, display notices or cause a disturbance. It has been necessary on several occasions when disturbances have occurred in the public gallery for the Speaker to direct that those involved cease their actions or be removed from the gallery altogether.³⁷ On 13 May 2004, during debate on a bill, the Speaker suspended the sitting for approximately 14 minutes after an incident occurred in the public gallery.³⁸

19.44. The first two rows of the gallery are usually reserved for members' advisers, to enable them to provide advice quickly to members should the need arise. At the back of the gallery is the 'press box'. This area may be used only by representatives from approved media organisations to report proceedings of the Assembly.³⁹

19.45. A hearing loop, enabling those with a hearing impairment to access proceedings, is available in the public gallery.

36 During the COVID-19 pandemic, the gallery was closed at various times.

37 For example, on 23 June 2004, the Speaker asked an individual in the public gallery to stop filming, as that was not allowed. On 19 August 2003, the Speaker ordered that a member of the public leave the gallery, as they were holding a sign and making a protest.

38 MoP, No 101, 13 May 2004, p 1333.

39 The Speaker has, on occasion, reminded members and staff of this requirement; see Assembly Debates, 27 February 2013, p 845.

Visitors

- 19.46. Standing order 210 originally provided that while the Assembly is sitting members may not bring any visitor into, nor may any visitor be present in, any part of the chamber appropriated to the members of the Assembly. On 13 March 2003, the standing order was amended to clarify that the word ‘visitor’ did not apply to an infant being breastfed by a member.⁴⁰ In March 2008, the standing order was further amended to include the words ‘other than a nursing infant’.⁴¹ It was further amended in October 2015 to permit an AUSLAN interpreter to be present on the floor of the chamber⁴² and amended again to allow the Speaker to have the discretion to allow a member caring for an infant to bring the infant onto the floor of the chamber during a meeting of the Assembly.⁴³
- 19.47. Distinguished visitors, such as delegations from other parliaments who wish to view Assembly proceedings, are invited to sit in the chamber, usually in chairs placed in front of the seats reserved for members’ advisers.⁴⁴ As in other parliaments, proceedings are interrupted at a convenient time to allow the Speaker to draw members’ attention to the fact that the visitors are present. Visitors are then welcomed by the Speaker on behalf of the Assembly.

Lobbies

- 19.48. Doors on either side of the chamber lead to the government and opposition lobbies.⁴⁵ This is where members may make telephone calls and meet with staff and/or directorate officials.

Standard of attire

- 19.49. The Legislative Assembly does not have a dress code for members while they are in the building precincts or in the chamber. However, through standing order 275, the Assembly adopts the requirements imposed by the House of Representatives in relation to members’ attire. *House of Representatives Practice* observes that, ‘While the standard of dress in the Chamber is a matter for the individual judgment of each Member, the ultimate discretion rests with the Speaker’.⁴⁶

40 MoP, No 53, 13 March 2003, pp 634-635.

41 See standing order 210.

42 MoP, No 120, 29 October 2015, p 1352.

43 MoP, No 82, 29 November 2018, p 1176.

44 For example, on the first sitting day following an election, the Chief Justice may elect to remain in the chamber following the swearing of new members and will be seated in such a manner.

45 Members of the crossbench are entitled to use the lobbies.

46 See *House of Representatives Practice*, pp 162-163.

Use of technology in the chamber

- 19.50. In the First Assembly, the Speaker considered a proposal to make telephones available at members' desks but rejected it as inappropriate in a debating chamber. With the widespread adoption of mobile phone technology, mobile phones have been permitted in the chamber.⁴⁷
- 19.51. In June 1998, after consideration by the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure, permission was given to the Chief Minister to trial the use of a laptop computer in the chamber for a week during questions without notice. The outcomes of that trial were reported to the committee by the Chief Minister in a letter dated 24 August 1998.⁴⁸
- 19.52. On 14 August 2009, the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure agreed that members could bring laptops into the chamber, that there would be no formal guidelines issued governing their use, and that members should instead 'exercise good judgement'. The committee agreed that the Speaker would monitor their use as a matter of order.⁴⁹
- 19.53. On 20 September 2013, the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure agreed to the following guidelines concerning the use of hand-held devices and social media in the chamber. Members were asked and reminded:
- to keep the electronic device on silent;
 - to avoid interference or distraction to other members, either visually or audibly, particularly the member speaking;
 - not to divert attention from the member speaking;
 - not to use the electronic device to record the proceedings (audio or vision); and
 - to try to use the device unobtrusively, and to bear in mind the need to balance use with creating a negative public image, particularly in question time and during high-profile debates.
 - that any comments made on social media are not covered by parliamentary privilege;
 - that use of social media to reflect on the Office of the Speaker or Deputy Speaker, aside from being disorderly, may amount to a contempt; and

47 While members are not permitted to make or receive calls, it is not uncommon for members to use mobile telephones and other hand-held digital devices for email and other online services.

48 The Chief Minister advised the Speaker that they would not be seeking to use a laptop during the forthcoming sittings as, following the trial, further software options were to be investigated.

49 Extract of minutes, Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure, 14 August 2009. The Speaker had requested of members that laptops be muted when brought into the chamber (see, for example, Assembly Debates, 23 February 2010, p 476).

- not to use social media to release confidential information about committee meetings or in camera hearings.

19.54. Since 2017, all members have been issued digital tablets facilitating access to chamber documents and tabled papers.

Use of the chamber for purposes other than sittings

19.55. On 27 November 2007, the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure endorsed *Guidelines in relation to the use of the Chamber of the Legislative Assembly*. The guidelines provide that:

The Chamber may also be used for the following parliamentary and educational purposes, however the Speaker may approve other proposed usage as long as such events do not interfere with the dignity of the Chamber:

- parliamentary conferences hosted by the Assembly;
- Assembly educational events organised by, or in conjunction with the ... [Office of the Legislative Assembly]; and
- briefings to visitors from other Australian or overseas parliaments.

19.56. Speakers have approved use of the chamber for meetings of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, citizenship evenings hosted by the Speaker, youth parliaments, constitutional conventions, the Older Persons Assembly, and various conferences and seminars.