



OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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27 April 2009

Shane Rattenbury MLA
Chair
Standing Committee on
Administration and Procedure
GPO Box 1020
Canberra ACT 2601
AUSTRALIA

	A.C.T. LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE OFFICE
SUBMISSION NUMBER	1
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Dear Mr Chairman,

Inquiry into the merit of appointing a Parliamentary Budget Officer for the Legislative Assembly

Thank you for your letter of 27 March 2009 seeking my views on the merits of appointing a Parliamentary Budget Officer for the ACT Legislative Assembly.

Norfolk Island enjoys a unique form of Government, which commenced in 1979. The Norfolk Island Act 1979 (Cwth) sets out the machinery of government and I attach a copy for your records.

The Legislative Assembly in recent times changed its standing orders to provide for the appointment of a Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. The relevant standing order provides –

“20B. A Public Accounts and Estimates Committee to consist of the Speaker (ex officio) and two other Members shall be appointed as soon as practicable after the opening of a new House to scrutinise and assess the financial administration of the Public Sector, and to promote reform where necessary.

The Committee shall –

- 1) examine –
 - a) the accounts of the receipts and expenditure of Norfolk Island;
 - b) the financial affairs of authorities of Norfolk Island;
 - c) all reports of the Government Auditor which have been laid before the Assembly; and
 - d) such other relevant matters as the Committee deems relevant
- 2) Report to the Assembly with such comments as it thinks fit, any items or matters in those accounts, statements and reports, or any circumstances connected with them, to which the Committee is of the opinion that the attention of the Assembly should be directed

- 3) Inquire into any question in connection with the public accounts which is referred to it by the Assembly and to report to the Assembly on that question

The Committee may consider any other matter relevant to its inquiry; shall have the power to send for persons, papers and records; and may invite submissions from members of the public”.

In my view the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee has the potential to be a more than adequate watchdog in the Norfolk Island context.

By convention I believe that there are sufficient checks and balances in how we do business bearing in mind that the Assembly chooses the ministry, not the Chief Minister; and conversely has the power to request a minister's removal from office in the event that he or she steps over the line. It is also practice for the Minister for Finance to table the financial indicators for the previous month at each sitting of the House and these are often robustly debated. Of course we are at an advantage to you of not having political parties in the Legislative Assembly and members in their informal weekly meetings actively oversight what the government is about.

Without full knowledge of how your system works it would not be appropriate for me to comment whether or not there is merit in your appointing a Parliamentary Budget Officer for the purposes outlined in your Assembly's motion of 12 February 2009. However, I hope that you may find this short response of some assistance.

I thank you for your offer to participate in your public hearings but I feel there would be little more that I could add to the above.

I wish you well in your inquiry and would be most pleased to received advice on the outcome in due course.

Yours faithfully,



Lisle Snell MLA
Speaker