A summary of news from overseas parliaments.

Australia

**Deputy Speaker acting as Speaker**

Affirming to the House that he denied the allegations made against him, the Speaker said that he proposed to ask the Deputy Speaker, as Deputy Speaker, and members of the Speaker’s panel to assist in chairing the proceedings of the House. He is continuing to carry out his other duties.

Hansard: Statement by the Speaker, Votes and proceedings: Hansard, House of Representatives, 8 May 2012 [http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/genpdf/chamber/hansardr/1c0dbef0-05d4-42fa-89c8-ae7e3958767b/0003/hansard_frag.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf](http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/genpdf/chamber/hansardr/1c0dbef0-05d4-42fa-89c8-ae7e3958767b/0003/hansard_frag.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf)


**Parliamentary departments subject to Freedom of Information Act**

Revised guidelines for the Freedom of Information Act 1982 as amended in 2010 clarify that the Departments of the House of Representatives, the Senate and the Parliamentary Services are subject to the Act, since they fall within its ambit and have not been exempted. The Parliamentary Budget Office is, however, exempted.


**Legislative drafting consolidated in one agency**

Responsibility for drafting government bills and subordinate legislation and compiling and publishing all laws is to be brought together in the Parliamentary Counsel Office, an independent statutory agency. Currently the Office has responsibility only for drafting government bills, while responsibility for drafting subordinate legislation and compiling laws lies with the Office of Legislative Drafting and Publishing in the Attorney-General’s Department. The intention is to facilitate a consistent approach to drafting bills and legislative instruments and maximise the use and flexibility of drafting resources.
Bill: Parliamentary Counsel and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012, 10 May 2012
Explanatory note: Parliamentary Counsel and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012: explanatory memorandum, 10 May 2012

Scrutiny of bills

The Senate Scrutiny of Bills Committee examines and assesses bills, with a focus on individual rights, government accountability, administrative fairness and openness and parliamentary propriety, and notifies the Senate of any potential problems. In a review of its role, the Committee recommended, among other matters, that its terms of reference be amended to include specifically the scrutiny of bills with an excessive reliance on delegated legislation for their operation. It also intends to develop checklists, guidelines and other supporting documents to raise awareness of its work.

Report: Senate Standing Committee for the Scrutiny of Bills, Inquiry into the future role and direction of the Senate Scrutiny of Bills Committee: final report, 10 May 2012

Canada

YouTube videos an attack on House’s privileges

Videos making threats against a minister in reaction to his sponsorship of a controversial bill, and also against members of Parliament more generally, were posted on YouTube by Anonymous. A House of Commons committee concluded that the threats were directly related to the proceedings of the House and violated the parliamentary privileges of the minister and all members. The committee condemned the actions of those involved in producing and uploading the videos, and in the event of their identities becoming known would resume its consideration of the matter.


New chairs for the chamber

Tenders have been called for 75 new chairs, hand-carved from white oak, for the House of Commons chamber. The chairs are needed partly to replace worn out chairs and partly to replace chairs sold to departing members. On leaving Parliament, members are given the opportunity to purchase, at a cost of $950, the chair they occupied in the chamber.

Media article: Seats of power: House of Commons solicits bids to supply 75 new chairs, The Ottawa Citizen, 14 May 2012
http://www.ottawacitizen.com/Seats+power+House+Commons+solicits+bids+supply+chairs/6618595/story.html
Denmark

Lack of consultation on bills

Four opposition parties wrote a letter of complaint to the President of the Folketing after the Health Minister allowed only four days, including a weekend, for consultation on a bill. They asked for its first reading to be delayed. The President said he could understand their dissatisfaction and he would speak very seriously to the government, but it would be difficult to delay the bill so close to the end of the session. Similar complaints were made under the previous government, and the new government made a commitment to allow reasonable consultation periods for bills prior to their introduction into the Folketing, with the results available in good time for the first reading.

Glossary: Folketinget – Parliament


Changes to members’ pay and former members’ entitlements

Changes proposed to members’ conditions include linking future increases in their base salary to pay movements for certain senior public servants. As well, members who leave the Folketing at an election or as a result of illness will continue to be paid the full base salary for between one and two years after leaving, depending on their length of service, but it will now immediately be offset by other income, instead of after 12 months as before. An exemption for the first 100,000 kr. (NZ$21,500) will be introduced. During the same period, former members will also be entitled to up to 100,000 kr., depending on length of service, for the payment of educational fees, subject to the approval of the Folketing’s President.

Glossary: Folketinget – Parliament

Bill: Forslag til Lov om ændring af lov om valg til Folketinget (Regulering af grundvederlaget, modregning i eftervederlaget det første år, optjening af beløb til efteruddannelse m.v., forhøjelse af pensionsalder for egenpension m.v.), 15 May 2012 [http://www.ft.dk/RIPdf/samling/20111/lovforslag/i190/20111_i190_som_fremsat.pdf]

Media article: Folketinget forringer sin pension, Jyllands-Posten, 15 May 2012 [http://jp.dk/indland/indland_politik/article2778579.ece]

Livelier question time

Changes to question time are planned for the start of the new session in the autumn. Twice a month, in the question time straight after her weekly press conference, the Prime Minister will face questions from the leaders of the five opposition parties. It is hoped that the new format will lead to a livelier, richer debate in the style of the Prime Minister’s question time in the British House of Commons, and will also offer a window onto the Folketing.

Glossary: Folketinget – Parliament

Media article: Thorning skal dyste mod oppositionslederne, Jyllands-Posten, 24 May 2012 [http://jp.dk/indland/indland_politik/article2786445.ece]
European Parliament

Parliament’s budget

A request to the Secretary-General to close down EuroparlTV, which live streams plenary sessions and committee meetings, because its low viewership did not justify its expense, was among cost savings recommended in a resolution passed by Parliament. MEPs also called for a reduction in the expenditure on prizes awarded by Parliament, e.g. the Sakharov Prize, which they did not consider to be a core activity of Parliament. The considerable savings that could be made if Parliament ceased to meet in Strasbourg were noted.

Decision: Discharge 2010: EU general budget, European Parliament, 10 May 2012
Media article: MEPs say little-watched parliament TV should be scrapped, EU Observer, 10 May 2012
http://euobserver.com/843/116219

Increased powers proposed for committees of inquiry

Committees of inquiry would have increased powers if a new regulation proposed by Parliament were to come into force. Committees would be able to hear members of EU institutions and member state governments, obtain evidence, request documents and experts’ reports and conduct on-the-spot investigations. Groundless refusals to provide documents or give evidence at hearings, giving false evidence, and bribery should be subject to appropriate sanctions under member states’ national laws.

Proposal: European Parliament’s right of inquiry, 23 May 2012
Media article: MEPs demand right to summon and sanction, EU Observer, 25 May 2012
http://euobserver.com/18/116376

Subsidiarity principle invoked

Twelve national parliaments have submitted reasoned opinions that a proposed regulation on the right to take collective action is contrary to the principle of subsidiarity, meaning that this is an issue that is best dealt with nationally. This is the first time since the procedure was introduced in the Lisbon Treaty, which came into force in 2009, that the threshold for a review of a draft legislative act’s compliance with the principle has been reached. The European Commission will decide what action to take next.

Media article: National parliaments show ‘yellow card’ to EU law on strikes, EU Observer, 29 May 2012
http://euobserver.com/851/116405

Kiribati

Public Accounts Committee workshop

A three-day workshop to familiarise MPs with the powers and functions of the Public Accounts Committee concluded with a set of recommendations for Parliament. They included broadening the Committee’s powers, authority and scope to strengthen its oversight function, measures to address the poor follow-up of the Committee’s recommendations, and for the Committee to conduct public hearings and increase public understanding of its role. The workshop was designed and facilitated by the United Nations Development Programme, the Kiribati Parliament and the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly.
Media article: Kiribati parliamentarians curbing corruption in the public sector, *Islands Business*, 11 May 2012
http://www.islandsbusiness.com/news/index_dynamic/containerNameToReplace=MiddleMiddle/focusModu
leID=130/focusContentID=28429/tableName=mediaRelease/overrideSkinName=newsArticle-full.tpl

New South Wales

**Eligibility for Sydney Allowance altered**

Members residing in non-metropolitan electorates are entitled to a Sydney Allowance to compensate them for accommodation and other costs incurred in attending to parliamentary business in Sydney. The Parliamentary Remuneration Tribunal has altered the basis for determining members’ eligibility for the Allowance. Previously members whose principal residence was in a non-metropolitan electorate were eligible, but now a member’s principal residence must be at least 70 kilometres by road from Parliament House. Members may not relocate their principal residence during the parliamentary term in order to meet the eligibility criteria.

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Media article: Politicians have to live with travelling, *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 May 2012

Papua New Guinea

**Parliament votes not to defer election**

Parliament’s previous vote in April to defer the election for six months was rescinded at its final sitting, although there were protests from some members. The start of the sitting had been delayed by several hours when the Speaker initially declined to attend and chair it, but he was finally persuaded to do so. The election writs have now been issued and voting is due to start on 23 June.

Media articles: Nape keeps House waiting, *The National*, 16 May 2012
http://www.islandsbusiness.com/news/index_dynamic/containerNameToReplace=MiddleMiddle/focusModu
leID=130/focusContentID=28487/tableName=mediaRelease/overrideSkinName=newsArticle-full.tpl; Trawen issues writs for Election 2012, *The National*, 21 May 2012
http://www.thenational.com.pg/?q=node/33181

**Parliament recalled to vote on Prime Minister**

Parliament was recalled for a special sitting after the Supreme Court again ruled that Sir Michael Somare was the legitimate Prime Minister and that Peter O’Neill’s appointment was invalid. Members adopted a motion declaring the office of Prime Minister vacant. The Deputy Speaker said that Somare could not serve as Prime Minister as he had been absent without leave from Parliament for three consecutive meetings since January and was therefore no longer a member of Parliament. O’Neill was re-elected as Prime Minister.
Queensland

**Statutory changes to committees**

In response to the new Parliament’s composition of 78 government members and 11 non-government members, the statutory provisions for the membership of portfolio committees have been changed to provide flexibility to meet different situations. As well, the Speaker will now be a full member of and will chair the Committee of the Legislative Assembly, and will have a deliberative vote on matters affecting the Speaker, the chamber and standing orders. Responsibility for the management of the Parliamentary Service was transferred last year from the Speaker to the newly established Committee and to the Clerk.

**Act:** Parliament of Queensland and Other Acts Amendment Act 2012, 18 May 2012

**Explanatory note:** Parliament of Queensland and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2012: explanatory notes, 17 May 2012

**Press release:** Parliament committee system to be enhanced, 1 May 2012

South Australia

**Committees to monitor corruption and members’ standards of conduct**

A bill to establish an Independent Commissioner Against Corruption would create a parliamentary committee to examine the Commissioner’s annual reports, together with those of the Commissioner of Police and the Police Ombudsman, and report on any matters of policy affecting public administration arising from them. The bill would also create a Parliamentary Conduct Committee to promote compliance with the standards of members’ conduct required by each House and investigate alleged contraventions, and generally keep standards of parliamentary conduct under review.

**Bill:** Independent Commissioner against Corruption Bill 2012, 2 May 2012

**Press release:** ICAC bill to establish powerful anti-corruption body, 1 May 2012

**Change to setting of members’ pay**

Members’ base salary is automatically linked to the base salary paid to members of the Commonwealth parliament. From July, members of the state parliament will be paid at a rate equal to $42,000 less than that of Commonwealth members’ base salary, as opposed to the previous rate of $2,000 less. In the year beginning 1 July 2012 this will result in an effective increase of 2.9% in members’ base salary.

**Act:** Parliamentary Remuneration (Basic Salary) Amendment Act 2012, 24 May 2012
Select committee witnesses misled committee

Following developments in 2011, the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee re-opened its earlier inquiry into phone-hacking at the News of the World to investigate the extent to which it had been misled. The Committee concluded that certain witnesses and News International corporately had misled the Committee and demonstrated contempt for the select committee system. It noted that the integrity and effectiveness of this system relies on the truthfulness and completeness of the evidence submitted. It also emphasised the importance of parliamentary privilege in uncovering information that would not otherwise have been revealed. After debating the Committee’s conclusions, the House resolved to refer the matter to the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

Managing visitors to Parliament

Two concepts of Parliament, as a working institution and as a visitor attraction, need to be seen as complementary rather than conflicting, said a House of Commons committee, if current tensions regarding visitor access to the Houses of Parliament are to be resolved. The committee’s recommendations include consultation with members on the costs of and charges for conducting public tours, the introduction of specialist tours, e.g. art and architecture, efficient allocation of security staff to match times of greatest visitor pressure, and maximisation of the revenue from souvenir sales.

Victoria

Changes to setting of members’ pay

The act governing members’ salaries is to be amended to limit the pay increase for 2012-2013 to 2.5%. The Premier said that the historical link between state and federal parliamentarians’ pay, contained in the act, will be ended. The government will establish an independent review to assess alternative methods for the future determination of parliamentarians’ remuneration.
Wales

Photography competition

In a drive to get more people involved in the political process, the Presiding Officer has launched the National Assembly’s inaugural photography competition. Participants are invited to send in pictures of democracy in action, illustrating the power that Welsh citizens have to change their country. All entries will be displayed online, as well as the best entries going on display at the Assembly, with prizes being awarded to the winners of the judges’ and the popular votes. The competition is organised in conjunction with the University of Wales and Ffotogallery.


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