

CORRECTED VERSION

LAW REFORM COMMITTEE

Review of the Members of Parliament (Register of Interests) Act 1978

Sydney — 17 August 2009

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Mr Paul Pearce MP, Chair, Standing Committee on Parliamentary Privilege and Ethics,
Legislative Assembly.

CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME

Mr PEARCE—I understand you have had presentations already from my upper house colleagues, including the President of the upper house, so there may be some repetition in this.

I think you have had a chronology of how New South Wales has got to where it has got to. We also have, of course, the ICAC Act, which has an impact on the whole nature of Parliament's relationship to declarations and the like. I got elected in 2003, so for the period prior to that I am relying on notes I have been given.

There was a Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Ethics with three community members, 1995-96. 1997 committees of the Assembly and the Council both tabled draft codes which differed in some areas. Both committees met and tabled further reports. I would add that actually getting a meeting of the two committees has been fairly problematic. We have not had one, despite some repeated requests. I am sure the Legislative Council have explained why they could not meet with the Legislative Assembly on this matter. Anyway, we have not been able to get it together, and there are some issues there which obviously have to be resolved between the two Houses, because we do not want glaring inconsistencies between the two codes.

We have a Parliamentary Ethics Adviser, which I imagine you have been advised of. The role of that ethics adviser is fairly limited in that he cannot give legal advice. Consequently, the amount of work he does is fairly low. Members do inquire from time to time, but it is advice of a generic nature, rather than specific legal advice, and quite frankly, members I think, if they do have an ethical issue they have to resolve, really need some specific advice. If it is a real issue, I suspect they would be seeking their own legal advice on the matter. But in general terms there is an ethics adviser there.

My personal view is I would like to see that role expanded, and again speaking from my own perspective, I think some of the changes being mooted in the House of Commons may be advantageous when it comes to ethics advisers. Mind you, the House of Commons has had a few more difficulties than any of us recently.

The ICAC in 2002 recommended a review of the code and the regulation in its reports on the investigation of parliamentary electorate travel. I think as the upper house members may have advised you, some of these arose from specific circumstances developed by members over a period, including some where members finished up on the wrong side of the discussion with the ICAC in circumstances where there was a general belief that somebody was acting in accordance with standard practice, former member Langton in particular, the former Minister for Transport in Opposition, and it related to travel and the capacity to transfer travel between members. That was found to be corrupt conduct by the ICAC. I was not in Parliament at that stage but I know my predecessor in the seat certainly found that very surprising. I understand that members of all parties found that sort of decision very surprising, because it had been a practice which had been very common for basically the best part of 100 years.

I would emphasise there that the ICAC legislation has a very wide definition when it comes to corrupt conduct and it is well beyond anything that would be corruption in the sense of the Crimes Act or what a general member of the public would recognise as corruption. Corrupt conduct actually goes to issues such as maladministration as well as partiality and the like, which is well beyond what corruption is generally considered.

In June 2002, the Standing Ethics Committee considered the ICAC recommendations for changes to the code: the application of the code during promulgation of Parliament; the provision in the code relating to bribery be amended to broaden private benefit and to clarify the provision; any inconsistency between the requirements for declaration thresholds of gifts and travel, one being \$500, one being \$250; references for the threshold to be increased in recognition of the impact of inflation and parity with certain provisions of local government declarations; consideration be given to residents of New South Wales being able to view the information on the parliamentary web site, but acknowledging there were security implications; and that more information be made available to candidates for election about the ethical environment in which they were expected to work. Recommendations 1, 2 and 6 were ultimately adopted, the other three, being the gifts, the quantum being increased and the public information, at that stage were not adopted.

In 2006 the Standing Ethics Committee examined the Parliament's proposed amendments to the code and regulation to introduce six monthly reporting through a supplementary return, to introduce the capacity for

discretionary reporting and to introduce a requirement for members to give information about clients to whom members were providing consultancy advisory services related to their parliamentary role.

Again, the first two of those actually arose from specific circumstances. One related to an upper house member whose circumstances had changed and there was a delay in advising of the changes. There was certainly no suggestion that anything unlawful had taken place, but there was a perception in the upper house, or by some members of the upper house, that there was a problem. My personal view is there was not a problem. It was just simply a case of the timing. The declaration was accurate at the time it was made. Circumstances changed after that. The other related specifically, as I recall, to the circumstances of the former Leader of the Opposition in the lower house, who had been doing advisory consultancy services for a client. Again, the matter was referred to the ICAC and I think there was no case to answer at the end of the exercise.

I suppose what that does show is that this tendency to get involved becomes very much within the party political process. That in a way, from my perspective, is wrong, that you go down that path. Parliamentary ethics should stand outside of that party political process. The reality is in the New South Wales Parliament, and I do not suspect it is that much different elsewhere, that there is a tendency to play the man not the ball at times and if he is the captain of the team it is even better to go after him, and so that is what has happened. If there is a certain level of notoriety in the public's mind, it is a good idea to go after him. That tends to get caught up in this.

A lot of the changes that have been made over the period have been in response to that to, on the one hand, protect members and on the other hand to apparently respond to those public concerns or parliamentary concerns about individual members' circumstances and what they did and did not do, or allegedly did or did not do.

The upper house committee disagreed with the requirement for six monthly reporting, recommending annual reporting and mandatory updating after 35 days if there was a change in the interest, which would have addressed this specific circumstance that arose from the upper house member. Notwithstanding that we do have now six monthly reporting.

The Government further proposed minor changes to the regulation. I think you have copies of all the regulations, so I won't go through the detail there and the appropriate forms.

There are amendments to the sample given in the corporations section of the form. There was an issue as to exactly what we are talking about and how broad that definition was. One interpretation was that it was extremely broad and was it going to relate to a federal definition and was it going to relate to what other people would understand a corporation is. That was clarified. There was an example inserted and the sample form clarified the disclosure requirements of proprietary limited companies.

The committee considered the amendments to the Constitution (Disclosure by Members) Regulation 1983, reported in 2006 and adopted in 2007. The draft regulation was forwarded to the committee for consideration prior to introduction. The draft regulation contained four new forms, which I will leave with you, which were substantially reformatted to provide extra information about what needed to be declared with sample entries.

In 2008 the Government forwarded proposed amendments to the regulation the Committee on Parliamentary Privilege and Ethics. A major amendment was to further reformat the pecuniary interests form so that the section filled in by members was less than 15 pages long. The new form, which was adopted, is in two sections, the first section being explanatory and the second being the actual return. Members were required to make the first supplementary return by 31 March 2008 and we currently have an obligation to provide the annual return at the end of September 2009. You can see the sort of document which is the compiled register there. I think that gives you an outline.

Perhaps I will answer questions and expand on any of those issues. I believe there was some discussion earlier in relation to members' induction programs. I found the induction program in 2003, when I became a member, very informative but equally it was a hell of a lot of information supplied in a relatively short period of time, some of which I personally didn't find particularly relevant, partly because I had spent 21 years in local government and was fairly familiar with some of the declaration requirements. Having said that,

certainly other members found it valuable.

I think it is a good way of doing it and it is a good way of giving members a concept. All members are issued with a handbook and I assume that would be the same in the Victorian Parliament and it has in their members' code of conduct, implications of the code of conduct and, particularly, reference to terms of corrupt conduct under Sections 8 and 9 of the ICAC Act.

It makes a point, quite correctly so, an action mentioned in section 8 of the ICAC Act will not constitute corrupt conduct unless it amounted to either a criminal offence or disciplinary offence, reasonable grounds for dismissing or dispensing with services or otherwise terminating the services of a public official.

In the case of a minister of the Crown or a member of parliament it needs to be a substantial breach of the applicable code of conduct, and then there is a further section there in disclosure of pecuniary and other interests and discussing what is actually involved as a pecuniary interest.

I did find this interesting when I came here from a local government background that the type of declaration and type of interest we had at local government varied and in some areas it was much more rigorous at local government than it was at the State level. There is probably good reason for that.

Local government in New South Wales, despite recent changes, acts as the consent authority under the provisions of the Environmental Planning & Assessment Act, whereas a backbench member of parliament isn't in that sort of role, so that specific capacity for potential corruption or perception of corruption or corrupt conduct clearly doesn't exist, so I can understand why there was that change.

The one area that leapt out at me as a change was that in local government you had to declare a whole range of interests, including those interests you had out at quite some distance and the interests stretching off those family members elsewhere, whereas of course that does not apply as a State member. It is a more constrained level of declaration. It relates more to the member personally than it would to general circumstances.

The CHAIR—I note that you were saying earlier on that the Privileges Committee and the Ethics Committee, those two components had not met, is that correct?

Mr PEARCE—No, the upper house and lower house committees hadn't met. I chair the Privileges and Ethics Committee. We have a combined Committee.

The CHAIR—They have met together but not separately?

Mr PEARCE—There is only one committee. Privileges and ethics is a single committee in the lower house. There is an upper house Committee also. They call themselves the Privileges Committee. The two committees, the upper house and lower house committee haven't met, so there were some inconsistencies in the two codes.

The CHAIR—My question related to the reviews. I see that one of the tasks you have is to review the code of conduct for members. Can you talk to us how you go about those reviews and that is in the context of in Victoria our code has been criticised because it is really guidelines. Maybe they should be further developed, but being guidelines they don't really contain a statement of values or a statement of principles and it has been put to this Committee in our discussions that these kinds of documents benefit from being expanded in that way.

How do you review and are those kinds of considerations taken into account?

Mr PEARCE—We have a statutory obligation to review the code over each term of Parliament, and basically the objective is to keep it relevant, to obviously take into account any findings or recommendations that might come from other bodies, particularly the ICAC, and to respond.

Obviously if something has come up through the Ethics Adviser, if there is a matter that he or she may have identified, we look at that. We make recommendations to the Government for amendment, if necessary, to the regulation.

The CHAIR—Did you include MPs in that review process, through surveys and questionnaires?

Mr PEARCE—I don't know that we got all that many responses, from my recollection, but we included MPs in it and it was one of those things that most MPs see that as a pain, frankly, filling out the paperwork on a regular basis. Some take the view that it is intrusive on their private existence but it happens to be a requirement of holding the position, so yes, we did inquire of the MPs but didn't get a lot of feedback.

The CHAIR—In our hearings witnesses have acknowledged that it is difficult to engage in these kinds of processes, maybe for very good reasons because people are busy and have a lot of onerous duties and don't tend to this part of their work. It has been put to us that part of our work is to enhance the standing of the Parliament, as the institution of democracy in our society, and that we as MPs are really the stewards of the process which is much greater than us and will go on afterwards and that we need to pay some attention to making sure that is strengthened and developed and if we don't get MPs to subscribe to that objective we are not going to be able to strengthen democracy. Is that part of what you are thinking?

Mr PEARCE—Yes, it is. Most recently I have put on the agenda of our Committee, which Ronda has been doing some work on, the whole impact of what has happened in the House of Commons. Obviously we have different objective and legal circumstances, but there are issues there which go to the ethics of members of parliament and how Parliament responds and how the public responds to that sort of circumstance.

We so far have not had anything like cleaning out of moats or building duck ponds or anything along those lines and I think it would be extremely unlikely, certainly under the New South Wales system that that would eventuate, quite apart from the fact that most of the State is still in drought.

What it does, particularly when you look at the way the tabloid media has handled it, is that it brings Parliament and parliamentarians generally into a level of disrepute or reinforces what has effectively been done over a number of years in terms of sniping at members of parliament.

The risk that I see in what is, if you like, a wash-up from the House of Commons and then the attempt to identify matters at Federal Parliament and then at State levels, is that you will get the executive, of which the ICAC is obviously part, increasingly intruding on an area of Parliament sovereignty and parliamentary privilege.

The general public simply doesn't understand that. When you talk about parliamentary privilege the general public do not understand and the media do not want to understand what you are actually talking about, that it is bigger than members of parliament, it is not the individual members of parliament, it is the institution of Parliament and the role of the legislature relative to the executive.

I know when I told some of the my friends I was chairing the Privileges and Ethics Committee there was raised eyebrows all around. The general perception was that we didn't have enough ethics and we had far too many privileges. I then had to explain to them exactly what it was that I was meant to be doing.

There is an issue there and I think it is an issue that I do not think our Committee has necessarily grappled with directly, although it has certainly been alluded to by our current Committee and also my predecessor, John Price, and that is that you are gradually whittling away the concept of parliamentary privilege, that Parliament is the master of its own internal arrangement.

The ICAC legislation does do that and there has not always been a very good relationship between Parliament and the Independent Commission Against Corruption. I think the upper house members may well have referred to an incident where the ICAC raided an office of a former member here and seized documents, both in electronic and paper form and that was viewed as a significant breach of privilege.

Now there is a protocol in place, but the fact that an agency of the executive felt that they had no issues of stepping in and clearly breaching parliamentary privilege, I think is disturbing. You have to remember the ICAC legislation is a very powerful piece of legislation. It is a piece of legislation which was developed by a former Government in the late 1980s, about 1988 I think, in response to what was perceived to be a specific situation, and I won't go into the politics of it but it was very much targeted at a former Government and several former Ministers, none of whom I might add finished up in any strife, although the perpetrators of the said legislation certainly did, which had a certain irony.

You are dealing with a very powerful body there. The question really is the general public have a perception about the ICAC and its role. It has become a very politicized role in my opinion, in that it is viewed as part of the tools of the political debate in New South Wales. The grand statement, 'I will refer the matter to the ICAC', and the general public immediately assume that something is not right, to the extent that the ICAC, I think, actually issued guidelines at one point prior to a local government election, which put limitations on people referring other people to the ICAC. The workload is overwhelming.

So there is a problem with that type of organisation on a broader principle issue. It really is an example of an executive intruding quite significantly on parliamentary privilege. They are able to do it because there was a lack of understanding, I believe, in the community. That could mean that there is a need for an educative role. We do not currently have that role, I do not believe, as far as the general public is concerned.

Mrs KRONBERG—Is there any consideration to amend the Act?

Mr PEARCE—The ICAC legislation?

Mrs KRONBERG—Yes.

Mr PEARCE—My view is no, because from the simple political perspective anyone who sought to go down that path will be pilloried, despite the fact, I suspect, that there is a number of members on all political sides, with the possible exception of one of the minor parties in the upper house, who take a similar analysis that I will be taking here. I do not think I am verballing anyone there by saying that. I think there is a very real concern.

You have got a piece of legislation which was modelled on the Hong Kong legislation, which was designed to deal with the triad gangs in Hong Kong. We did not have that level of corruption in New South Wales, notwithstanding what was said from time to time or portrayed in various television shows. So we end up having a very powerful piece of legislation which pursues driving instructors who are taking a sling. It is a proportionality issue in a way and it does intrude on Parliament.

Those provisions, sections 8 and 9 of the Act, and I am relying on memory here, are worded in a manner which attempts to respect parliamentary sovereignty and parliamentary privilege, but also, when you read the Act in totality, I am not sure that it actually does protect or recognise those requirements.

Mrs KRONBERG—Are you saying that it is like having the genie out of the bottle, the tail wagging the dog?

Mr PEARCE—The genie is well and truly out of the bottle and I think it is a political reality that the ICAC will remain in New South Wales. Again speaking personally, there are elements of the ICAC which have got elements of the star chamber about it and I do not like star chambers. I think there is a real problem in that it has an element of a standing royal commission that can demand answers.

It also has certain evidentiary problems further down the track, depending how they acquire their information, and that has the consequence that prosecutions are not particularly common arising from ICAC reports relative to the number of reports and number of inquiries which take place, because of the nature of the way the evidence is gathered. However, I know the strict legal definition is that there has probably not been a criminal sanction arise from an adverse ICAC report. However, if you are a member of parliament or if you are a senior public servant, your career prospects are extremely limited as a direct consequence of an adverse finding.

There is also within the ICAC legislation no actual method to purge the record if you are subsequently cleared by a court or in fact if you are able to establish that the information upon which the adverse finding was made was flawed. So you can see it is a very dangerous piece of legislation.

Mrs KRONBERG—If I could just follow this, to be a member of the ICAC, I am assuming there are appointments?

Mr PEARCE—Yes.

Mrs KRONBERG—Fixed term?

Mr PEARCE—Yes, there are fixed terms.

Mrs KRONBERG—And that some people are appointed term after term?

Mr PEARCE—They can be. I think we do have commissioners who have done two terms, yes.

Mrs KRONBERG—In terms of any management of their activities, if that was to be looked at, would the only instrument or means available perhaps be restricting their budget?

Mr PEARCE—No. To put on another hat, I am deputy chair of a parliamentary oversight committee on the Ombudsman and the Police Inspector General and formerly a member of the Committee on the ICAC. Neither oversight committee can look into any individual case. It is really looking at their budget and looking at the general practice and procedures rather than any individual case.

However, with the PIC we did establish an inspectorate who acts on the committee's behalf. The inspector, again constrained under the provisions of the Act that established the role, can go into the PIC and dig deeper than a parliamentary committee would be capable of doing. We have public hearings and we regularly meet with the commissioner as well and we meet with the inspector. Certainly, if you look at the published documents for the last meeting of that particular committee, you will see that there is an issue between the inspector and the commissioner in interpretation of a whole range of areas, in that the commissioner takes a particular view as to what the role is and where they do or do not have to abide by the rules of natural justice and administrative fairness, which is contrary to the view of the inspector. I raise this because the PIC Act and ICAC Act have similar provisions that have similar impacts on persons brought before them. The current chairperson of the PIC committee is essentially - how is a polite way of putting it - refereeing the debate between the two, the inspector and the commissioner. What that does reflect is that there is an issue in terms of natural justice and procedural fairness.

Mr BROOKS—You spoke about the role of ongoing education. I think you alluded to it by saying you had a good induction course.

Mr PEARCE—Yes. It was a very compressed induction course, but it was good, yes.

Mr BROOKS—So you would suggest it may be useful when we are looking at a new system of ongoing education in terms of parliamentary standards?

Mr PEARCE—To be frank, given the public's perception of parliaments generally, I think there is an advantage in having a vigorous induction course, including looking at issues of ethics and parliamentary standards. The induction is very compressed, and it tends to be very much focussed on how you go about managing your office, what is the nature of the allowances, how do you go about claiming those allowances, what paperwork is required, all those sort of things.

Yes, your obligations of disclosure are part and parcel of that. I think it is generally over two days, about three or four hours a session. So it is intense, and like anything of that nature, and particularly when you have newly elected members who are sort of wide-eyed anyway walking around the place, it does not always sink in. Then, of course, you get your members handbook, which you can see from the fact that it has not been folded back, is not something that members generally refer to, although you obviously flick into it. So, yes, I think there is a role for that. Possibly that will be twofold. One, it will re-establish some level of public confidence in the parliamentary process and also defend the parliamentary process from undue impacts from the executive.

Mr BROOKS—On a different topic, we had Mr Cripps in earlier on from the ICAC, and the nuts and bolts of the information given to us is that in terms of MPs - we are only looking at MPs' register of interests - there has been one successful prosecution stemming from an ICAC inquiry in the whole time they have had those extensive powers. They have a budget this year of \$18 million and I am assuming it was similar in the past. Can you offer any suggestion as to why Victoria would look at something like that, with that sort of cost with a limited outcome?

Mr PEARCE—I think you have got to look at your circumstances. This is speaking as me personally, not as a government member or anything else. I think you have got to look at the objective circumstances that you find yourself in. Is there a genuine widespread problem that cannot be dealt with by existing legal mechanisms? Do you really need a standing royal commission, which is effectively, with the nature of the powers, what the ICAC is? It may be worthwhile to look at the Queensland model, which I think is called maladministration. I think WA has a similar type of model.

I think the naming of the body is part of the problem. Independent Commission Against Corruption immediately puts this image in the public mind of brown paper bags, whereas in fact a lot of what the ICAC looks at is probably more in the area of maladministration, possible partiality, rather than corruption in the sense of the Crimes Act.

I question whether you would do it, and if you did do it, whether you really need to go down the path of the fairly extensive investigatory powers and the powers that the ICAC has to demand answers. From a legal background I find that offensive. I do not think I am alone on that one, but we have got it.

Mrs VICTORIA—As a supplement to what Mr Foley has just asked, do you think it is because you have an ICAC that is there, and this looming body, that there are not as many prosecutions as there could be or cases leading to prosecution? Does it make you a little more aware of what you are doing?

Mr PEARCE—If the ICAC has had an impact anywhere it has been in a limited number of areas in the bureaucracy. There have been issues around the RTA, the driving testers, which I might add was pretty small beer when you looked at it, but in terms of the public impact of dangerous driving, yes, there is obviously an issue. There is a major inquiry going on in the area of State Rail in relation to corruption there, and it appears to be genuine corruption in that instance.

Part of the issue there arises, if you are going to move away from a pure public provision of infrastructure and move into contracting out and privatisation, then you do have an issue about how you go about managing that. Within the public sector there are generally pretty solid guidelines about how you go about ensuring transparency and appropriate behaviour. Once you bring the private sector in, you have by nature a different game that you are playing.

As I understand it, the ICAC does have a role when it comes to the private sector, the private sector acting as the government would be. That brings a whole interesting debate into the equation because the private sector operation does not have to go down the path that the public sector generally has to go. So there are issues there.

I do not know whether the existence of the ICAC has reduced the amount of corruption. My personal view is that there was not a particularly high level of corruption, certainly at the State level. There were certainly issues at local government level. They tended to be amongst officers rather than councillors, simply due to the delegated nature of the approval process. Anyone who is able to approve something behind a closed door, there is a potential for corruption. That is my view. If you are looking at a parliamentary member, what can they approve behind a closed door? Zilch. If you look at ministers, you have a very limited and over the last 20 odd years reduced level of ministerial discretion.

Certainly, in New South Wales we had an issue in the early 1980s with a former Minister for Corrective Services, where he was exercising discretion in a corrupt manner and finished up in the Berrima nick for his troubles. One of my party I might add, but so be it. But you are looking at isolated incidents. As I say, there was a belief afoot that a former minister was going to be caught up in the ICAC and there was absolutely nothing that came out of that fairly rigorous evidentiary process. So there is a public perception that there might be an issue rather than a reality. Do you therefore need a body with the sort of powers, and in some elements fairly offensive powers, of the ICAC to deal with what is a public perception or are you simply generating headlines in the tabloid media?

Mrs KRONBERG—You mentioned the investigator and his or her dialogue with ICAC.

Mr PEARCE—Yes, inspector general. There are two--

Mrs KRONBERG—For an investigative role, a dialogue?

Mr PEARCE—No, the ICAC and the commissioner have the investigative role and can conduct a hearing. We have an oversight committee of Parliament, because the ICAC is notionally answerable to Parliament. It puts in annual reports and reports on individual issues. But what the committee found was that we were unable, because of the nature of the committee and the fact that we are not able to walk into the ICAC offices as a committee, we found that it was relatively ineffective, parliament's oversight role.

I suppose matters to some extent came to a head as a result of the upper house matter, with the former member and the raid on the offices, and the views expressed by the ICAC commissioner at the time. I might add that the new commissioner has a different range of views on that. With the ICAC, as with the PIC, we established with government legislation to have an inspector general who was answerable to the committee and in a sense acts as the agent of the committee to better fulfil the role of the committee and then report to the committee. So he, he in this case, is our person on the inside, if you want to put it that way.

Mrs KRONBERG—And that report is only to the committee, that is not publicly available?

Mr PEARCE—It is a public document, tabled in Parliament.

The CHAIR—Just two quick things, if you would not mind. The timing of returns is six monthly?

Mr PEARCE—Six monthly, so it is the end of March and the end of September.

The CHAIR—Is that working well?

Mr PEARCE—It is working fine. People are putting them in. There is a lot of paperwork involved. Most members do not have radical changes in their declarations. Certainly, I do not and I think if you go through those, if you are so inclined, you will find that most members more or less fill in the same thing return after return. There may be a change in their real property holdings if they have moved home or acquired an investment property, but there is not a lot. Members of Parliament by nature, certainly lower house members, are pretty engaged in their political activities. They have not got all that much time to run around and run a business as well.

The CHAIR—Any thoughts on on-line, real time registration and publication?

Mr PEARCE—This is a bit of a vexed question as to how you do it. Certainly, one of the minor parties in our upper house has been pushing for this real time declaration. You have got to remember we have a fairly extensive and complex overlay on electoral funding donations, where we have to report every six months as well. In a way, in the public mind at least, there is a certain amount of this all getting tangled up together. I think it is more in the area of electoral donations, and real time updating of that is probably more of a demand rather than this. Although, the public mind seems to think that this might be it as well, in actual fact it is the other one where you have got the electoral donations, and there is an overlap between the two and certainly the public mind has become very blurred as to what role is what.

I think we probably have a multiplicity of forms and returns and so-called transparency, which is actually leading to a lack of transparency, because it is confusing issues more than anything else.

The CHAIR—Thank you very much for that and we will send you the transcript. It was much appreciated.

Committee adjourned.