



Overview of the Parliamentary Reform and Modernisation Initiatives

Following a bipartisan review of the parliamentary committee system by the Parliament's Committee System Review Committee, significant and historic changes to Queensland's system of parliamentary committees and the legislative process of the Legislative Assembly have been adopted. These reforms will enhance the Parliament's oversight and examination of legislation and strengthen the parliamentary committee system and accountability. This fact sheet provides an overview of those changes.

The Parliamentary Committee System

The majority of the previous parliamentary committees have now been replaced with seven portfolio committees, with responsibility for scrutinising all ministerial portfolios and Government departments.

These portfolio committees are made up of three Government Members of Parliament and three non-Government Members. The Chair of each committee is nominated by the Leader of the House. In practice, this means that the Chair is a Government Member. The Chair votes on decisions of the committee, and, if the vote is tied, the Chair has a casting vote. For their respective portfolios, each committee will examine legislation - including Government and Private Members' Bills and subordinate legislation. They will also conduct the budget estimates inquiries and examine public accounts and public works matters associated with the portfolio.

Portfolio committees have the ability to call senior public servants as witnesses and question them directly. Public servants may also be invited to assist committees in their examination of legislation.

In regard to legislation, each relevant portfolio committee will examine Bills to consider their policy intent and implementation as well as the application of fundamental legislative principles. In addition, the committees will consider the lawfulness of items of subordinate legislation. It is envisaged that members of the public will be invited to make submissions on proposed legislation and in some cases may be given the opportunity to expand on their submissions before a committee at public hearings.

The Public Accounts and Public Works Committee no longer exists. However, all of its functions have been given to the portfolio committees. This means that, among other things, the portfolio committees are able to review reports by the Auditor-General and examine major capital works within their portfolio areas.

The portfolio committees also serve as the Estimates Committees and will examine in detail the budgets of the departments within their portfolio at a public hearing. These hearings will no longer have structured times for each question and answer and will allow for a more free-flowing examination with direct questioning of both Ministers and senior public servants.

As a result of these reforms, the budget accounts, capital works and legislation for portfolio areas will all be examined by the one committee.

In addition to portfolio committees, there are three other parliamentary committees: the Ethics Committee, the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee and the Committee of the Legislative Assembly.

The **Ethics Committee** examines any matters referred to it with respect to complaints about the ethical conduct of particular members or



alleged breaches of privilege by Members of Parliament or other persons.

The Committee of the Legislative Assembly has oversight and responsibility for the business of the Legislative Assembly. This includes the ethical conduct of Members of Parliament, including the Register of Members' Interests and the Code of Ethical Conduct for Members. However, the Ethics Committee deals with any complaints. The Committee of the Legislative Assembly also has responsibility for parliamentary powers, rights and immunities; the Standing Orders about the conduct of business by and the practices and procedures of the Legislative Assembly and its committees; and, any other matters for which the committee is given responsibility under Standing Orders.

The Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee has been retained with its current complement of seven members. In contrast to the other committees, the current Chair of this committee is a non-Government Member. The committee monitors and reviews the Crime and Misconduct Commission.

The Legislative Process

The new system includes major reform of the Parliament's legislative process. As of 1 August 2011, following their introduction into the Legislative Assembly, the majority of Bills will now be referred automatically to a portfolio committee or another committee for examination. This examination process can take up to six months. As Figures 1 and 2 show, the stages of most Bills will be as follows: First Reading, Committee Consideration, Committee Report, Second Reading, Consideration-in-Detail, Third Reading, Royal Assent.

Figure 1: The Legislative Process in the Queensland Parliament for Non-Urgent Government Bills

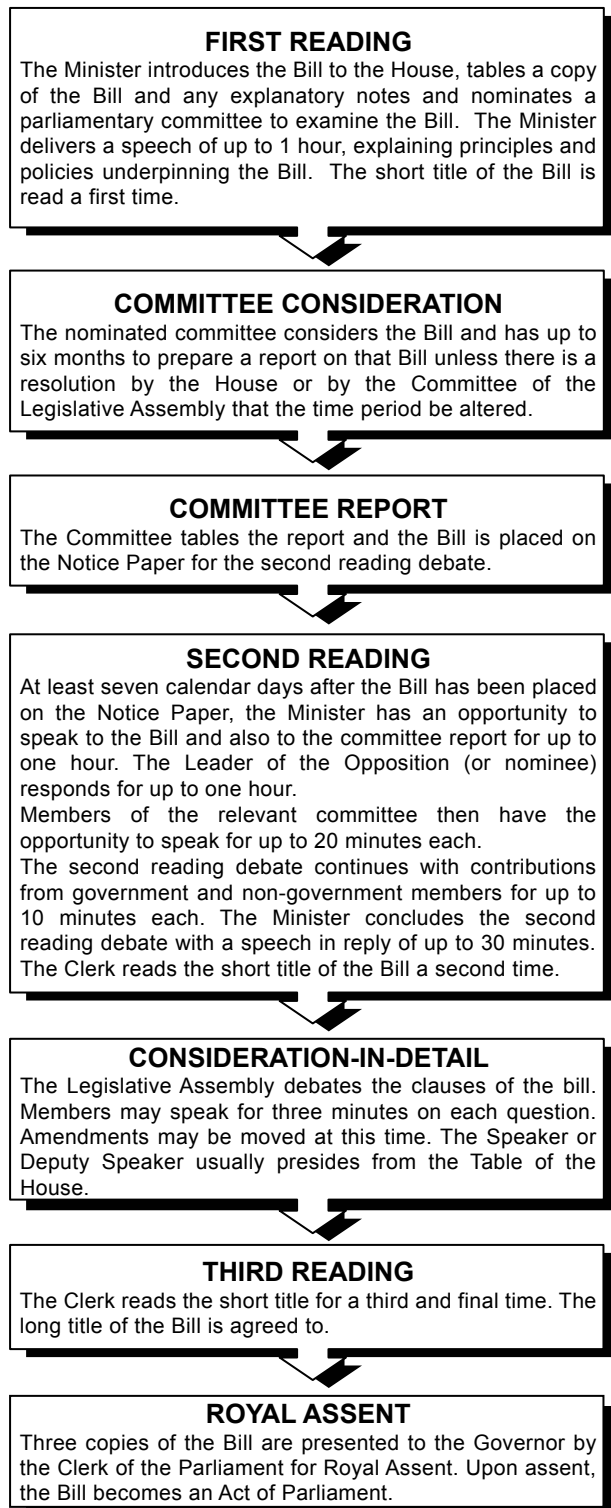
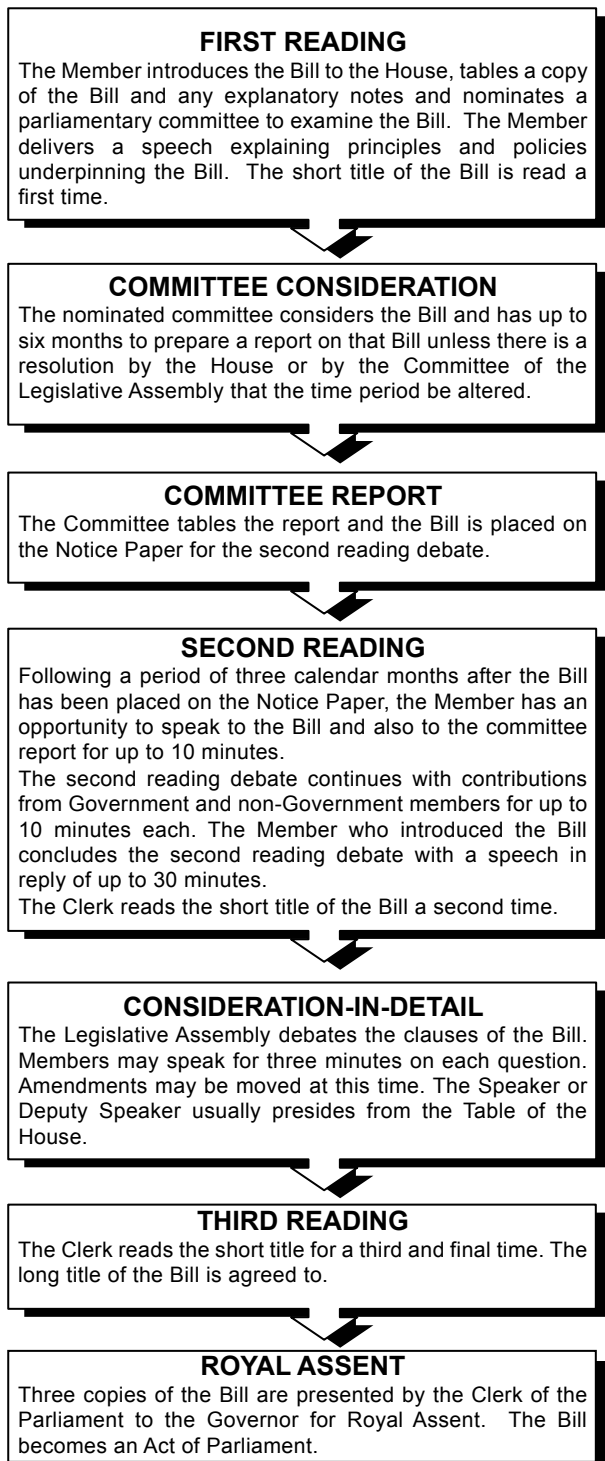


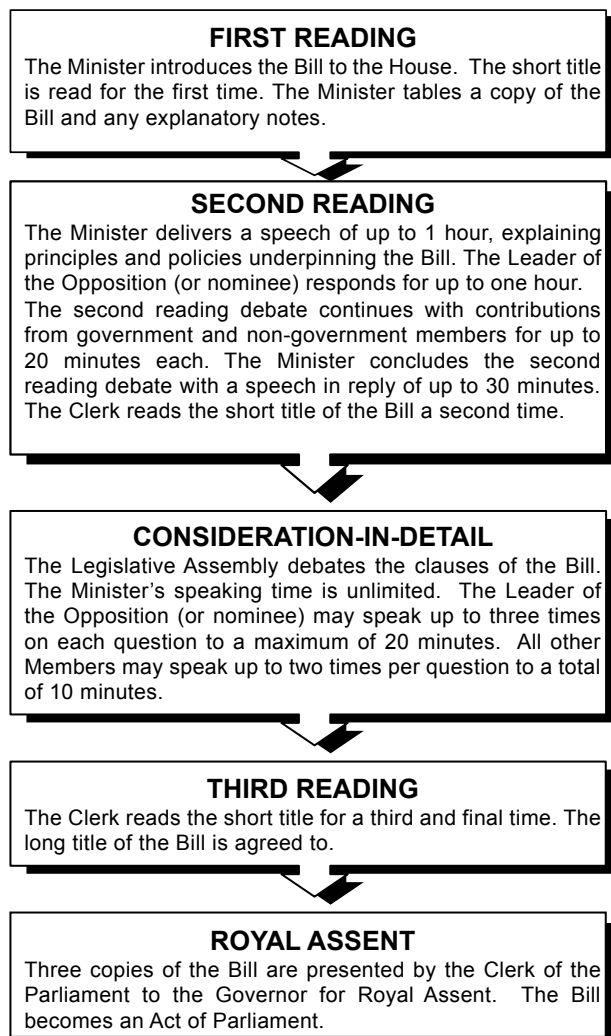


Figure 2: The Legislative Process in the Queensland Parliament for Non-Urgent Private Members' Bills



Urgent Bills are considered immediately and are not referred to a portfolio committee. Figure 3 sets out the legislative process for urgent Government Bills. A Bill may be declared urgent at any stage of the legislative process. If a Bill is declared urgent after it has been referred to a portfolio committee, it will be put on the notice paper and proceed to the second reading stage. Figure 3 sets out the legislative process for urgent Bills.

Figure 3: The Legislative Process in the Queensland Parliament for Urgent Government Bills





The Financial Process

The reform of the parliamentary committee system has had a major impact on the Parliament's process for the annual Appropriation Bills. Portfolio committees now act as Budget Estimates committees and examine the Government's annual Budget Estimates for their area of responsibility. During Estimates hearings, each committee may directly question Ministers and Chief Executives of Departments and Statutory Authorities. In contrast to Estimates hearings conducted in Queensland prior to the reforms, during the time allotted to the committee for questioning, questions are now asked and answered in a free-flowing manner, without specified times for Government and non-Government questions and without time limits on questions or answers. Unless otherwise ordered by the committee, these are public hearings. Figure 4 sets out the new process in the Queensland Parliament for passing Appropriation Bills.

Figure 4: The Legislative Process in the Queensland Parliament for Annual Appropriation Bills

