

Major Highlights

Regional Sitting in Townsville

During his opening speech for the 56th Parliament, on 14 February 2018, His Excellency the Governor announced that the Parliament would hold a regional sitting during the parliamentary term.

On 19 June 2019, the Hon Anastacia Palaszczuk MP, Premier announced that the Queensland Parliament would hold a regional sitting in Townsville during September 2019. The Premier announced subsequently, on 27 June 2019, that the North Queensland sitting of Parliament (the regional sitting) would take place from 3 to 5 September 2019. On 22 August 2019, the Premier informed the House that the regional sitting would be held in Townsville.

The venue for the regional sitting was the Townsville Entertainment and Convention Centre (TECC). The parliamentary precinct was established at the TECC, including the Legislative Assembly Chamber, offices and Members' areas, as well as external space for the construction of marquees for the education program and school tours. All Members of Parliament, except for certain local Members of Parliament, were accommodated at an adjacent hotel.

A functional parliamentary precinct, including the Chamber and office accommodation, was delivered on time and the delivery of the operational and logistical aspects of the regional sitting was a success. Members reported strong satisfaction with the Parliamentary Service's delivery of the regional sitting. In response to the survey question - how would you rate the performance of the Parliamentary Service in delivering the Regional Sitting - 94 per cent of Members were satisfied or very satisfied.

The proceedings were recorded by Hansard and broadcast live on Parliament TV. Members and staff were provided with wireless internet access to the Parliamentary network. It is estimated that approximately 2,200 Members of the general public, teachers and school children attended the sitting over the three days.

COVID-19 Response

In response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, in March 2020, the Speaker approved the COVID-19 Response Plan. This Plan formed part of the Parliamentary Service Risk Management and Business Continuity Framework and established formal processes and procedures to govern the Parliamentary Service's response to the health risks associated with the global COVID-19 pandemic. The Plan identifies key strategies to address specific risks posed at different stages by the COVID-19 virus to:

- Members and Parliamentary Service employees
- public guests to the Parliament, and
- the ability to continue delivery of critical services to clients.

Specific impacts of COVID-19 on the normal operations of the Parliamentary Service included:

- restrictions on public access to the parliamentary precinct and electorate offices
- suspension of various public events and activities including catered functions, public and school tours, and education seminars
- establishing revised hygiene and social distancing protocols for work areas in the parliamentary precinct including the Legislative Assembly Chamber, and within electorate offices
- developing and testing contingency plans for establishing a 'virtual parliament' if required, and
- activating broad work from home arrangements for Parliamentary Service staff.

During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic all Parliamentary Service staff, both in the precinct and electorate offices, responded professionally and co-operatively to the necessary changes brought on by COVID-19.

As the effects of COVID-19 started to take effect on our function bookings and events our catering services team looked at options to fill the gaps from the reduction in functions and events. It was agreed to support local charities where we could offer our kitchens and chefs to assist in the increased demand for meals. The team reached out to the Scarlett May Foundation which provides meals and support to families with critically ill children and those whose children have passed. Our Chefs produced 645kg of bulk food over a few months during the peak of the isolation periods in Brisbane.

In addition to the Scarlett May Foundation the team were able to add support for the Wesley Mission by preparing donated food into bulk meals for serving. The team produced over 2,897kg of meals for this charity, whilst continuing our annual support for Ozharvest with over 218kg of food donated on a weekly ongoing basis. On average the above combined donation of food was estimated at 300kg per month with a total of 3.76 tonnes equal to 25,070 individual meals. Our team will continue to support these and other charities where possible.

The Parliamentary Service continues to respond to COVID-19 with the recent recommencement of public access to the precinct and electorate offices, and the resumption of school tours, catering and education events. To ensure that these activities can be offered safely, a COVID-Safe Plan for the parliamentary precinct has also been developed to provide visitors with information regarding necessary measures and changes to access where required.

50th Presiding Officers and Clerks' Conference

The Queensland Parliament hosted the 50th Presiding Officers and Clerks' Conference (POCC) of the Australian and Pacific Regions from 9-11 July 2019.

Mr Speaker welcomed 73 conference delegates and observers from 22 Australian and Pacific parliaments and from the UK House of Commons to the conference from the Commonwealth of Australia, Australian states and territories, New Zealand, the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

The POCC provides a forum for presiding officers and clerks from Australian, New Zealand and Pacific jurisdictions to connect and to share and learn from each jurisdiction's experiences and developments. Importantly, the POCC supports twinning and other partnerships between Australian and Pacific parliaments, thereby strengthening parliamentary democracy across these jurisdictions.

The Hon Curtis Pitt MP officially opened the refurbished Queensland Parliament Committee rooms: the 'Aboriginal Peoples Room', the 'Torres Strait Islander Peoples Room' and the 'Twinning Parliaments Room' for the parliament's partnerships with the National Parliament of Papua New Guinea and the Parliament of Vanuatu.

The conference also provided professional opportunities for presiding officers and clerks to explore complex issues regarding parliamentary practice, law, procedure and governance. The Right Honourable Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP, then Deputy Speaker of the UK House of Commons (now Speaker), provided the keynote address where he explored the impact of emerging security issues on parliaments.

The conference built on strong relationships between Australian, New Zealand and Pacific parliaments in order to enhance parliamentary knowledge and capacity for all delegates and all jurisdictions. The sessions, papers and workshops allowed in-depth exploration of matters across jurisdictions and opportunities for input into solutions to common issues.

Improved Liaison with Electorate Office staff

The current management structure of the Parliamentary Service recognises the need to improve the coordination, responsiveness and relevance of support services, tools and information provided to Members' electorate offices. Under the new corporate structure, this function sits with the Director, Corporate Services and Electorate Office Liaison. Key liaison activities undertaken during 2019-20 include the following:

Electorate Office Reference Group (EORG)

It is recognised that this key liaison function can only be delivered effectively through the direct involvement and contribution of electorate office staff. The Electorate Office Reference Group (EORG) includes six electorate office Members representing government and non-government electorates, and regional and Brisbane locations. The EORG provides a valuable liaison and communication forum between the Parliamentary Service and electorate officers, and provide opportunities for:

- providing a forum for electorate office staff to inform and promote the role of electorate officers in supporting Members
- identification of key training needs and business tools required by electorate staff to support the activities of the electorate office
- consultation with electorate office staff on a range of Parliamentary Service policy initiatives

and projects directly affecting electorate office staff

- facilitating electorate officers raising issues of a general nature concerning services, equipment, support and the operation of electorate offices, and
- improving the content and effectiveness of important information exchanged with and between electorate office staff.

The EORG met on three occasions during 2019-20 with some interruptions caused by COVID-19 travel restrictions. Specific issues and initiatives considered by the EORG included:

- administrative issues which impact on the effective management of electorate offices (automatic ordering of toners, travel, management of staff and volunteers, office relocations)
- review and feedback on proposed rules and policies governing the introduction of a new Relief Staff Allocation, use of resources during election periods, etc
- commencing development of an Electorate Office Information Manual
- the mental health and wellbeing of electorate office staff, and participated in the Electorate Officer Mental Health Training Pilot Program, and
- the workload of electorate offices in general but also the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lead up to the 2020 State Election.

EO Connect E-Newsletter

With almost half of the Parliamentary Service workforce supporting Members directly in electorate offices, the Service is committed to exploring innovative ways to better communicate with Members and electorate staff, and improve the way services are delivered. As one of these strategies, in November 2019 the Clerk launched the first edition of EO Connect. This e-newsletter is designed to provide Members and electorate staff with concise information in a user-friendly format about a range of issues specifically relevant to electorate staff and offices.

The second edition was issued in June 2020 and it is planned to issue new editions every 3-4 months.

Electorate Office Relocations

The Parliamentary Service manages 97 electorate offices around Queensland including:

- site identification
- lease negotiations
- design, tender and fit out of new sites
- refurbishments and upgrades to existing sites
- security standard reviews, and
- WHS compliance.

Due to the electorate boundary redistribution in 2018 some electorate offices were situated outside of their nominated electorate. The Parliamentary Services was tasked with relocating these offices within their electoral boundary. During 2019-20 the Electorate Office Property team successfully completed the relocation of 11 offices and closed down the previous offices.

Stage 1 Critical Infrastructure Upgrade

The parliamentary precinct's infrastructure and Annexe building services have undergone ad-hoc upgrades over the last 40 years. Many of the key infrastructure systems are nearing or past their usable life expectancy. The Parliamentary Service has a \$14m Critical Infrastructure Works Program planned for the Parliamentary Annexe building, with the program to be delivered in three stages across the 2019-22 financial years. The proposed scope of works has been developed based on infrastructure and service upgrade priorities identified in an external consultant's report, together with internal assessments based on recent service issues and maintenance provider reports and risks.

The program of work focusses on three key infrastructure categories (fire, mechanical and electrical services) to be delivered in accordance with a three year plan.