

Question Time

What's being investigated?

Question

In the July/August 2000 issue of *About the House*, there was a picture of the rosewood despatch boxes on the Chamber Table. The photo also showed a row of books on the Table behind the boxes. What are the books and are they ever used?



Answer

The row of books along the centre of the Table are leather bound volumes of the House of Representatives Hansards covering approximately the past three years (Hansard is the official record of debates for the House). Earlier Hansards are available outside the Chamber.

Members refer to the Hansards from time to time if they want to check on something which may have been said in an earlier debate.

As well as the Hansards, a number of books sit on the table in front of the Clerk and the Deputy Clerk. The books, which the Speaker, Members and the Clerks may use as reference tools, include:

- House of Representatives Practice (a comprehensive and authoritative text on the procedure and practice of the House of Representatives);
- Standing and Sessional Orders (the Standing Orders are the continuing rules of procedure adopted by the House; the Sessional Orders are temporary rules which, in most cases, expire at the end of a session – usually when the House is dissolved for a general election);
- the Constitution;
- Votes and Proceedings (the official record of decisions of the House); and
- a dictionary.

Send in your questions

If you have a question that you would like to have answered about the House of Representatives, write to, email, phone or fax:

Liaison and Projects Office
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Email: liaison.reps@aph.gov.au
Phone: (02) 6277 2122
Fax: (02) 6277 8521

Review of relationship with World Trade Organisation

The Joint Standing Committee on Treaties is investigating the nature and scope of Australia's relationship with the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The Treaties Committee is examining:

- opportunities for community involvement in developing Australia's negotiating positions on matters with the WTO;
- the transparency and accountability of WTO operations and decision making;
- the effectiveness of the WTO's dispute settlement procedures and the ease of access to these procedures;
- Australia's capacity to undertake WTO advocacy;
- the involvement of peak bodies, industry groups and external lawyers in conducting WTO disputes;
- the relationship between the WTO and regional economic arrangements;
- the relationship between WTO agreements and other multilateral agreements, including those on trade and related matters, and on environmental, human rights and labour standards; and
- the extent to which social, cultural and environmental considerations influence WTO priorities and decision making.

Comments to the Committee were due by 25 August 2000, but those people still wanting to have their say on these matters can mail or email their comments to:

The Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Email: jsct@aph.gov.au
Call: (02) 6277 4002
Fax: (02) 6277 4827
Visit: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jsct

Kyoto Protocol also under review

The Joint Standing Committee on Treaties also is investigating whether ratification of the Kyoto Protocol on climate change is in Australia's national interest. The Treaties Committee is looking at the implications for Australia of proceeding or not proceeding to ratify the Kyoto Protocol and meeting its target emissions levels by 2008.

An important issue for the Committee is the veracity of conflicting current scientific theories on global warming and any solutions proposed for it. The Committee also wants to know what definitions and criteria Australia should develop and actively pursue in its national interest with regard to matters such as carbon credits, revegetation and land management.

The full terms of reference for the inquiry can be obtained from the Committee's web site or the Committee secretariat (see contact details above). Comments were due by 25 August 2000, but if you have anything to say on the Kyoto Protocol then you can still mail or email your comments to the Treaties Committee.

If you want to join an email alert list for updates on the above inquiries, email: jsct@aph.gov.au