

MPs. For example, Rob Oakeshott (Lyne, NSW) recently received more than 10,000 emails in just one day, which is more than 400 per hour.

In the House itself, the Speaker uses a PC to communicate with the clerks (parliamentary officials), to monitor the daily program, and to keep an eye on the TV broadcast from the chamber. You will also occasionally see MPs using their iPads in the chamber, most often to keep up with news and emails, occasionally to tweet, and sometimes to present their speech.

Click here

The Australian parliament's website at www.aph.gov.au gives access to a huge amount of information on the work of the House and the Senate. You can track legislation, find out what's on, link to MPs' personal websites, get 'live minutes' of proceedings or watch webcasts of the chambers and committee meetings.

A selection of videos can also be viewed on demand, including Question Time replays and TV stories about the work members do (visit www.aph.gov.au/ath).

Social media is used for updates and announcements. You can follow the work of the House on Twitter @AboutTheHouse and the Senate @AuSenate. There is also an 'About the House' Facebook page with news on the work of the House and its committees at: www.facebook.com/athnews

Decisions in an instant

One idea explored in the past, but not yet introduced, is electronic voting in the House. Currently when there is a vote (a division), the bells ring and members rush to the chamber where a manual tally is done of MPs. This takes several minutes. Electronic voting



CHAMBER CHAT: Harry Jenkins using his PC in the House

would do away with manual counting of votes and would provide instant results for divisions. This could save time and money.

In 2003 the House of Representatives Procedure Committee recommended against the introduction of electronic voting because there would be no 'cooling off' period in proceedings; no sign of how a member is voting based on where they are sitting; the possibility of members voting for absent colleagues; and more divisions being called. The committee said it would also mean losing the opportunity for MPs to liaise with colleagues, for example ministers, while divisions are in progress.

Electronic voting at elections has also been investigated, so that any Australian, anywhere in the world could cast their vote without having to travel to a polling place. A trial was conducted at the 2007 election for selected Australian Defence Force personnel serving overseas. The Electoral Matters Committee concluded it was too expensive to implement.

The global network

Every two years, the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament based in Rome hosts an e-parliament to promote the use of information technology in parliaments around the world.

It says technology helps create stronger links between citizens and their parliaments, makes people feel more engaged and makes parliaments seem more relevant.

The centre predicts growth in online discussions, online polls, e-petitions, e-consultations on issues and e-consultations on bills. You can find out more at: www.ictparliament.org

OVER TO YOU...

Is there an 'app' you would design for the Australian parliament which you think people would use?

If you come up with a clever idea, we'd love to hear about it!

Email us at: news@aph.gov.au

House Work

Your guide to investigations by House of Representatives and Joint Committees

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Committee

- Language learning in Indigenous communities
Public hearings being conducted
www.aph.gov.au/atsia
atsia.reps@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 4559

Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries and Forestry Committee

- Australian forestry industry
Report released 23 November 2011
www.aph.gov.au/arff
arff.reps@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 4500

Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity Committee

- Integrity testing
Report being prepared
www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/aclei_ctte/index.htm
aclei.committee@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 3419

Australia's Immigration Detention Network Committee

- Interim report released 7 October 2011
www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/immigration_detention_ctte/index.htm
immigration.detention@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 3521

Climate Change, Environment and the Arts Committee

- Australia's biodiversity in a changing climate
Public hearings being conducted
www.aph.gov.au/ccea
ccea.reps@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 4580

Corporations and Financial Services Committee

- The collapse of Trio Capital and any other related matters
Public hearings being conducted
www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/corporations_ctte/index.htm
corporations.joint@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 3583

Cyber-Safety Committee

- Interim report released 20 June 2011
www.aph.gov.au/cybersafety
jssc@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 4202

Economics Committee

- Reserve Bank Annual Report 2011 (First Report)
Public hearing scheduled for 24 February 2012
- Reserve Bank Annual Report 2010 (Third Report)
Public hearing held on 26 August 2011
www.aph.gov.au/economics
economics.reps@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 4587

Education and Employment Committee

- Mental health and workforce participation
Report being prepared
www.aph.gov.au/ee
ee.reps@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 4573

Electoral Matters Committee

- Funding of political parties and election campaigns
Report being prepared
www.aph.gov.au/em
jscem@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 2374

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee

- Inquiry into Australia's overseas representation
Submissions being sought
- Australia's human rights dialogues with China and Vietnam
Report being prepared
- Australia's trade and investment relationship with Japan and the Republic of Korea
Report being prepared
- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Annual Report 2009–2010
Report released 21 July 2011
- Defence Annual Report 2009–2010
Report being prepared
- Australia's trade and investment relations with Asia, the Pacific and Latin America
Report released 22 August 2011
www.aph.gov.au/jfadt
jscfadt@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 2313

Gambling Reform Committee

- Interactive and online gambling and gambling advertising
Report being prepared
www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/gamblingreform_ctte/index.htm
gamblingreform@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 3433

Health and Ageing Committee

- Registration processes and support for overseas trained doctors
Public hearings being conducted
www.aph.gov.au/haa
haa.reps@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 4145

Infrastructure and Communications Committee

- Role and potential of the National Broadband Network
Report released 25 August 2011
- Ratio of cabin crew members on aircraft
Report released 21 November 2011
www.aph.gov.au/ic
ic.reps@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 2352

Intelligence and Security Committee

- Listing of Al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the re-listing of 6 terrorist organisations
Report released 22 August 2011
- Administration and Expenditure No. 9 (2009–2010) – Australian intelligence agencies
Report being prepared
www.aph.gov.au/pjicis
pjicis@aph.gov.au
(02) 6277 2360