

## House Rules

# Year of the private member

Private members made their presence felt in the House of Representatives in 2011 following the changes to standing orders after the 2010 election.

THERE has been wide debate about the impact of the parliamentary reforms negotiated following the August 2010 federal election. The statistics point to a significant shift in the way the House works.

One key goal stated by the independents in the negotiations was to give private members (MPs who are not ministers or the Speaker) more opportunity to highlight individual electorate issues and present their own legislation.

Increased participation by private members has primarily been achieved by changes to the order of business in the House and Federation Chamber (previously known as the Main Committee), and an increase in sitting hours in each chamber.

A comparison between the 2011 sittings and the pre-election sittings in 2010 shows around a 10 per cent increase in the proportion of time spent on contributions by private members. Nearly one quarter of all business conducted in the House in 2011 was made up of either private members' business — that is, legislation and motions sponsored by private members — or other opportunities available to private members, such as members' statements and contributions to adjournment and grievance debates.

Twenty-one of the 223 bills initiated in the House of Representatives in 2011 were introduced by private members. Of these, 12 were debated at the second reading stage and two were passed by the House. In previous parliaments, private members' bills were only occasionally debated and, even then, not usually voted on.



APFONE

BACKBENCH BOOST: *Parliamentary reforms emphasised the role of local MPs*

Also during 2011, 117 private members' motions were moved and debated, with 52 being put to a vote. Of those motions voted on, 42 were agreed to by the House. Prior to the 43rd Parliament, it was rare for votes to occur on private members' motions.

The statistical summary for 2011 also shows a heavy workload in the House and the Federation Chamber.

There were 64 sitting days in 2011 during which the House met for a

total of 640 hours, while the Federation Chamber met on 54 occasions for a total of 290 hours.

During this period, 142 committee reports were presented, 882 questions without notice were asked and 621 questions in writing were submitted.

There were also 195 petitions presented, which, in total, comprised 704,954 signatories, and 136 ministerial responses to petitions were presented. •

*Continued from page 54*

Despite its close proximity to Greece at the epicentre of Europe's sovereign debt crisis, the Cypriot economy and its financial institutions remain the most stable in the Mediterranean due to billions of dollars in investment from Russia. Cypriots are still among the most prosperous people in the region.

"We face some problems — for example we have unemployment," he said. "For the first time in our history we have nine per cent unemployment, which is very big for our country. But I could not say that the people are feeling the crisis as they are feeling the crisis in a majority of European member countries." •