

based on the Commonwealth's House of Representatives provisions.

The Chair of the committee submitted this revised bill to government with a view to having it approved for introduction. With the exception of two amendments that I will discuss in a moment, the government has accepted the recommendations of the Standing Orders Committee and its revised bill.

In order to ensure that the new scheme is as wide as possible, the government has put forward a bill that imposes disclosure obligations in regard to the pecuniary interests of MLAs' de facto partners. Under existing legislative definitions, this extends to de facto same sex partners. The current scheme imposes disclosure obligations in regard to the financial interests of an MLA, a spouse, a de facto partner and to dependent children. The bill recommended by the committee only extended to the financial interests of a member, a spouse and dependent children. There seems to be little justification in making the disclosure provisions narrower than they already are. A modern, transparent pecuniary interest register should extend to the interests of all people the member is closely connected to, and where there is a possibility of a conflict of interest or the perception of a possible conflict of interest.

The second difference between the bill that has been introduced and the bill that was recommended by the committee concerns the conditions upon which the register of members' interests is to be made available for inspection. The committee's draft specifies the register to be available for inspection under conditions laid down by a committee of members' interests from time to time. Conceivably, at some stage in the future, such a committee could impose both cost and time restrictions that would place significant obstacles in the way of reasonable and open public access. To ensure the open and transparent intention is maintained, a minor addition has been made to this clause so that the conditions of access laid down by any future committee have to be reasonable, and that the information should be generally available to the public unless there is good reason to restrict its availability. Both amendments proposed by the government will result in a broader, more open scheme.

In regard to the committee that determines the conditions upon which the register of interests is to be available for inspection, I note that the federal parliament sets up a specific Committee of Members' Interests to undertake this task. The former Chair of this Assembly's Standing Orders Committee suggested that the establishment of a new dedicated committee for this task is unwarranted in the Northern Territory. He further

suggested that the existing Standing Orders Committee could undertake the role.

The essential components of the proposed scheme are as follows:

- within 28 days of becoming an MLA, the member must provide a statement of defined pecuniary interests in regard to themselves, and in regard to related people.
- within 28 days of alteration of these interests, the member must lodge a form advising of the change.
- people related to the MLA include a spouse, a de facto partner, or a child who is wholly or mainly dependent on the member.
- the Clerk must maintain a register of the disclosed interests and make this available for public inspection on the terms laid out by a committee of the Assembly.
- failure to comply with the requirements amounts to a contempt of the Assembly and is punishable under the provisions of the *Legislative Assembly (Powers and Privileges) Act*.
- the schedule of the act sets out what type of interests need to be disclosed and the type of information which has to be provided. The interests include: shareholdings, directorships, interests as a beneficiary, landholdings, partnerships, debts, bonds, bank accounts, major assets, gifts, sponsored travel or hospitality, and any other interests where a conflict of interest with a member's public duties could foreseeably arise or be seen to arise.

The new scheme is straightforward, comprehensive, and easy to understand.

Madam Speaker, I commend this bill to honourable members, and table the explanatory statement which accompanies the bill.

Debate adjourned.

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY (MEMBERS'
CODE OF CONDUCT AND
ETHICAL STANDARDS) BILL
(Serial 12)**

Bill presented and read a first time.