

**THE PROCESS OF POLICY DEVELOPMENT:
THE ROLE OF POLICY COMMITTEES
AND STATE CONFERENCE**

**REPORT TO AGENDA COMMITTEE
OCTOBER 1996**

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1 October 1996

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The agenda committee take a more active role in advance of policy committee elections to ensure that the talent of the Party is exploited to the full. (para. 17)
2. The rules be amended to establish a system of automatic co-option. (para. 23)
3. The existence of the committees and the availability of co-option be given maximum publicity throughout the party. (para. 24)
4. The sanction for non-attendance at committee meetings be strictly enforced. (para. 25)
5. Attendance be monitored by the agenda committee. (para. 26)
6. The existing machinery for countbacks be activated promptly following notice from a policy committee that a vacancy has occurred. Alternatively, consideration be given to a proposal for Conference, at the time of committee elections, to elect four extra people as a "reserve bench" for each committee. (para. 27)
7. At the commencement of each two-year term, each policy committee member be asked to sign a pledge of confidentiality. (para. 35).
8. Where a policy proposal is of such sensitivity that circulation must be tightly held, there be consultation at least with the president and secretary of the relevant policy committee. (para. 36)
9. The function of acting as a clearing-house for policy initiatives being developed by shadow ministers or the State parliamentary leadership be taken on by the agenda committee or, preferably, by a special sub-committee of that committee. (para. 41).
10. There be stricter monitoring by the agenda committee of the attendance by SPLP members of policy committees. (para. 43)
11. The leader (or his/her deputy) visit each policy committee at least once in the first year after the election of the committee and at least once in the 12 months preceding a State election. (para. 44)
12. The role of policy committees in preparing platform documents be enshrined in the rules. (para. 48)
13. A protocol outlining the process of platform development be prepared and published to all policy committees and shadow ministers not later than the end of the third year of the parliamentary term. (para. 50)
14. When decisions are to be taken about the timing and order of policy releases, the cross-portfolio committee (see rec. 16 below) should be consulted. (para. 52)
15. Representatives of all policy committees have an opportunity to contribute to the decision-making on spending commitments and competing policy priorities. (para. 54)
16. A cross-portfolio committee be established. (para. 57)
17. The attention of committee presidents and secretaries be specifically drawn in the initial briefing (see rec. 27) to their obligations in relation to branch and FEA correspondence. (para. 66)
18. A more effective system of transmission of branch correspondence to committees be established in head office. (para. 66)

19. At least once each year a letter be sent by head office to each Party member setting out:
 - a list of the policy committee and their portfolio responsibilities;
 - the procedures for election and co-option; and
 - the name and telephone number of the president and secretary of each committee.(para. 67)
20. Each policy committee be required to prepare by 30 June in each year a report summarising the activities of the committee over the preceding twelve months and identifying the three principal policy issues with which the committee has been concerned over that period. A pro forma report be developed for this purpose consisting of a single page with appropriate sections to be completed. (para. 68)
21. There be a limited program of branch visits by policy committees, the program to be developed and administered by head office. (para. 70)
22. Committees be required to draw up a work program for themselves, setting out an indicative timetable for the two-year life of the committee. (para. 73)
23. At an early meeting of the policy committee there be a briefing by the State shadow minister and, on the same or a separate occasion, by the Federal shadow minister about the policy agenda as perceived by him/her. (para. 74)
24. Policy committees be informed about any relevant campaign targets i.e. particular marginal seats or particular issues which are to be given priority, and be briefed on research conducted by the Party (para. 75)
25. At least in the next two-year policy committee cycle, a rolling program of policy review be laid down by the agenda committee. (para. 76)
26. A requirement be introduced that each policy committee submit at least one substantive policy recommendation to Conference each year. (para. 77)
27. There be time set aside at the inaugural meeting of each committee, following the election of president and secretary, for a briefing by a head office organiser and a representative of the agenda committee on the functions of the policy committee. (para. 78)
28. A forum be held to which members of all policy committees could be invited, to be addressed by State and Federal parliamentary leadership. (para. 79)
29. There be a party-wide survey of members, inviting them to indicate areas of policy expertise. (para. 80)
30. There be greater effort on the part of committees and shadow ministers to build links with external sources of advice and expertise. (para. 81)
31. A specialist research position be established and funded by the Party. (para. 83)
32. The agenda committee take a more active role in monitoring the quality of policy committee performance. (para. 85)
33. The principle of direct access by state committees to the FPLP be endorsed and Federal shadow ministers be encouraged to attend a meeting of the relevant State policy committee at least once per calendar year. (para. 92)
34. There be a component of FPLP representation on every policy committee. (para. 94)
35. The attendance of FPLP members be monitored in the same way the attendance of SPLP members is monitored. (para. 95)

36. The importance of consulting relevant interest groups be emphasised in the initial briefing to the committee (rec. 27). (para. 100)
37. The rules be amended to require each committee to hold at least one public forum in the life of the committee. The assistance of head office be available to committees for the setting up and publicising of such forums. (para. 101)
38. Presidents and secretaries of committees be reminded of their obligation to convene one policy assembly per year, and that there be some follow-up by the agenda committee to ensure that the assemblies take place. (para. 102).
39. Policy committees be required to hold at least two meetings away from the inner metropolitan area during the life of the committee. (para. 109)
40. Policy committees be encouraged to hold at least one meeting per year on a Sunday morning or afternoon. (para. 109).
41. The section of the membership application and renewal forms seeking expressions of interest in policy committees also seek an indication of whether childcare facilities would be used if available. (para. 110)
42. Certain policy committees be asked, following their election at the October 1996 Conference, to review their own structure and to report to the agenda committee, which can then decide what changes (if any) need to be recommended to Conference in March 1997. (para. 111)
43. The agenda committee give priority in Conference planning to the identification of appropriate policy issues around which to structure debate. (para. 121)
44. Policy forums be held within the framework of Conference. (para. 123)

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REPORT TO AGENDA COMMITTEE

1. Introduction

In June 1996, I was asked by the agenda committee to conduct a review of the functioning of policy committees and State Conference, and to recommend ways of enhancing the contributions they respectively make to the process of policy development. The formal terms of reference were as follows :

"The review will -

- (a) assess the performance and output of policy committees in the period since the October 1992 election;
- (b) consider what changes are required to policy committee structures and procedures in order to achieve the following objectives:
 - . increased access for party members to policy committees, including in particular members with specialist expertise;
 - . more efficient administration of policy committees and more effective monitoring of their performance;
 - . improved links between policy committees and community groups;
 - . the development of working relationships between policy committees and recognised experts in various policy fields;
 - . achieving a more active and visible role for policy committees as the focus for policy discussion within the Party;
 - . an improved relationship between policy committees and both the parliamentary and the industrial wings of the Party;
 - . improved consultative arrangements between policy committees and the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party;
 - . effective implementation of policy following endorsement by State Conference.
- (c) consider what changes are required to State Conference structures and procedures in order to improve the extent and quality of policy discussion, both on policy recommendations from committees and on specific policy issues."

2. I have consulted as widely as possible in the time available. All State shadow ministers and policy committees, and several Federal members, were invited to participate. In the event, I conducted 27 interviews with individuals and groups, including the Leader of the Opposition and 10 shadow ministers, and representatives of 10 of the 15 existing policy committees. I also received 8 written submissions. I had direct contact with representatives of all factions and addressed one factional general meeting.
3. The consultation produced a wide range of opinions and suggestions, most of which I have attempted to address in this report. The report is a synthesis of my own views and of those with whom I have discussed the issues. Consistently with the focus of the terms of

reference, the report deals first, and at greatest length, with policy committees, before considering the role of State Conference.

POLICY COMMITTEES

4. Why policy matters

"Our commitment to and competence in policy is a measure of how well we understand the electorate and of our qualification to be an alternative government. Policy must be something that will enable us to govern in a progressive and responsible way. There is no more important issue than policy development."
(Shadow Minister)

"If we are to get elected, there needs to be a dynamic relationship between our policies and what the electorate wants. We must combine a leadership role in policy, which captures the electorate's imagination, with an ability to listen to the electorate and respond to it." (Shadow Minister)

5. It is a basic assumption of this report (and of everyone to whom I spoke) that the health of the policy development process is vital to the health of the Party and its future electoral success. The Victorian branch has a very strong tradition of sustained and effective policy development. It is widely acknowledged that the work of policy committees in the period 1979-82 was an essential part of preparing for government and of being accepted by the electorate as ready to govern.
6. Equally, there is a widespread perception that the role and importance of policy committees declined during the later years of the Cain/Kirner administrations. This was partly a function of policy progressively being implemented (or discarded) and partly a function of the inevitable reliance of ministers on the resources of the public service and on inputs from outside experts and interest groups (see e.g. Considine and Costar, Trials in Power pp 187-9).
7. The period 1992-1996 has been one of readjustment to being in opposition. Views differ about the performance of the policy committees over this period. On the one hand, some claim that policy committees have been underperforming. On the other hand, there is objective evidence that many of the committees have continued to work hard and productively throughout this period, including in particular in the lead-up to the 1996 State election.
8. Now, as the Party confronts a second term in opposition, the policy task is more important than ever. It is important, first and foremost, because good policy is what defines a credible alternative government. It is also the ammunition which arms an effective opposition. But policy development is also important for the health of the Party internally. Ours is a party founded upon principles of participatory democracy. Its strength lies in the active participation of the membership which, in turn, depends on members feeling that there is a vigorous process of debate on policy issues and that there is an opportunity for them to contribute to that process.
9. This report is, necessarily, written from the perspective of opposition. The nature of the policy development process, and the role of policy committees within it, must reflect the particular demands of opposition. The relationship between policy committees and a Labor Government raises additional and different issues which will need to be addressed closer to the next election.
10. The functions of policy committees
The principal functions of a policy committee can be summarised as follows :
 - (a) writing Party policy;
 - (b) acting as a clearing house for ideas;
 - (c) acting as a resource for shadow ministers;
 - (d) providing a measure of accountability for the parliamentary party.I will deal with each of these in turn.

11. Traditionally, the primary function of policy committees has been to draft the policy documents which, following endorsement by State Conference, become the policy of the Party. Although State Conference is the supreme policy-making body of the Party (rule 6.2.1), the detailed work of drafting and negotiating new policy falls to the committees. (The distinction between "policy" and "platform" will be considered below).
12. As to the second of the four functions, a strong theme which emerged in the consultation was the need for policy committees to "broaden the pool of ideas". In performance of what is essentially a consultative function, policy committees are now expected to be active in seeking out new policy ideas from within the Party, from the wider community and from relevant interest groups and experts in the sector(s) affected by the policy. Particular emphasis is laid on the importance of holding policy forums on particular issues and/or in particular areas. (These matters are dealt with in paragraphs 98-101 below).
13. Thirdly, the policy committees must be an effective resource for shadow ministers. Ideally, a shadow minister should be able to obtain the policy committee's advice on the following aspects of any policy proposal :
 - its intellectual cogency and technical credibility;
 - the likely electorate response;
 - the likely Party response.This function should be as much pro-active as reactive. That is, in addition to acting as a sounding-board, policy committees should be ready to raise policy ideas of their own for discussion with shadow ministers. The same applies to the development of critiques of Government policy.
14. Fourthly, policy committees are part of the accountability framework. A policy committee acts on behalf of State Conference in seeking to maximise the degree of implementation of policy. The monthly meetings of policy committees are appropriate occasions for shadow ministers to report on their activities and to identify areas where new policy is required or where existing policy needs to be re-examined. This should be a productive and dynamic process, leading ultimately to the evolution of a policy which meets both philosophical and political objectives.
15. The capacity of the committees

How well a committee performs these various functions will depend on the relationships it builds with shadow ministers, with the wider Party, with unions and community groups and with the community at large. But above all it will depend on how well-equipped the committee is for the task. To a large extent, this is a function of the quality of the committee's membership.
16. In the course of the consultation, some serious criticisms were made of the capacity of policy committees. While they do not apply to every committee, it is instructive to record them because they give an indication of where performance is seen as falling short of expectation. It was variously said that policy committees:
 - are not a vehicle for generating innovative policy, and are short of new ideas;
 - are not expert enough in the portfolio area to provide much assistance;
 - are not focused enough on the task of winning government but are too concerned with policy in isolation;
 - are unable to deal with cross-portfolio issues, which are increasingly important;
 - are too reactive, depending on shadow ministers to set their agenda;
 - are not sufficiently in touch with the community or relevant parts of it;
 - cannot be relied on to maintain confidentiality.
17. Recruitment and election

The overriding challenge is to ensure that Party members with skill and commitment are recruited to policy committees. Responsibility for achieving this is shared by head office, by shadow ministers, by those already active on committees, by factional leaders and by the leadership of the State parliamentary party. Ultimate responsibility, however, should rest with the agenda committee, consistently with its enhanced role in ensuring the quality of the policy

development process. I recommend that the agenda committee take a more active role in advance of policy committee elections to ensure that the talent of the Party is exploited to the full. This would involve some intensive work in the months preceding the close of nominations for policy committees to ensure that all available avenues are being explored for recruiting high calibre candidates.

18. There is a widespread perception that the present system of election at State Conference is not producing the best available talent. It is well recognised that the system of factional ticketing for elections at Conference means that a non-aligned person has a very limited chance of election to a committee, whatever his or her credentials. The common experience is that, following a good attendance at the inaugural meeting of the committee at which the president and secretary are elected, a number of factional nominees disappear and are rarely seen again in the life of the committee. On committees with the standard membership of 20, the common experience is that by the end of the first year there will only be 8 or 9 members attending regularly, one or more of whom will be co-optees rather than elected members.
19. Early in the consultation, it was suggested that the system of electing policy committees be abandoned altogether, and that membership be open to any interested Party member. This suggestion - made independently by one shadow minister and one policy committee - would bring Victoria into line with the system used in Western Australia and New South Wales. If adopted, it would remove any actual or perceived barrier to entry based on factional membership.
20. Reaction to the proposal was evenly divided. Chief among the objections was that it would produce a lack of structure and continuity. Membership would fluctuate, it was argued, with individual members lacking the sense of commitment which flows from having been elected. It was also suggested that open access of this kind might expose the committees to domination by sectional interests.
21. On balance, I consider that the present system of elections should be retained. Having a core of elected members who are themselves accountable to Conference for their performance does, I believe, give some guarantee of continuity and consistency in the work of a committee over the two-year cycle. At the same time, I believe that the important objective of opening up the committees to the Party can be achieved by an enhanced system of co-option. As already noted, the experience of many committees is that much of the best work already being done is done by those who are co-opted.
22. Change is required in two areas, namely the mechanism for co-option and the method of encouraging potential co-optees to come forward. As to the mechanics, the rules already provide that each policy committee has the power to co-opt "such additional members as it deems fit" (rule 8.5.7). The rule provides that co-optees must be members of the Party "and shall have a voice but no vote". Several committees I spoke to emphasised that they had an entirely open approach to co-option. That is, any Party member who expresses interest is automatically co-opted. This is a practice I have followed in the committees I have chaired, and the results have invariably been positive.
23. I recommend that the rules be amended to establish a system of automatic co-option. That is, once a Party member has notified the president or secretary of the committee of his or her desire to be co-opted, the member should automatically become a co-opted member (by force of the rules and without the need for a committee resolution) with effect from the first meeting attended. As at present, the co-optee would have speaking but not voting rights. There should, however, be power in the committee to resolve that speaking rights be withdrawn. This power, which should be exercisable only by an absolute majority of the elected members, will cover the exceptional circumstance where a person automatically co-opted behaves in a manner which is incompatible with the work program of the committee.

24. I further recommend that the existence of the committees and the availability of co-option be given maximum publicity throughout the party. This can be done in a number of ways, for example :
- membership forms (both initial application and renewal) should list all policy committees and invite members to indicate any committee on which they would be interested to serve. Those who do should automatically receive a letter advising them of the co-option procedure and providing appropriate contact numbers;
 - policy committees should communicate direct with branches (see paragraphs 67-72);
 - all unsuccessful candidates for election to a committee should be invited to indicate whether they wish to be co-opted;
 - party members who attend policy assemblies or forums convened by a policy committee (see paragraphs 101-104) should receive a similar invitation.
25. I also recommend that the sanction for non-attendance at committee meetings should be strictly enforced. The rules already provide that any member of a policy committee who is absent from three consecutive meetings shall have his or her seat on the committee declared vacant, unless the committee president has granted a special leave of absence (rule 8.5.8(d)). In practice, this rule is not strictly enforced, with the consequence that the number of active committee members tends to decline over its life. Stricter enforcement will be an incentive to attendance and will also ensure that, if a member loses interest, an opening will be promptly created for one of the unsuccessful candidates at the election.
26. This should not, however, be left entirely to the committees themselves. I recommend that attendance be monitored by the agenda committee. To facilitate this process, head office should maintain a record of attendance for each committee. The printed form currently used to record attendance can be used for this purpose. Where persistent non-attendance has not been acted upon by the policy committee, the agenda committee should intervene.
27. Stricter enforcement of attendance must be accompanied by prompt filling of vacancies. A common complaint is that, even if the attendance rule is enforced and the member's seat on the committee declared vacant, it can take several months before the new committee member is identified. I recommend that the existing machinery for countbacks be activated promptly following notice from a policy committee that such a vacancy has occurred. As an alternative, I recommend that consideration be given to a proposal for Conference, at the time of election, to elect four extra people as a "reserve bench". In other words, for the standard committee size of 20 members, 24 would be elected, on the basis that those elected 21-24 would fill casual vacancies as they arose. Since the invariable experience of committees is that a number of vacancies do arise, either by resignation or by non-attendance, there would be a real incentive for candidates to fill these reserve positions.
28. The factions bear a heavy responsibility for ensuring a high quality of committee membership. This applies both to active recruitment and to monitoring of the performance of factional nominees once elected. There is a perception that factional support is often conferred on those who see policy committee membership as a stepping-stone to Party advancement, rather than as a task requiring sustained commitment and hard work. If the committees are to fulfil their potential, the factions need to establish more systematic processes for identifying suitable members, both within their ranks and beyond. Factional leaders have acknowledged to me their readiness to support non-aligned members if they have the necessary skills. It should be possible, for example, to draw on those Party members who have previously been co-opted and who have thereby demonstrated their qualifications for election in the next round.
29. Relationship with the State Parliamentary Labor Party (SPLP)
"When a policy committee performs its role, producing documents which have the 'blessing' of the Parliamentary and Organisational wings, the members have a right to expect that their work, as ratified by State Conference, will be used as approved, and implemented by the ALP in government." (policy committee)

"Once adopted by State Conference there needs to be a commitment that the parliamentary party will implement the policy and abide by their individual pledges 'to do my utmost to carry out the principles embodied in the Platform'. This is the most fundamental issue to be addressed. It is hard enough to get party members to participate in the policy developing process. De-valuing their participation, by ignoring their work, is therefore no way to keep them involved." (policy committee)

"Platform development should be a joint effort between the policy committee and the shadow minister. I asked the policy committee to prepare the first draft of the platform. I asked them to identify the key issues in the policy which State Conference had previously endorsed. We then worked through the draft platform and tested each other's tolerance on particular issues." (shadow minister)

30. The relationship between policy committees and the parliamentary party is of critical importance. For policy committees, the whole object of their endeavours is to help shape the policies which a future Labor Government will implement and to assist the parliamentary party to function effectively in opposition. For their part, shadow ministers need maximum support and assistance from policy committees, to supplement the scarce resources otherwise available to them.
31. As one shadow minister put it, the basic assumption must be that each has a constructive role to play in the process. If the relationship is to be productive, it must be based on co-operation and trust. In practice, the success of the relationship depends on the individuals involved. A shadow minister should be prepared to take a policy committee into his/her confidence. Conversely, the performance of the policy committee must be good enough to earn that confidence.
32. Crucial to the success of the relationship is consistency, on both sides. The more consistent the attendance of policy committee members, the greater the degree of continuity and, generally speaking, the more assistance a shadow minister can derive. Equally, the shadow minister must deal consistently with the policy committee. The shadow minister cannot pick and choose the matters on which the policy committee is consulted, if the relationship is to be maintained. It should be a true partnership.
33. A particularly difficult issue concerns policy initiatives being developed by individual shadow ministers or the parliamentary leadership. Such policy leadership is both inevitable and desirable, but it needs to accommodate the policy development process if that process is to remain relevant.
34. On occasions, significant policy announcements have been made after little or no consultation with policy committees. This is said to be justified by the need for quick response and the need for strict confidentiality. Major policy announcements must of course be distinguished from the issues which arise day to day. The former will rarely be matters of great urgency, while the latter can be accommodated by means of informal contact between the shadow minister and the president and secretary of the policy committee.
35. The issue of confidentiality is more difficult. In my experience, policy committees are generally very reliable in maintaining confidentiality. Policy committee members recognise that the privilege of being consulted on policy issues carries with it the responsibility of preserving confidentiality. Nevertheless, there have been occasions when policy proposals have been leaked. My own view is that these few exceptions should not be allowed to derail the normal processes and that the policy development process can proceed on the assumption that policy committees are trustworthy. To strengthen this assumption, however, I recommend that, at the commencement of each two-year term, each policy committee member be asked to sign a pledge of confidentiality. Obviously, this would be of symbolic significance only, but it would have the benefit of drawing to the attention of members - in particular those who have not served on committees before - the significance of this responsibility.

36. In exceptional circumstances, where a policy proposal is of such sensitivity that circulation must be tightly held, I recommend that there should be consultation at least with the president and secretary of the relevant policy committee. While this will not always produce comments which are representative of the view of the whole committee and while it may place those individuals in a difficult position, it seems to me that such limited consultation is to be preferred to none at all.
 37. What must be avoided if trust is to be maintained is the pre-emptive announcement of new policy before consultation has taken place. Such announcements undermine the co-operative relationship with policy committees, by effectively committing the party publicly before those who might otherwise offer cogent reasons for not proceeding with the policy, or for choosing an alternative course, have had an opportunity to do so.
- Policy development working group
38. A policy development working group was established by State Conference after the 1992 election. The working group had a tripartite structure, comprising representatives of the shadow cabinet, the organisational wing (principally policy committees) and ALP unions. A shadow minister and the president of a policy committee (also a member of the administrative committee) were the co-convenors.
 39. The working group was intended to be a "funnel" for policy proposals being developed by shadow ministers. It had no power to approve or reject a particular policy proposal but was responsible for ensuring that each of the three sectors was equally able to contribute to the consideration. In this way, the process was designed to minimise breakdowns in consultation and, so far as possible, to bridge the gap between policy development and the political exigencies faced by the parliamentary party.
 40. Views differ as to how effectively this process operated. It appears to have been honoured as much in the breach as in the observance. While some proposals were cleared through the working group, others were announced without reference to it. Obviously, no process can be fully effective unless all participants are committed to it.
 41. The concept of a clearing-house for policy initiatives being developed by shadow ministers or the State parliamentary leadership remains, in my view, very important. Given the enhanced focus of the agenda committee on policy matters, I recommend that this clearing-house function be taken on by the agenda committee or, preferably, by a special sub-committee of it. This role falls comfortably within the policy co-ordination function of the agenda committee under rule 8.2.2(h). The sub-committee should meet for this purpose at least once a month, and should include representation of the caucus as well as of the shadow cabinet, unions and policy committees. For the process to be effective, shadow cabinet and the parliamentary leadership must signal their commitment to participate in it.
 42. State Parliamentary representatives
Under rule 8.5.1, State Conference determines the number of members of committees to be elected by the SPLP and FLP. With the exception of foreign affairs, defence and trade, each policy committee has two SPLP members. The regularity of their attendance, and the quality of their input, is variable. The regular attendance of caucus members with an interest in the portfolio is of considerable benefit to the committee process. It brings to a committee's deliberations a different electoral and parliamentary perspective from that of the shadow minister, and it enables the caucus member to take to the parliamentary deliberations the Party and policy committee perspectives. It also enhances the assistance which the caucus member can give to the shadow minister in parliamentary debates.
 43. Attendance by elected members should be more strictly enforced. I recommend that there be stricter monitoring by the agenda committee of the attendance by SPLP members. Their attendance should be recorded on the same form as for other members and included in the party records. If it becomes apparent that a particular SPLP member is consistently not

attending, the member should be asked to indicate whether he/she still wishes to participate. If not, a new representative can be nominated.

44. Leader's visits

Two policy committees reported on visits by the leader of the SPLP to their meetings. In each case, this enabled the committee to hear what the leader regarded as the short and long-term policy priorities in the policy area. In turn, it enabled the committee to communicate to the leader some of the committee's perspectives on relevant policy issues. Symbolically, such attendance sends a positive message to policy committees that their work is valued as an integral part of the political process. Recognising that there are enormous demands on the leader's time, I nevertheless recommend that the leader (or his/her deputy) visit each policy committee at least once in the first year after the election of the committee and at least once in the 12 months preceding a State election.

45. Policy or platform?

Many of those consulted referred to the widespread confusion about the distinction between policy and platform. As I understand it, the distinction is as follows:

- policy: the set of propositions prepared by a policy committee and approved (with or without amendment) by State Conference.
- platform: the set of policy priorities and commitments announced before an election. No Conference approval is required, although these priorities/commitments must be consistent with the policy as previously adopted.

46. It is important to note that the word "platform" is used in a quite different sense in the Party rules. In section 2 of the rules, under the heading "Platform", the rules set out the objectives of the Party in the most general terms. Thus -

"To achieve the political and social values of equality, democracy, liberty and social co-operation ..., the Australian Labor Party stands for :

2.2.1 Redistribution of political and economic power so that all members of society have the opportunity to participate in the shaping and control of the institutions and relationships which determine their lives.

...

2.2.6 Recognition and encouragement of the right of labour to organise for the protection and advancement of its interests.

...

2.2.12 Equal access and rights to employment, education, information, technology, housing, health and welfare services, cultural and leisure activities and the law."

47. As the terms are ordinarily used, however, it is the platform rather than the policy which contains specific commitments. As a general rule, the policies adopted by State Conference will be couched in more general terms than an election platform. For example, policy adopted by Conference does not include financial commitments. At the same time, this demarcation cannot be too rigorously defined. It may be entirely appropriate for a policy document to make some quite specific commitments.

48. The key issue is the process by which the policy is converted into the platform in the period leading up to the election. There is general agreement that this should be a joint process between the shadow minister and the policy committee. If the relationship between them is healthy, this will happen naturally. For reasons already given, the exclusion of policy committees from this process would be to deny them a part in the "business end" of the policy development process. I recommend that the role of policy committees in preparing platform documents should be enshrined in the rules.

49. To avoid misunderstanding, there needs to be much greater clarity about the process for preparing platforms and, in particular, about who has the authority to make final decisions about platform content. Ultimately, these decisions must be made by those responsible for the conduct of the election campaigns, that is, the campaign committee and the parliamentary executive. What is crucial, however, is the process leading up to the making of those final decisions.
50. I therefore recommend the preparation and publication to all policy committees and shadow ministers, not later than the end of the third year of the parliamentary term, of a protocol outlining the process of platform development. The preparation of the protocol should be a joint exercise involving the State parliamentary executive, the campaign committee and the agenda committee. The protocol should set deadlines for the submission of draft platforms and outline the process by which final decisions will be made. It should identify clearly the opportunities which policy committees and shadow ministers will have to argue the relative priorities of their proposals. Finally, the protocol should make provision for proper feedback to committees and shadow ministers about the decisions ultimately made, especially where the platform as put forward is modified in some significant way before release.
51. Timing of release of policies
A key issue concerns the timing of release of election policies. There are of course competing concerns here. On the one hand, it is essential that Labor in opposition establish itself as a credible alternative. This would seem to require clear definition, and maximum advance publicity, of what Labor's policy positions are. On the other hand, there are risks in the early release of policies and, given the intensive focus on the campaign itself, it is necessary to keep some fresh policy commitments for release during the election.
52. This question of campaign strategy is of fundamental importance to all participants in the policy development process. Policy committees are naturally eager to see the release of policy platforms on which they have worked. I recommend that, when decisions are to be taken about the timing and order of policy releases, the cross-portfolio committee (see below) should be consulted. This will give policy committees an opportunity to contribute to the decision-making.
53. Determining priorities
Another key issue, affecting all policies, is the question of how much spending will be promised and in what areas. Clearly, this is a fundamental and difficult issue, on which views vary. But it is an issue which must be resolved in a timely fashion, well before the election, so that platforms can be adjusted accordingly and released in good time.
54. Since these decisions so directly affect the extent to which policy put forward by a particular policy committee/shadow minister will be implemented, I recommend that representatives of all policy committees should have an opportunity to contribute to the decision-making on these issues. The proposed cross-portfolio committee could be used for this purpose. This would enable policy committee representatives to put forward arguments both about the overall approach to spending, and about the relative priority to be given to particular policies. These views should be of assistance to the parliamentary leadership and the campaign committee in making the final decisions.
55. Proposed cross-portfolio committee
Cross-portfolio issues are an increasingly important part of policy development. Structured as they are along traditional portfolio lines (although some committees cover more than one portfolio), the committees are not equipped to deal with major policy issues which affect a number of portfolios. An example would be reform of the electricity industry. Any such reform is likely to raise issues in a whole range of policy areas - energy, economics, environment, industry and consumer affairs to name a few. Again, any integrated policy for regional development must necessarily include policies within a range of portfolios.

56. In my view, the solution does not lie in a restructuring of the committees. In at least two instances, attempts to combine more than one portfolio under the one policy committee appear to have failed (see further below). The fact is that policy issues will continue to arise within individual portfolio areas and it is just as important that committees be able to devote their time and expertise to those issues.
57. I recommend that a cross-portfolio committee be established to deal with such issues. This committee should not be separately elected but should consist of one representative from each of the existing committees - president, secretary or a nominee of the committee. A committee might nominate a different person depending upon the issue under discussion.
58. The functions of this committee in relation to cross-portfolio issues would be both substantive and procedural. That is, if a proposal for reform of the electricity industry were being formulated, it would be brought to that committee for a discussion to which each of the members would bring his or her own perspective. The procedural function would involve the members of the committee then taking the proposal back to their own committees for further consideration and report back. I do not envisage the committee meeting on a monthly basis but only as required. The committee should be convened, and chaired, by a senior member of the agenda committee, which would be responsible for ensuring that this resource was properly utilised.
59. As foreshadowed earlier, I envisage that this committee would also provide the forum for policy committee input into the discussion of campaign strategy issues (para 52 above) and, in the pre-election period, spending issues and policy priorities (see para 54 above).
60. The relationship with party branches
 "Rank and file party members ... are hungry for a say in policy development and I am determined to make sure they are given that say; that the process of policy development is truly driven by the broader membership; that it is not captured by particular sectional groups or interests." (J. Brumby, "The Age", June 1996).
- "Collective ownership of policy is very important because it means policy is more likely to be representative, more likely to reflect concerns of the Party and the community, and because it actively reinforces the desire of people to participate." (Party member)
- "We need to underline the importance of skills in policy development. They are just as important as organisational skills". (Shadow Minister)
61. It is hardly surprising if branch members feel alienated from the policy development process. The level of contact between policy committees and the party membership at large is minimal. This is, I think, attributable both to the natural preoccupation of committees with the demands of their policy work, which consume the available time and energy, and to the widespread ignorance within the Party of what policy committees are, what they are doing and where they can be contacted.
62. The traditional form of communication between Party branches and committees is by correspondence. Committees from time to time receive letters from branches, setting out resolutions they have passed relating to the relevant policy area or seeking some information about policy development. Often these communications are treated more cursorily than they deserve, again because the matter raised may be remote from the immediate issues confronting the committee. The problem is exacerbated by the not infrequent delays in the transmission of correspondence to the officers of a policy committee once it has been received by head office. If more than one or two months have elapsed by the time the letter is considered by the committee, the relevance of the issue raised by the branch may have disappeared altogether.

63. Under the existing rules, a policy committee's report to State Conference must set out any resolutions forwarded to it by constituent units of the Party (including branches) which -
- (a) have been incorporated in or instrumental in formulating the committee's policy recommendations;
 - (b) which relate to those policy recommendations but have not been incorporated;
 - (c) which require no further action other than an acknowledgment to the branch, for the reason that they re-state existing platform or policy; or
 - (d) which have not yet been considered (rule 8.5.10).
64. I see no reason to change this procedure. Provided that it is adhered to, it makes the policy committee accountable to State Conference for its consideration of every policy-related resolution forwarded to the committee. Having to account in this way ought to ensure that the committees give proper consideration to the resolutions as they are received. It was suggested in the course of the consultation that the rules be amended so that branch resolutions were automatically forwarded to conference for consideration. In my view, the present mechanism already enables that to occur. For example, if a policy committee has decided to take no action with respect to a particular resolution, Conference delegates upon reading the committee's report to Conference can ask that the matter to be "taken out" of the committee's report for debate at Conference.
65. The same analysis applies to resolutions of FEA general meetings. Clearly enough, a Federal Electorate Assembly (established by Rule 9.1.1) is a constituent unit of the party. A resolution of the FEA at a duly-convened general meeting should, if it raises policy issues, be directed to the relevant policy committee. The committee would have to consider the resolution and report it to conference, in precisely the same way. I see no benefit - and real disadvantage from a policy development point of view - in allowing FEA resolutions to go direct to conference. Policy committees are, after all, established by Conference to carry out the policy development function and Conference would naturally expect any policy-related resolution to have been through the policy committee process first.
66. To ensure that this process works as the rules clearly intend, I recommend that the attention of committee presidents and secretaries be specifically drawn in the initial briefing (see below) to their obligations in relation to branch and FEA correspondence. In addition, I recommend that a more effective system of transmission of branch correspondence be established in head office. This should ensure that, within seven days of the receipt of a branch or FEA resolution, a letter of acknowledgment is sent to the branch or FEA and copies of the resolution are dispatched to the president and secretary of the relevant policy committee(s).
67. Of equal importance is the need to inform Party members about the policy development process, and the work of policy committees, and about their opportunities to participate in it. There are a number of ways this can be done. The first is to inform Party members what the various committees are and of the opportunities for election and co-option. I have already recommended (para 23) that membership and renewal forms be used for this purpose. In view, however, of the importance of policy development, I recommend that at least once each year a letter be sent by head office to each Party member setting out:
- . a list of the policy committee and their portfolio responsibilities;
 - . the procedures for election and co-option; and
 - . the name and telephone number of the president and secretary of each committee.
68. Secondly, there should be more direct contact between the committees and branches. This can take a number of forms. I recommend that each policy committee be required to prepare by 30 June in each year a report summarising the activities of the committee over the preceding twelve months and identifying the three principal policy issues with which the committee has been concerned over that period. Recognising that this will impose a further administrative burden on committees, I recommend that a pro forma report be developed for this purpose, consisting of a single page with appropriate sections to be completed. It would, once again, be the responsibility of the agenda committee (through the head office organiser

responsible for policy) to ensure that these forms were provided to policy committees and completed. The completed forms would then be distributed to branches via the state secretary's newsletter.

69. It was a recurring suggestion during the consultation that policy committees should make visits to branches. While in principle this is to be encouraged, it is attended with practical difficulties. In the first place, it is a considerable additional demand on policy committee members to undertake branch visits, and attendance at branch meetings will often not justify the effort. Secondly, the logistics of arranging such visits will in themselves impose an administrative burden. Thirdly, unless such visits are properly co-ordinated, the object of maximising communication through the Victorian branch will not be achieved.
70. With those considerations in mind, I recommend that there be a limited program of branch visits by policy committees, the program to be developed and administered by head office. The program should involve representatives of a particular policy committee being required to make no more than two branch visits in any twelve-month period. Having the program centrally organised will ensure that visits are arranged across an appropriate spread of locations, both urban and country, and that the visits can be tailored according to where particular policies are of particular relevance and/or meet the needs of a marginal seats campaign. It is appropriate that the administrative responsibility for arranging the time and place with the relevant branch or branches should rest with the full-time officers of the Party.
71. It hardly needs to be emphasised that this program of visits should include country visits. I understand that there is an even greater sense of isolation from the process amongst the country branches. Such visits will assist in bridging that gap.
72. Finally, the use of policy forums and discussion papers (see paras 98-104) should provide opportunities for branch member participation. Except where time constraints prevent it, I see no reason why branches should not as a matter of routine receive notice of any such forum and a copy of any such discussion paper. Inevitably, this means that circulation is limited to those who attend branch meetings and take the trouble to read the state secretary's newsletter, but it does not seem practicable to make the circulation wider.
73. Setting the agenda
The consultation identified a clear need for better planning of the work program of policy committees and better integration of that work with the political and strategic priorities of the Labor opposition. I recommend that committees be required to draw up a work program for themselves setting out an indicative timetable for the two-year life of the committee. Such a program should identify, for example, the key policy areas to which the committee proposes to give priority, the timing for holding of policy forums and the timing for preparation of any proposed policy amendments for submission to conference. In a pre-election period, the work program would include a timetable for the development of the platform document.
74. The work program will naturally reflect the particular concerns, and expertise, of the members of the policy committee. Committees should be encouraged to articulate the policy issues in which they have interest and expertise. But it is crucial that the work program be informed by the political agenda. For this purpose, I recommend that at an early meeting of the policy committee there be a briefing by the State shadow minister and, on the same or a separate occasion, by the Federal shadow minister about the policy agenda as perceived by him/her. It would be expected that this occasion would involve some debate between the shadow minister and the policy committee about what the priorities should be.
75. In addition, I recommend that policy committees be informed about any relevant campaign targets i.e. particular marginal seats or particular issues which are to be given priority. In addition, committees should be informed of the results of any relevant research conducted by the party. It is self-evident that policy development cannot take place in a vacuum and must be informed by the best information available to the party as to the perceptions in the electorate on particular issues. Briefings of this kind, which should be the responsibility of the

state secretary and the campaign committee, should occur not only at the beginning of the life of a committee but periodically as required. One means of doing this would be for the campaign committee to circulate regular bulletins, identifying policy and electoral priorities and drawing attention to particular timing requirements (e.g. in a pre-election context).

76. A further factor which will influence the work program will be the timing of reports to conference. At present, decisions about whether and when to amend existing policy are left entirely to the committees themselves. I recommend that, at least in the next two-year policy committee cycle, a rolling program of policy review be laid down by the agenda committee. That is, the committee - perhaps in consultation with the cross-portfolio committee - should nominate in relation to each State Conference three or four policy committees whose responsibility it will be to have reviewed their policy and prepared recommendations for submission to that Conference. This would have the benefit of giving committees quite specific targets to work towards and of enabling Conference to focus its attention more intensively on policies.
77. A related suggestion, made by two policy committees, was that each committee be required to bring at least one substantive policy recommendation to a State Conference in each year. The purpose of such a requirement would be similar, namely to impose a discipline on committees to maintain the momentum of policy development. This is, in my view, a not unreasonable expectation. Accepting that there may be problems in deciding what constitutes a "substantive policy recommendation", I nevertheless recommend that such a requirement be introduced. It would have the advantage of establishing a benchmark by reference to which performance of committees could be monitored by the agenda committee.
78. Enhancing the capacity of committees
Two distinct types of skill require consideration. First, there is the ability of a committee to carry out the functions expected of it. Although responsibility falls particularly on presidents and secretaries, it is important that all committee members have a clear appreciation of what the committee's functions and responsibilities are. To this end, I recommend that there be time set aside at the inaugural meeting of each committee, following the election of president and secretary, for a briefing by a head office organiser and a representative of the agenda committee. The briefing should cover various issues dealt with in this report, including:
- . the need for a work program;
 - . the nature of the relationships with head office, the SPLP, the Party at large and the wider community;
 - . the committee's reporting obligations;
 - . the attendance obligations of committee members;
 - . the difference between "policy" and "platform".
79. In addition to individual committee briefings, it has been suggested that there might be a forum to which members of all policy committees could be invited, which would be addressed by State and Federal leadership. Such a forum would again underline to committees their role not only in policy development but in the political task of winning government, and would further define the context in which committees are to carry out their work. I support this suggestion and recommend accordingly.
80. Then there are skills in the policy area itself. As already noted, one of the criticisms of policy committees is that they are not sufficiently expert in the policy area to be of assistance on specific policy issues. The recommendations I have made about automatic co-option and greater contact between policy committees and branches should have the effect of attracting to the committees party members with specialist expertise. A further suggestion is that there should be a party-wide survey of members, inviting them to indicate members of expertise. I support this suggestion and recommend accordingly.
81. The skills base can also be broadened by the building of contacts with outside experts, for example academics, policy commentators and union research officers. Some of these links already exist but I recommend that there be greater effort on the part of committees and

shadow ministers to build these links. The committees should be encouraged to invite such outsiders to attend committee meetings and/or participate in the work of sub-committees.

82. A separate issue concerns the lack of any research capacity. As one shadow minister pointed out, if a policy proposal emerges which requires a detailed feasibility analysis, the policy committee will ordinarily not have either the time or the expertise to carry out that task. Yet it is, clearly enough, vital that there be a capacity for such research and analysis if policy proposals put forward by the opposition are to be credible.
83. This is of such importance, in my view, that it justifies the establishment, and funding by the Party, of a specialist research position. I recommend accordingly. The occupant of such a position would be a resource for policy committees and for the shadow cabinet. He/she would be responsible for carrying out research/analysis in relation to particular policy proposals and would also play a significant role in establishing and maintaining contact with sources of outside advice and expertise. To overcome problems of competition for this officer's time, his/her work program should be monitored by the agenda committee.
84. Questions arise as to whether the position should be physically located within head office. It has been argued that, to avoid confusion with the administrative functions of head office, it should be physically separate. This is a matter which requires further consideration.
85. Although it is implicit in many of the recommendations already made, I recommend that the agenda committee take a more active role in monitoring the quality of policy committee performance. At present, the relevant functions of the agenda committee under the rules are:
- (a) "to ensure effective participation of the party through co-ordination of policy committees ... in the ongoing development and implementation of the party's political priorities" (8.2.2(h));
 - (b) "to establish and co-ordinate a system of annual policy reviews ... through the policy committees, who will be required to produce progress and implementation reports in consultation with the relevant ministers and bill committees" (8.2.2(i)).
86. The system of quality control will be enhanced by the earlier recommendations concerning the agenda committee's role in:
- . monitoring attendance at meetings;
 - . administering the cycle of committee reports to Conference;
 - . administering the system of annual reports by committees on their work.
87. The Federal relationship
Contact between policy committees and members of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party (FPLP) is an essential part of the policy development process. In my view, the committees should have the opportunity to engage in the kind of dialogue with Federal ministers (now shadow ministers) which they have traditionally had with State (shadow) ministers. The more direct the connection between Federal policy and State policy, the more significant this becomes. But in every policy area there should be the opportunity for the Federal spokesperson to report on policy priorities from the Canberra perspective, and for the committee to express its own views on policy, bringing to bear State perspectives. Often the local knowledge and experience of policy committee members will provide the Federal representative with valuable information regarding, for example, the implementation (or otherwise) of Federal policy in Victoria.
88. To some extent the Federal perspective can be provided by backbench FPLP representatives on the committees. As the committees are presently constituted, only four officially have FPLP members: economic and industrial development (2), foreign affairs, defence and trade (2), legal affairs (2) and immigration and ethnic affairs (1). Where it occurs, regular attendance by an FPLP member is regarded as being very important to the effective functioning of the committee. Generally speaking, however, attendance by FPLP members has been sporadic, reflecting their frequent Canberra commitments.

89. There is, of course, a separate system of national policy committees which are intended to perform similar functions at the national level to those performed by state policy committees at the State level. Because of the logistical difficulties of convening meetings of representatives drawn from all over Australia, the activities of national policy committees have traditionally concentrated on the development of platform documents for submission to National Conference. A detailed set of guidelines for the operation of national committees, adopted in April 1993, provided for national committees to "integrate where possible with the work of State branch policy committees", and for this purpose to hold -

"joint meetings in each State with the relevant State-based committees to whom it should present comprehensive documents for consideration and from whom it should accept submissions and dialogue."

My understanding is that this guideline has only rarely been adhered to and that the policy work of national committees has been largely self-contained.

90. The national office of the Party is endeavouring to upgrade the role of national policy committees. As a first step, a letter from the national secretary was distributed to constituent units in July, encouraging members with interest and expertise to put themselves forward for election. The committees will be encouraged to hold policy forums and to consult with State committees. It has not yet been resolved whether national committees will have a continuing role once the national platform is settled, for example in relation to the preparation of platform documents.
91. Clearly, there needs to be good communication between State and national policy committees when policy responsibilities overlap. I do not, however, believe that the contact which a State committee needs to have with the FPLP can or should be mediated through a national policy committee. A procedure which required, for example, that a query or suggestion about national policy be directed via the chairperson of the relevant national policy committee would, in my view, be slow and unwieldy.
92. I recommend that the principle of direct access by state committees to the FPLP be endorsed and that Federal shadow ministers be encouraged to attend a meeting of the relevant State policy committee at least once per calendar year. This is a bare minimum given the importance of such direct communication and the benefits which it can bring. Policy committees are accustomed to arranging special meetings for this purpose, to accommodate the travel arrangements of Federal representatives.
93. It is, I think, unnecessary to make any formal declaration of the right of policy committees to make direct contact with the offices of Federal shadow ministers. Committees already make such contacts - by telephone or by letter - where issues arise on which the committee seeks a response or wishes to express a view.
94. As regards FPLP members of policy committees, I recommend that there be a component of FPLP representation on every committee. There is almost no area of policy which is unaffected by Federal issues. I fail to see why the Legal Affairs policy committee should have two FPLP members, while committees such as Aboriginal Affairs and Health, Aged Care and Community Services, whose policy responsibilities have a substantial Federal component, should have none.
95. I further recommend that the attendance of FPLP members be monitored in the same way as I have recommended the attendance of SPLP members be monitored. In cases of continued non-attendance, the agenda committee should ask the member whether he/she wishes to continue. If not, an appropriate replacement can be found.
96. Reaching the wider community
For Labor in opposition, communication with the wider community is, clearly enough, of the utmost importance to policy development. Good communication of this kind -

- expands the range of policy ideas being fed into the process;
- helps inform the community about new policy ideas, as well as about the policy process;
- builds networks of support for particular policies.

These are all prerequisites to building the momentum for change which must be established before the next election.

97. There are at least two distinct levels of community consultation. The first involves those unions, community groups, non-government organisations and other interest groups with special interest and expertise in particular areas of policy. They can be described collectively as "the policy sector". The second level involves the community at large. Consultation at this level will usually be driven by electoral priorities, concentrating on marginal seats or areas where particular policy issues have special relevance.
98. Consultation at the first level can take a number of forms. It may consist of inviting representatives of the policy sector to attend a meeting of the committee or of a relevant sub-committee. It may consist of a written invitation for policy suggestions or for comment on a draft which the committee has prepared. At the most formal level, it may consist of an open policy forum, to which representatives of the sector are invited.
99. A public forum of this kind can also serve as a vehicle for consulting the community at large. These may also be opportunities for policy committees to participate in some research into public opinion on specific issues - for example by conducting a telephone survey - but this is very labour-intensive and should, ordinarily, be the responsibility of the party administration.
100. It is neither possible nor appropriate to prescribe the methods which policy committees should use to consult relevant interest groups, or the frequency with which such consultation should occur. I recommend, nevertheless, that be emphasised in the initial briefing to the committee referred to in paragraph 78 above. The proposed annual report of each committee (paragraph 68) should also include space for recording contacts of this kind. This will quickly indicate to the agenda committee where necessary consultation is not occurring.
101. Since policy forums assist consultation at both levels, I recommend that the rules be amended to require each committee to hold at least one such forum in the life of the committee. The topic for the forum, and its location, should be the subject of discussion with the agenda committee which, in turn, must liaise with the Campaign Committee to ensure that this is determined consistently with the political agenda. I further recommend that the assistance of head office be available to committees for the setting up and promotion of such forums.
102. Public forums of this kind are to be distinguished from the policy assemblies for which the rules already make provision. As contemplated by rule 8.5.9, a "policy assembly" is intended to promote policy consultation within the Party. The rules require that there be, at least once each year, an assembly of one day's duration -

"to which all members of the Party shall be invited by adequate notice through the Party journal, which notice shall include full details of the agenda for such meeting."

103. With some exceptions, the mechanism of policy assemblies has fallen into disuse. Everything I have said previously about the importance of Party participation makes it desirable that they be revived. I see no reason to recommend any change in the terms of the rule. What is necessary is for the rule to be enforced. I recommend that presidents and secretaries be reminded of their obligation to convene one such assembly per year, and that there be some follow-up by the agenda committee to ensure that the assemblies take place.
104. Such assemblies are likely to be more productive, and more inviting to the party membership, if they have some specific focus, for example, discussion of a particular policy area or debate on a discussion paper which the committee has prepared. While it will not always be possible

to identify months in advance what the topic(s) will be, the requirement for policy committees to develop a structured work program (paragraph 73 above) should assist in ensuring that the assemblies take place and that the topics for discussion are integrated with the policy development work of the committees.

105. When and where the committees meet

Most commonly, policy committees meet once a month, on a week night, in the early evening, at head office. It is said, with some justification, that while this model suits someone who works in the city, lives in North Fitzroy and has no children, it tends to exclude many who live or work away from the CBD and/or who have children to look after. As to the latter, it was pointed out that childcare facilities are not provided in association with policy committee meetings and that this is a deterrent to a number of people who would otherwise wish to be members of committees.

106. In relation to the frequency of meetings, an alternative model proposed was that formal meetings of committees might take place quarterly, with more frequent meetings of sub-committees in the meantime. This, it was suggested, would facilitate short-term, intensive participation at the sub-Committee level by co-optees and outside experts who did not wish to be involved in the work of the full committee or for the full two-year term.

107. In my view, this objective can be achieved without any change to the monthly schedule. It seems to me that, unless a committee is meeting with that kind of frequency, there will be a significant loss of continuity in the committee's work and in its relationship with the shadow minister.

108. Presumably the week night meeting at head office has evolved as the model because it suits most committee members most of the time. Generally speaking, a central location will be more accessible than any other; daytime meetings are incompatible with most jobs; and a weeknight is generally easier than a weekend, especially for those with children. Nevertheless, these perceived obstacles to access can be mitigated to some extent if committees build in some variation to their program of meetings.

109. Accordingly, I recommend that policy committees be required to hold at least two meetings in the life of the committee away from the inner metropolitan area. Those other meetings might, for example, include one country meeting and one outer metropolitan meeting. To justify the effort involved, it would clearly be desirable for such meetings to be linked with a local branch or FEA meeting, at which some report could be given of the policy committee's activities and some opportunity provided for comments and suggestions from party members. The timing and location of these "regional" meetings should be co-ordinated by head office in conjunction with the Campaign Committee. In addition, I recommend that policy committees be encouraged to hold at least one meeting per year on a Sunday morning or afternoon. This not only opens up opportunities for attendance but provides a setting for more sustained discussion than is usually possible in 90 minutes on a week night.

110. No solutions to the problem of a lack of childcare facilities were put forward. While it is difficult to assess how significant a factor this is in deterring those who would otherwise wish to be members of committees, it clearly warrants further investigation. To enable the agenda committee to deal with this issue, I recommend that the section of the membership application and renewal forms seeking expressions of interest in policy committees (see paragraph 24 above) should also seek an indication of whether childcare facilities would be used if available.

111. Specific structural issues

I have not regarded it as part of my brief to review the structure of the committees, that is, the number and title of the various committees and the policy areas for which each is responsible. I nevertheless draw to the attention of the agenda committee concerns expressed by several committees about the existing structure. I recommend that the relevant committees, following their election at the October 1996 Conference, be asked to review

these structural matters and to report to the agenda committee, which can then decide what changes (if any) need to be recommended to Conference in March 1997.

112. Legal affairs. This committee was established as a "super" committee, with a membership of 30, following the merger of the former Civil Rights and Law Reform Committee with the former Consumer Affairs Committee. The view expressed to me by the committee was that the amalgamation has not worked and that there should be a re-subdivision of the policy responsibilities. It is pointed out that there is already a *de facto* separation, with the consumer affairs sub-committee operating to all intents and purposes as if it were a separate committee.
113. Housing and local government. In 1994, the Municipal Executive, the Housing policy committee and the Urban and Regional Affairs committee were abolished and replaced by the Housing and Local Government policy committee. As elected in late 1994, the committee consisted principally of members with expertise/interest in local government. It lacked members with skills in the other two policy areas of housing and planning. As both the committee and one of the relevant shadow ministers commented, each of the three policy areas requires particular skills. It seems unrealistic to expect that a single committee can perform its functions adequately across the three areas.
114. Economic and industrial development. This is also a "super committee", with 30 members. The view expressed to me by the committee is that a membership of 30 is too large. More particularly, it is said that while economic and manufacturing industry policy fit satisfactorily together, energy, science and technology requires specialist expertise and interest and should once again be separate.
115. Conservation and environment. This committee proposed that its own membership be increased to 30 elected members. The basis of this submission was perceived frustration on the part of branch members at the lack of opportunities to be involved in policy development. The committee argued that membership of 30 was a practicable size. This view, if adopted, would logically apply to all committees.
116. I do not support the proposal to expand the number of elected members to 30. The recommendations I have made for automatic co-option should meet much of the concern about exclusion, without exacerbating the problems associated with election.
117. Regional and rural affairs. This committee has identified the need for greater integration of its own work with that of other committees. The committee argues, with justification in my view, that a rural and regional perspective should be brought to bear upon policy deliberations in critical policy areas such as health, transport and education. To this end, the committee proposes that a formal arrangement be established for the secondment of its own members to other key policy committees. Given that many of its members are country-based, it is not envisaged that a secondees would attend every meeting of the relevant policy committee. It would be sufficient for them to do so 4-6 times per year. This would enhance two-way communication.

STATE CONFERENCE

118. The role of State Conference in policy development involves something of a paradox. On the one hand, Conference alone is invested with the power to make, or amend, policy. Its role therefore is unique and fundamental. On the other hand, if the policy development process is working effectively, Conference should have almost no substantive role in the making of policy. That is, by the time a draft policy gets to conference, it should be the product of extensive consultations within and outside the Party and of negotiations to resolve conflicting points of view. Of course, Conference must retain the power to intervene and either overrule particular policy recommendations or express contrary opinions prior to remitting a policy for further work by the committee. But it is to be hoped that the need for such intervention will be rare.

119. At the same time, it is important that Conference once again be - and be seen to be - a forum for policy debate. It was a recurrent theme in the consultation that the standard of policy debate has declined in recent years, which in turn has led to growing disillusionment with Conference itself. Part of being in the "ideas market", it is now argued, entails making the best use of these rare occasions when representatives of the Party and unions from all over Victoria are present. Not only does this enhance the reality, and the perception, of participation in policy-making but it demonstrates to the wider community (through the media) that the Party is once again actively engaged in a search for the right policies for Victoria.
120. Restoring some policy vigour to Conference can be achieved in a number of ways, for example by having :
- one or two members of a policy committee speak in some detail to policy recommendations before the Conference votes, rather than (as often happens) the vote to ratify being a mere formality. (Rule 8.5.4 gives committee members speaking rights at Conference for this purpose);
 - set-piece debates on particular issues of current policy significance eg. drug law reform, gun control, urban planning;
 - discussions led by invited speakers on particular topics;
 - "policy only" days, involving a combination of the above.
121. I recommend that the agenda committee give priority in conference planning to the identification of appropriate policy issues around which to structure debate. Such debate should occupy at least two hours at each Conference. The identification of appropriate issues should not be difficult. Consultation with policy committees is an obvious starting-point.
122. Any debate of this kind is likely to expose conflicting opinions. Far from this being a reason for caution, it should be welcomed as the sign of a healthy process. It was suggested that if some policy was of particular sensitivity, it could be debated in a closed session of Conference. Experience indicates, however, that to do so would not prevent the debate from being reported and would simply invest the subject-matter (and the fact of dissent) with an importance which it did not deserve.
123. Further, I recommend that policy forums be held within the framework of Conference. I have in mind that this should occur away from the floor of conference. For this purpose, two or three policy areas should be designated in advance and conference delegates (and Party members generally) be invited to attend whichever forum is of particular interest to them. Each forum would be attended by the relevant state and federal shadow ministers and representatives of the relevant policy committee.
124. The forum would have no decision-making function but, where appropriate, matters discussed at the forum could be reported back to the Conference. The subject-matter for discussion at the forum would vary according to the occasion but it should at least provide an opportunity for delegates and other Party members to hear from the shadow ministers and the committee what they are doing, to make their own policy suggestions and, if appropriate, to discuss a draft paper prepared by the committee. In an ideal world, a policy committee which was planning to submit a full draft policy to October conference would have a draft ready for March conference, for discussion at such a policy forum. Comments received at the forum could then be incorporated into the final draft submitted to October.
125. This proposal received widespread support during the consultation. While there was some scepticism about whether Conference delegates would be likely to attend, the prevailing view was that it deserved at least a trial. A comparable procedure at Country Conference has reportedly been very successful. Again, the responsibility will fall to the agenda committee to nominate the policy areas well enough in advance to ensure that shadow ministers and policy committees can plan accordingly.

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1 October 1996