

Inquiry into the Introduction of Electronic Voting in the Northern Ireland Assembly Chamber

**Northern Ireland Assembly
Committee on Procedures**

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Executive Summary

1 Viability

EV is possible but is dependant on the type of electronic voting system to be used. The three main questions need to be answered.

1. What are the time, financial and personnel resources that are available?
2. What type of electronic voting system do you want?
3. What changes can be made to the chamber?

2 Electronic Voting Systems

The three main categories of electronic voting systems are:

EV Systems	Advantages	Disadvantages
1 Desk based systems most common systems in use in parliaments.	They are built into the seating arrangements	Not all members have access to a dedicated desk
	Can also register that the member is in the chamber	Require adequate space for installation and operation
	Can offer a number of other facilities such as messaging, microphone and speakers	
2 Hand held systems portable devices, usually wireless and transmit the members vote via either infrared or radio waves	Less intrusive and quick to install	Ruled out by parliaments because they are less secure
	For the Northern Ireland Assembly it would overcome the obstacle of members having no desks	Difficult to keep track of who voted
		Would require the introduction of tight guidelines and procedures
3 Voting Stations A single or a small number of units where members register their vote. The voting station can be outside the chamber	Unobtrusive to install	Not as quick a procedure as voting from ones seat and still requires members to physically file past the stations
	Do not require members to have individual desks	

3 Length of time for a vote

The main argument for the introduction of electronic voting into parliamentary chambers is to speed up an otherwise slow process.

A study of the Australian senate pointed out that time is only saved in the actual voting with time still being taking to call members etc.

Where time is really saved is through the compound effect of having a number of votes together such as decision time in the Scottish Parliament.

4 Implications for the timing of votes

It has no implications except that the system saves most time by grouping votes together.

5 Where can Electronic Voting take place?

Given the range of electronic voting systems available, the venue for where a vote can take place has few boundaries although as the Procedures Committee of the Australian House of Representatives pointed out:

“None of the parliaments which use electronic voting have considered any form of remote electronic voting. Those who were asked dismissed the idea as lacking accountability and transparency.”

6 Safeguards

These issues are not solely an issue for electronic methods of voting;

Most other systems use such security such as logging on using a personal swipe card or use technology which recognises finger prints, as in Oregon, or hand prints as in Colombia.

The main safeguard against a technical problem with the system is to retain the procedures for carrying out a manual count.

7 Advantages

- Results are quickly available saving time,
- Immediate summaries of how Members voted are available to all Members and the public, unless there is a secret ballot;
- Technology allows for a printout to be available for Hansard and an instant summary of the result of divisions/ballots to be displayed for the Speaker

8 Disadvantages

- Expense and disruption is cited as the main reason.
- Would change some of the ‘theatre’ of the Chamber
- Divisions provide Members with the opportunity for informal interaction with their colleagues, and especially with Ministers.

9 Should electronic voting replace manual votes?

In most cases electronic voting does not take the place of all votes but rather takes the place of the majority of divisions. For instance in Dail Eireann, a decision is read out and if there is obvious support then it is passed and only if it is unclear, or if a member challenges the Speaker’s ruling, does it go to an electronic vote.

Terms Of Reference

Inquiry into the Introduction of Electronic Voting (EV) in the Northern Ireland Assembly Chamber

The Terms of Reference of the inquiry are to:

- consider the viability of introducing electronic voting into the Chamber including examining that it is physically and technologically possible to introduce electronic voting into the Assembly Chamber.
- conduct comparative research in other legislatures regarding the practice of electronic voting including the time it takes to conduct a vote.
- assess the advantages and disadvantages of electronic voting and manual voting and to look at what type of safeguard may need to be introduced.
- consider the timing of votes in the chamber and where voting can take place.
- consider whether electronic voting should replace all forms of manual votes or should only be used when a division is required.
- report to the Assembly making recommendations on the findings of the Committee on Procedures into electronic voting.

As in most other areas of professional and personal life, traditional methods of conducting business are giving way to more “high-tech” electronic methods. The operation of parliamentary business is no different. Electronic voting in the debating chambers of parliaments is now common place and now, no new parliament building would be designed without a system allowing elected members to vote electronically being included.

The content of this report presents information on the options open to the Northern Ireland Assembly on introducing electronic voting into the chamber and some of the issues which may arise given the experience of other parliaments. In presenting the information and in responding to the inquiry’s terms of reference this paper addresses a number of questions raised in the terms of reference. The questions are:

- Is Electronic Voting (EV) Viable?
- What types of Electronic Voting Systems are available?
- How long does it take to conduct a vote?
- What implications does EV have for the timing of votes?
- Where can EV take place?
- What type of safeguards would be needed to introduce EV?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of electronic voting and manual voting?
- Should electronic voting replace all forms of manual votes?

1.0 Is Electronic Voting (EV) Viable?

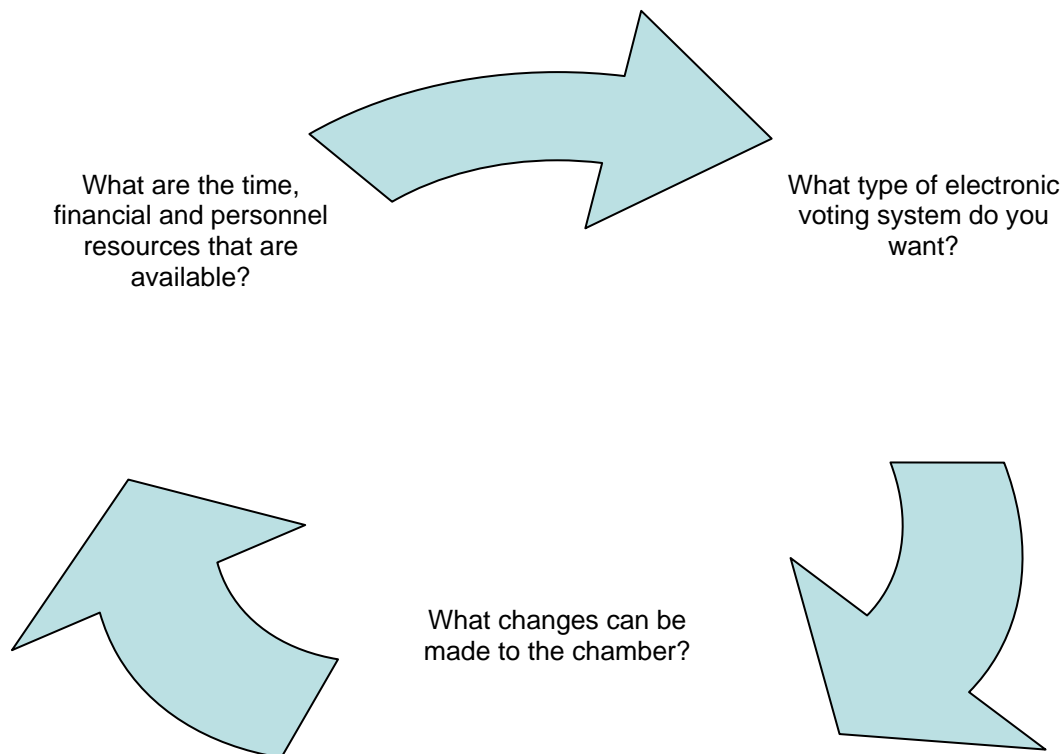
The viability of introducing Electronic Voting (EV) into the debating chamber of the Northern Ireland Assembly is based on a number of constituent questions; is it physically possible and technologically possible and if the answer to both these questions yes, then, will it give enough added value to the chamber to be worth the expense and upheaval.

Is it Physically and Technologically Possible

The main obstacles, which could make the introduction of electronic voting impossible, would be;

- that the technology available is insufficient for introduction to the chamber,
- that structural work needed would be prohibited in a listed building, and
- that the chamber is too small to allow electronic voting for 108 MLA's.

However the short answer to the question is yes that introducing EV into the debating chamber is possible but that its introduction is dependant on the type of electronic voting system to be used. If the intent is to introduce EV then it can be done but in deciding how it can be done there are a number of decisions to be made and each of these has a knock-on effect on each other. The three main questions are shown in the diagram below.



An answer to any of these three questions directly impacts on the possible answers to the other two. For example if there are limitations set on the extent of changes to be made to the chamber then this limits the options of

possible systems which can be introduced and so effects the costs and time scales for implementation.

2.0 What types of Electronic Voting Systems are available?

There are a large range of electronic voting (EV) systems available, some of which are less intrusive than others. Within this wide range of systems there are three main categories/types of system which may help narrow down the possibilities.

The three main categories of electronic voting systems are

- “Desk based” systems,
- “Hand held” systems, and
- Voting Stations.

Desk based systems

Desk based systems are the most common systems in use in parliaments. They tend to be fully integrated into the design and structure of the chamber and can often be, as is the case in new parliament buildings such as in Scotland and Wales, a feature of the initial plan for the parliament and are integrated into members’ desks. These systems also tend to have a number of functions such as a messaging service, a sound recording system and even email capability and computer screen. For example in Wales computers were included into the desk for each member where as in Scotland computers are not allowed. In the Welsh Assembly the voting system is not part of the computer but is integrated so as the computer screen will announce a vote and display the results afterward.

The Scottish system is integrated into the desk and includes a request to speak button, a microphone and speakers, and a screen indicating messages such as the time remaining to vote (see appendix A).

Other systems which are integrated into existing chambers may be less multi-tasking and be designed to simply record and count the vote. This type of system can be smaller and less obvious in the chamber. For instance the system introduced to Dail Eireann is a small box on each desk with two buttons to register yes and no votes.

Advantages and disadvantages

The advantage of desk based systems is that they are built into the seating arrangements. This means that they are visible and available when a member takes his seat. They can also register that the member is in the chamber. In addition, desk based electronic voting systems can offer a number of other facilities such as messaging, microphone and speakers.

A disadvantage of these type of systems as far as the Northern Ireland Assembly is concerned is the fact that they are “desk based”. In the Assembly, not all members have access to a dedicated desk. This leads on to another disadvantage which is that these types of systems require adequate space for installation and operation. Desk based systems tend to

be systems which are incorporated into the electrical and electronic systems of the building and for an existing chamber – especially one which is ill-equipped for it – they can take a lot of time to install. Desk based systems are easier to install into new chambers where they are integrated as part of the chamber's construction. To introduce this type of system into an existing chamber, especially one of historic or architectural importance, can be disruptive and expensive.

However it can be achieved, for example Dail Eireann had a desk based system installed into its chamber. The system is very basic with only two buttons and sits on each member's desk.

Hand held systems

Hand held systems for electronic voting are portable devices usually a lot simpler in design than desk based systems with less functions available although they can include additional functions other than the ability to vote. These systems are usually wireless and transmit the members vote via either infrared or radio waves to a central unit which counts the votes and usually displays them on a central screen within the chamber. Hand held systems can also be sophisticated enough to recognise the individual user¹.

These types of systems are mostly used in conferences, classrooms and lectures.

The advantage of hand held systems are that they are less intrusive to install given their wireless nature. This type of system is also quick to install and relatively cheap if there is a need to carry out structural work to accommodate an integrated system. For the Northern Ireland Assembly it would overcome the obstacle of members having no desks, the lack of space and that it would not require any structural work.

The issue of security is a significant disadvantage. Wireless systems have been ruled out by parliaments because they are less secure. Given that hand held systems use radio waves or infrared, it is possible for an external device to "block" a vote from taking place although it could not be corrupted². Also the hand held units may find their way out of the chamber or get lost or swapped around between members making it difficult to keep track of who voted. These problems would require the introduction of tight guidelines and procedures to keep control of the units. These issues could be surmounted by attaching the units to seating positions. In addition there would need to be systems in place to ensure that the units were always charged and working.

Voting Stations

Some parliaments have introduced electronic voting by setting up a single or a small number of electronic units within the voting chamber or in another chamber where, when a division is called, members go to register their vote.

¹ <http://www.brahler-ics.co.uk/digivote.html>

² From discussions with staff at Bhraler, an electronic voting system manufacturer

One such chamber using this system is the House of Representatives of the United States of America. A description of this system is given as:

“Each Member is provided with a personalized Vote-ID Card which can be used to vote electronically. A number of vote stations are positioned around the Chamber. Each vote station has a slot into which the voting card is inserted and buttons marked "yea," "nay," "present." The stations have an "open" indicator, which is lit when a vote is in progress and the system is ready to accept votes. Members vote by inserting the voting card into the card slot and pressing the appropriate button to indicate the Member's choice.”³

In the State of Oregon, the voting station is outside the doors of the chamber. This system consists of two electronic scanners. One scanner is labelled “Yea” and the other “Nay”. Each scanner is able to register a members vote by identifying them from their fingerprint.

The advantages of this type of voting station system are that it is unobtrusive to install and does not require major changes to the chamber or any change at all if the station or stations are to be installed elsewhere. In addition they do not require members to have individual desks and do not require extra space. These types of systems are both quick and relatively inexpensive to install.

The major disadvantage is that it is not as quick a procedure as voting from ones seat and still requires members to physically file past the stations. For instance in a consultation report by the House of Commons Modernisation Committee, a voting station system based on touch screen technology was unlikely to save time unless there was multiple votes⁴.

Chamber	Voting System
Scottish Parliament	Electronic – Desk based
Welsh Assembly	Electronic – Desk based
Dail Eireann	Electronic – Desk based
House of Commons	Manual
House of Representatives, USA	Electronic – Voting stations
House of Representatives, Australia	Manual
Isle of Man	Electronic – Desk based

3.0 How long does it take to conduct a vote?

The main argument for the introduction of electronic voting into parliamentary chambers is to speed up an otherwise slow process. In describing the effect on to the Dail of introducing electronic voting to the chamber the Dail secretariat stated that:

³ http://clerk.house.gov/art_history/art_artifacts/virtual_tours/house_chamber/voting.html

⁴ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199798/cmselect/cmmodern/699v/md0503.htm>

“In terms of the savings of time to the House in the counting of votes, then the electronic voting system has improved the overall running of the business of the Chamber. It should be noted that the introduction of electronic voting addresses only the method by which the Members vote and how they are counted. The various other procedures in relation to voting remain unchanged. Overall notice remains - 10 minutes. The division bells are still rung for 6 minutes and the doors are locked after a further period of 4 minutes. Once the Question is put by the Ceann Comhairle (Speaker), Members then have one minute to cast their vote. However, the real saving in time occurs when one division immediately follows another. Standing Orders provide for a shorter period of bell ringing and a shorter period thereafter before the doors are locked, i.e., 3 minutes overall: this is a saving of 7 minutes. At times, during the Order of Business, there could be four to five votes demanded on the proposals being put forward by the Taoiseach (Prime Minister).”⁵

In a 2002 paper by Russell G. Smith he cites a 1994 comparative study on the voting times in different legislatures.

“In the study of the electronic voting systems used by a number of European parliaments, for example, it was found that voting took on average 30 seconds, whereas in the Commonwealth House of Representatives, divisions occupied between eight and nine minutes each. The use of an electronic system would, therefore, have saved approximately nine hours a year for each member (House of Representatives 1994, p. 20).”⁶

In a study of the Australian senate an assessment was made of the time taken for divisions and its four component parts of the process.

“(1) ringing the bells:

4 minutes for all divisions

(no divisions taken in immediate succession, for which the bells are rung for 1 minute, were included, because they account for only a small minority of divisions)

(2) putting the question and appointing tellers:

longest time — 35 seconds

shortest time — 14 seconds

average time — 22.25 seconds

(3) counting the votes:

longest time — 3 minutes 10 seconds

shortest time — 1 minute 25 seconds

average time — 2 minutes 29 seconds

⁵ Information provided by Dail Eireann staff

⁶ Electronic Voting: Benefits and Risks, Russell G. Smith, April 2002, Australian Institute of Criminology

(4) settling down before proceeding to the next business:

longest time — 42 seconds

shortest time — 5 seconds

average time — 27.8 seconds.

If electronic voting in the Chamber was adopted, the only component where time would be saved would be in counting the votes. Therefore, on this sample the Senate would save approximately 2.5 minutes out of the about 7.5 minutes now spent on each division. As the Senate takes approximately 140 divisions each year, this would mean a saving of just less than 6 hours each year.”⁷

A recent “snapshot” assessment of the time taken to conduct a vote in the Northern Ireland Assembly gave illustrative times of votes taking between 9 and 13 minutes.

4.0 What implications does EV have for the timing of votes?

The point stated in the last section regarding how much time could be saved by the introduction of electronic voting is a valid issue. The efficient nature of the Scottish system for taking decisions can be seen to be due to the compound effect of an electronic voting system and a period of time set aside in each sitting for decisions to be taken. The procedure is as follows:

“This is the time when MSPs decide on the motions that have been discussed that day. It normally takes place at 17.00, and MSPs who are not in the Chamber are alerted by the division bell, which is sounded throughout the Parliament building except for the Chamber. At Decision Time, the Presiding Officer goes through the list of motions and amendments that have been considered that day and, for each one, asks MSPs if they all agree with what is being proposed. If any MSP answers ‘No’, the Presiding Officer announces that there will be a division (a vote). MSPs can vote ‘Yes’, ‘No’ or ‘Abstain’ by pressing the appropriate voting button on the electronic consoles on their desks. After the 30-second voting period has ended, the computer system calculates the result, which is noted by the clerks and announced by the Presiding Officer.

The system is then reset for the next vote. Details of how MSPs voted are published in the Official Report of the meeting.”⁸

This approach allows members to come and go throughout the day taking it upon themselves to participate in the debates in the chamber on the upcoming decisions or to involve themselves with other work outside of the chamber, such as in committees or in their constituencies and then to go to the chamber and join in the voting on the issues that were debated during that

⁷ Ringing the bells – Some observations on electronic voting systems Senator the Hon. Paul Calvert, President of the Senate, 35th Presiding Officers’ and Clerks’ Conference, Parliament House, Melbourne

⁸ The Scottish Parliament Debating Chamber, Scottish Parliament Fact Sheet, Sept 2006

days sitting. Indeed this point is made previously in reference to Dail Eireann; the real time saving benefit is when there are multiple votes, one after the other.

The approach in the Scottish Parliament means that there is only one call for members to go to the chamber and votes can take place in quick succession. Some of the salient standing orders governing the procedures in the Scottish Parliament are appended (Appendix B).

5.0 Where can Electronic Voting take place?

Given the range of electronic voting systems available, the venue for where a vote can take place has few boundaries. The Scottish Parliament has contingency plans developed to allow it to sit in a number of venues around Scotland and still be able to vote using a portable electronic voting system⁹. As mentioned earlier there are systems, such as that in the legislature in the State of Oregon, where the voting station is directly outside of the chamber. Other options are that another room be made available for members to go to to vote. And yet other options would allow members to vote remotely via the internet. For instance the Modernisation Committee of the House of Commons stated that *“some electronic systems would in theory allow Members to vote without having to leave their rooms, or even to vote from their homes or constituency offices”*¹⁰

Although as a report by the Procedures Committee of the Australian House of Representatives pointed out:

*“None of the parliaments which use electronic voting have considered any form of remote electronic voting. Those who were asked dismissed the idea as lacking accountability and transparency.”*¹¹

6.0 What type of safeguards would be needed to introduce EV?

All voting systems need to be safeguarded against inaccuracy and fraud. These issues are not solely an issue for electronic methods of voting; mistakes can be made in physical counts as can fraudulent concerns such as impersonation or double voting. However for any electronic system introduced it should be able to be secure against both. For instance, one of the issues raised by Dail Eireann regarding their electronic voting system was the feasibility that issues of security could arise.

“In relation to a Member voting from another Members’ seat, the system cannot prevent against the possibility of deliberate or accidental voting on behalf of a Member who is not present. The main security

⁹ http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/corporate/spcb/minutes/papers-06/0328_Paper_26.pdf

¹⁰ Consultation Paper on Voting Methods, Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons, Fifth Report, April 1998

¹¹ Learning from other parliaments, Study Program 2006, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, August 2006

attaching to the designated seating method of voting is that it is visibly obvious whether or not a particular seat is occupied if the corresponding light on the display board is illuminated while all Members are present in the Chamber and voting at the same time. The Party Tellers role is to ensure that there is no misuse but there are no procedures or penalties in place at present for deliberate misuse of the system due to its obvious transparency and as the problem has not occurred to date.”¹²

This potential problem arises with the Dail system because no security features have been included, the member simply goes to his or her seat and presses either a button labelled “ta” (yes) or “nil” (no). The Dail system does not use any identification system to ensure that the voter is genuine. Most other systems do however use such security. The Welsh and Scottish systems both require the member to log on using a personal swipe card – in the Welsh system this means that the member can log on anywhere in the chamber and be recognised correctly. However security systems are varied, some systems use technology which recognises finger prints, as in Oregon, or hand prints (Camara de Representantes in Bogota, Colombia).

The main safeguard against a technical problem with the system is to retain the procedures for carrying out a manual count. For instance in The Standing Orders of the Scottish Parliament Rule 11.7 states:

“Rule 11.7 Manner of voting

1. Normally members shall vote at a meeting of the Parliament or of a Committee of the Whole Parliament using the electronic voting system.

2. If it appears to the Presiding Officer that the electronic voting system cannot be used for any reason, a roll call vote, or a vote in accordance with such other manner of voting as the Presiding Officer may decide, shall be held.

3. If it appears to the Presiding Officer that the electronic voting system has produced an unreliable result, he shall ask members to cast their votes again in accordance with any manner of voting the Presiding Officer considers appropriate.

4. In a roll call vote, the roll shall be called in alphabetical order. Voting shall be by word of mouth and shall be expressed by "Yes", "No" or "Abstain".”

The Standing Orders for the Welsh Assembly also allow for a show of hands rather than the sole reliance on the electronic system.

¹² Information compiled by The House of Oireachtas Secretariat for a survey by another Parliament.

7.0 What are the advantages and disadvantages of electronic voting and manual voting?

The major debating point regarding the introduction of electronic voting has tended to centre on the time saving that its introduction would bring versus the cost and upheaval of its introduction. Given that this is not an issue when a new chamber is being built, newly built chambers tend to have electronic voting systems integrated into the design. This would support the view that once the disruption and cost issues are removed from the equation that the advantages of electronic voting are convincing.

The main advantages and disadvantages of electronic voting are outlined below.

Advantages

In an article by Kate Lundy for the Australian Parliament she argues that the Australian “parliament might well benefit from serious examination of the United States model of electronic voting.¹³” In considering whether EV should be introduced in the Isle of Man parliamentary chamber, the House of Keys Standing Orders Committee, summarised the advantages of the system.

(a) results of divisions or ballots are quickly available saving time, which can be especially important when there are a large number of divisions taking place. The Scottish Parliament has indicated that divisions take as little as 30 seconds;

(b) immediate summaries of how Members voted are available to all Members and the public, unless there is a secret ballot;

(c) the technology allows for votes to be taken in secret and only the totals to be displayed where that may be required, as for example it would in the Keys when a ballot is being held to elect Members to an office, to a committee or to the Legislative Council;

(d) it avoids the distorting effect on Members voting of knowing how other Members have voted; and

(e) the technology allows for a printout to be available for Hansard and an instant summary of the result of divisions/ballots to be displayed for Mr Speaker.¹⁴

Disadvantages

Given the experience of many chambers it is difficult to dispute the benefits electronic voting offers in the way of efficiency and time-saving.

However there are disadvantages and in Australia, where the argument for and against the introduction of EV has been ongoing for a number of years, they have still decided not to convert. This decision has not been unanimous

¹³ Cyberdemocracy and the future of the Australian Senate, LUNDY, Sen Kate, Dec. 1999

¹⁴Report of the House of Keys Standing Orders Committee on Electronic Voting in the Chamber, Tynwald, Isle of Man, Jan 2003

and Members' opinions are divided on the matter. For existing chambers, as discussed earlier, expense and disruption is cited as the main reason.

"The traditional objection to implementing electronic voting is based on systems and maintenance costs. Indeed in its 1996 report—in which an earlier report on technology, costs and options by Speaker Martin was acknowledged—the committee deferred consideration of electronic voting because of costs and the time needed to select and commission a system.

*Not surprisingly, cost still looms large in budgeting for the operations of the Parliament. It is true that the real costs of IT systems continue to decrease but the committee recognises that any proposal for new infrastructure must be soundly based."*¹⁵

However it is not the only reason and this is detailed in a report by the Speaker of the House in the Australian House of Representatives.

"The possible cost of electronic voting is perhaps not the main factor in the opposition of some Members.

As the Chief Government Whip observed in the debate of the trial division procedures, electronic voting would change some of the 'theatre' of the Chamber—including the drama provided by the traditional division procedures when Members vote against their party.

*For other Members, and for backbenchers in particular, the time taken by divisions is not necessarily wasted time. Divisions provide Members with the opportunity for informal interaction with their colleagues, and especially with Ministers. In a recent newspaper article one government backbencher was quoted as saying in relation to the subject of lobbying Ministers on behalf of constituents, "The best way to get them is to ambush them during divisions and approach them directly".*¹⁶

*In the past the traditional procedures have also been regarded as providing a safeguard in respect of the right of the Opposition to be heard. In 1978 former Speaker Snedden observed:*¹⁷

*'If the ministerial managers will not give time to debate an issue the Opposition can register its disapproval and non co-operation by calling for divisions. The "waste of time" is the Opposition's only weapon and usually restores the process of consultation and accommodation . . .'*¹⁸

¹⁵Review of the conduct of divisions, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, August 2003

¹⁶ De-Anne Kelly MP, Canberra Times 10.5.97

¹⁷ The means by which divisions are conducted in the House - Paper presented by The Hon. Robert Halverson OBE MP, Speaker of the House of Representatives

¹⁸ Speech quoted in House of Representatives Practice 2nd edn, p. 315

In addition, another paper written as part of the debate around introducing EV to the Australian House of Representatives, lists a number of the disadvantages.

“There are a number of disadvantages of electronic voting, which can immediately be predicted:

(a) it would remove part of a pause in the proceedings which is often convenient;

(b) activities which now take place during the count may be transferred to other components of the time spent on divisions, so that little time would in fact be saved;

(c) the current practice of senators sitting to the right or left of the Chair has some advantages which would be lost; and

(d) more divisions may be called, cancelling out the time saved.”¹⁹

Indeed there has even been some suspicion about how beneficial the time saving aspect of electronic voting actually is.

“While the whole purpose of electronic voting is to save time and ensure accuracy, the first quality can also be a disadvantage. Staff of the Scottish Parliament consider it possible that more amendments are pressed because of the ease of formal votes.”²⁰

Other Issues

In addition to these advantages and disadvantages there may also be a number of less tangible and more political issues which the Committee may wish to consider. These issues are not as easily categorised as advantages or disadvantages as they are more a matter of opinion. One such issue would be whether or not electronic voting would limit party control over members voting.

8.0 Should electronic voting replace all forms of manual votes?

In most cases electronic voting does not take the place of all votes but rather takes the place of the majority of divisions. For instance in Dail Eireann, a decision is read out and if there is obvious support then it is passed and only if it is unclear, or if a member challenges the Speaker’s ruling, does it go to an electronic vote.

“If the matter before the House is one which there appears to be general agreement, the Chair may put the question in an informal manner – “Is the motion [or amendment] agreed?” and, if there is no dissent evident, will conform the decision of the House by stating “Motion [amendment] agreed”. Similarly, in the case of opposition

¹⁹ Ringing the bells – Some observations on electronic voting systems Senator the Hon. Paul Calvert, President of the Senate, 35th Presiding Officers’ and Clerks’ Conference, Parliament House, Melbourne

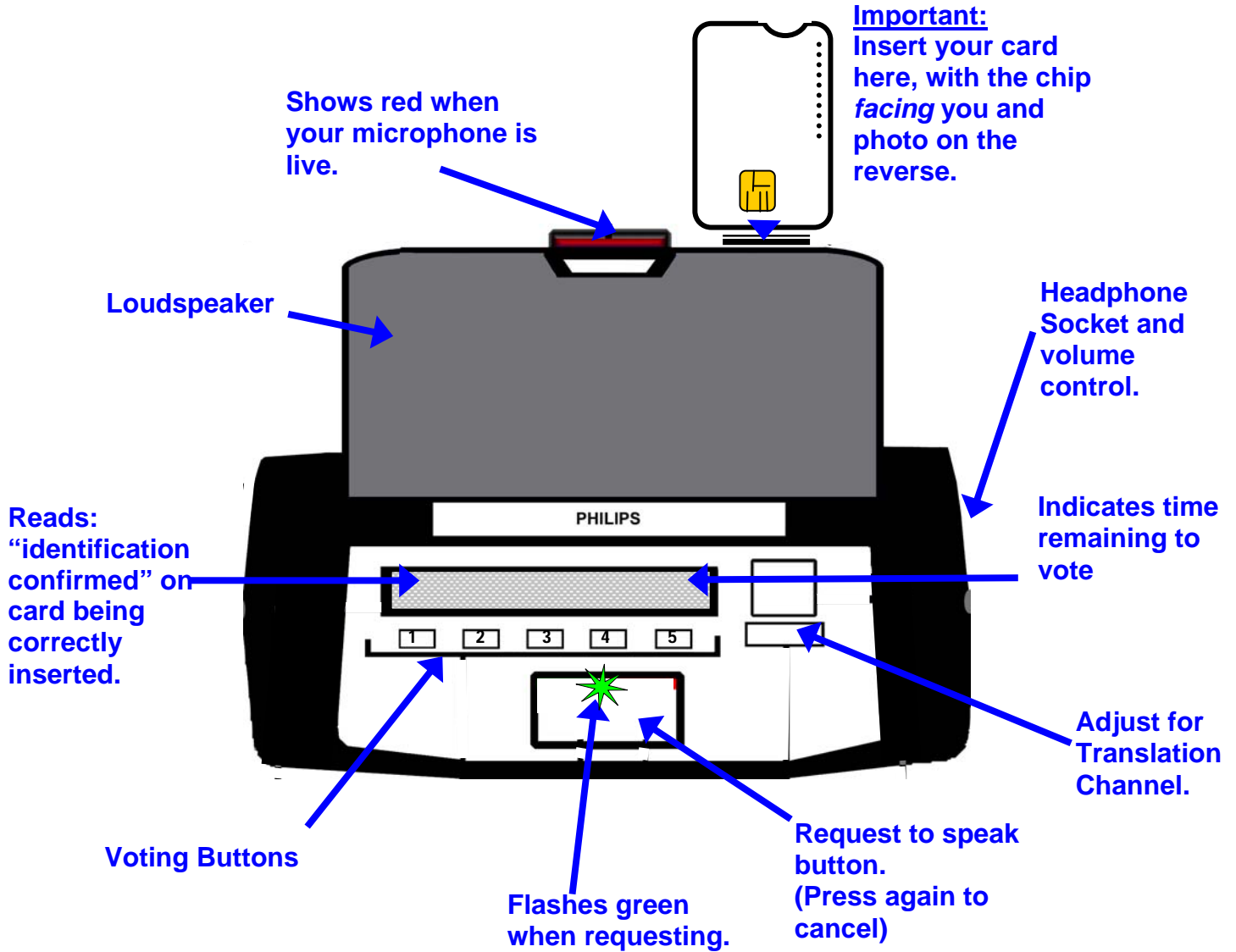
²⁰ Learning from other parliaments, Study Program 2006, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, August 2006

amendments to Government Bills, the Chair may ask the Member sponsoring the amendment if he or she wishes to press it and, if the Member does not wish to do so, there is no need to put the question – the Chair's will declare that the amendment is withdrawn.

If the matter is likely to give rise to a vote, or if the Members in the chamber request that the question "be formally put" (ie, where they wish to press the motion or amendment), the Chair will rise and state "The question is that...". The Chair will then ask the members to decide by saying "Ta" or "Nil". The Chair judges the result by the verbal responses and states that the question is carried or lost. At this point the Members may dispute the Chair's statement by calling "Votail". The house will then prepare to divide.²¹

In addition manual votes are retained in a number of chambers, such as in Wales and Scotland to be used at the discretion of the Speaker.

²¹ Information provided to new members of Dail Eireann, provided by Dail Secretariat.



Important note on voting:

When votes are called, the LCD screen will indicate clearly the choices on offer with flashing lights.

(IGNORE)	NO	ABSTAIN	YES	(IGNORE)
1	2	3	4	5

Your vote is confirmed by a constant yellow light beside the button pressed. A vote may be changed during the voting period.

Appendix B Excerpts from the Scottish Parliament Standing Orders, relevant to Voting in the Chamber.

Rule 11.2 Decision Time

2. Decision Time is the period which normally begins at 17:00 where a meeting of the Parliament is held on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday and at 12:00 where a meeting of the Parliament is held on Friday and which ends when every decision which is to be taken during Decision Time has been taken.

3. Normally, Decision Time shall end not later than 30 minutes after it begins but, in accordance with Rule 2.2.6(a), it may continue in order to complete any voting which is not adjourned to a later meeting under paragraph 5.

Rule 11.5 Right to vote

1. Only members have a right to vote at a meeting of the Parliament. A member is not obliged to vote.

2. A member shall vote only in person and shall not vote on behalf of any other member.

3. A member may vote although he or she did not hear the question put.

Rule 11.7 Manner of voting

1. Normally members shall vote at a meeting of the Parliament or of a Committee of the Whole Parliament using the electronic voting system.”²²

²² Standing Orders of the Scottish Parliament, April 2007