



Speaker

Tom Duncan
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly
Civic Square, London Circuit
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Mr Duncan

On Thursday 7 May 2020, you announced that a petition (4-20) lodged by Ms Le Couteur, MLA had been received. The petition was signed by 32 residents, and contained the following request:

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to resume the Assembly's customary annual sitting pattern. Virtual sittings should be introduced and broadcast in the normal manner. This will reduce the risk of expose (sic) to COVID 19 to members and staff whilst ensuring our Territory parliament continues its essential role at this important time.

Although standing order 100 indicates that every petition received by the Clerk and received by the Assembly shall be referred by the Clerk to the minister responsible for the administration of the matter which is the subject of the petition, as there is no responsible minister the matter was referred to me.

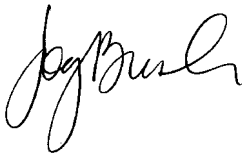
I can advise that, on 2 April 2020, the Assembly amended the sitting pattern to provide that, instead of sitting for 16 scheduled sitting days for the period up to the October 2020 election, the Assembly resolved that it would sit on a Thursday in May, June, and 2 in August. Later, on 7 May 2020, the Assembly resolved to add six further sitting days (with additional single day sittings on Thursdays for an additional six weeks).

This meant that, instead of sitting for 16 sitting days, the Assembly will sit for 11 sitting days.

There is a question whether virtual sittings can be conducted for the Assembly. There is a provision in the *Australian Capital Territory (Self-Government) Act 1988* (Cth) that stipulates that decisions of the Assembly must be made by members present and voting, and it is unclear if that requirement allows for virtual sittings.

However, recognising that all members could not meet in the Assembly Chamber in accordance with the Chief Medical Officer's advice, and that there were provisions in the *Australian Capital Territory (Self-Government) Act 1988* (Cth) as outlined above, which cast doubt about the ability to conduct virtual sittings, discussions were had with the architect of the Assembly building to ascertain whether the Chamber could be expanded. Following the construction of several desks, the Assembly reconvened for its scheduled sitting on Thursday 23 July with all members present and able to abide by the physical distancing requirements.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joy Burch', written in a cursive style.

Joy Burch MLA
Speaker

19 August 2020