

From the Office of the Minister
Gordon Lyons MLA



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Dear Carál

Committee Inquiry into Private Members' Bill (PMBs)

Thank you for your letter dated 17th December where you highlight the inquiry into the current procedures and support for Private Members Bills offered by the Assembly.

There is no doubt that PMBs can play an important role in the legislative process, although I think it would be a fair observation to say that we have seen a huge increase in the number of PMBs being brought forward, and on occasion being used more as a publicity tool rather than a genuine attempt to address an issue.

It is unfortunate that many legislators, and elements of the media, judge the success or failure of a mandate based on how much new law is created. This is not only an overly simplistic and ill-considered view, but it also leads to the creation of unnecessary and often ill thought out legislation. The legislating role of an MLA is perhaps our most important function, and the effectively scrutiny of legislation should be seen as the primary role for all Members.

The sheer volume of PMBs working their way through the system means that it becomes incredibly difficult for Members to fully consider the need and impact of same, and they can also undermine and circumvent the normal policy development role for Departments. Unfortunately, this can lead to bad law.

In any normal mandate there is always a rush in the final few months to get Executive legislation through the Assembly, even more so when we lost so much time at the beginning of this mandate. Add to this the number of PMBs taking up Assembly time and Departmental time and it is not hard to conclude that reform of the system is long overdue.

It may be a useful exercise for your Committee to consider different approaches to the PMB process at the Assembly, including giving some thought to the notion of a

ballot at the beginning of a mandate. It may also be useful to consider how Members could co-sponsor a Bill and jointly guide it through the legislative process.

I look forward to reading your recommendations in due course.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gordon Lyons', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

GORDON LYONS MLA
Minister for the Economy