



# **17<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories**

## **Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures**

Report on the Use of Tablet Computers  
in Formal Session of the Legislative  
Assembly

Chair: Mr. Bob Bromley, MLA Weledah

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RULES AND PROCEDURES**

**REPORT ON THE USE OF TABLET COMPUTERS IN FORMAL  
SESSION OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

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## **STANDING COMMITTEE ON RULES AND PROCEDURES**

### **REPORT ON THE USE OF TABLET COMPUTERS IN FORMAL SESSION OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

#### **BACKGROUND**

In its February 8, 2012, *Report on the Use of Tablet Computers in the Legislative Assembly*, the Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures recommended that:

*Tablet computers such as iPads be considered as a type of laptop computer/hand-held device, subject to the existing conventions in the House regarding electronic communications devices.*

This recommendation was adopted by motion of the Committee of the Whole. As a result, it is currently the convention that iPads, like laptops, Blackberries and other hand-held electronic communications devices, may be used during Committee of the Whole proceedings subject to the restrictions that they must be turned off when a Member has the floor, and must be on silent mode at all times.

The Committee also indicated in its February 2012 report that it would continue to review the expansion of iPad use outside of Committee of the Whole.

#### **CURRENT FINDINGS**

iPads were introduced as a standard tool for briefing materials and Cabinet and Committee meeting agenda packages at the outset of the 17<sup>th</sup> Assembly, in place of paper versions of the same documents. As noted earlier in this report, in February 2012 the House agreed to permit iPad use in the Chamber during Committee of the Whole proceedings.

The use of iPads for these purposes has allowed for a substantial reduction in the amount of paper used by Members and staff. It has also increased convenience and ease of retrieving information as documents equivalent to several binders of paper can be stored on one device.

In considering whether the use of iPads should be permitted in formal Session as well as Committee of the Whole proceedings, the Committee held in mind a number of factors in addition to the advantages of increased convenience and reduced paper consumption:

- iPads could present a distraction during debate
- the use of iPads, if not discreet, could create a negative impression among members of the public viewing the proceedings
- the increased ease of sending messages in and out of the Chamber might allow others to influence debate
- attempts to restrict certain uses of iPads might be difficult to enforce, and would rely largely on Members' voluntary compliance
- iPads, when used as visual readers, are not functionally different than paper documents, which Members are permitted to use and refer to during formal Session

The Committee also reviewed practices in other jurisdictions. These practices are rapidly evolving as use of iPads and other tablet devices becomes more widespread.

Both Houses of the Parliament of Canada, the United Kingdom House of Commons and the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan allow use of iPads in formal Session subject only to general restrictions that they be in silent mode and not be disruptive or interfere with decorum. Most other Canadian legislatures also allow for some use of iPads during formal session, albeit subject to additional restrictions. Examples of restrictions in place in other jurisdictions include prohibiting their use by a Member who has the floor, prohibiting their use during certain proceedings, such as votes, question period, and/or speakers' rulings, and allowing the use of iPads during question period as a virtual reading device only.

In the opinion of the Committee, the advantages of allowing use of iPads in formal Session outweigh the potential disadvantages. Further, the concerns about the detrimental effect iPads might have on formal proceedings can be mitigated by putting in place certain restrictions. The Committee therefore makes the following recommendations:

**Recommendation One:**

The Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures recommends that Members be permitted to use tablet computers during all proceedings in the Chamber with the exception of the following times: during the Prayer, at any time when the Commissioner is present in the Chamber, during the Speaker's opening and closing remarks and rulings, during votes, and at any other time designated pursuant to instruction of the Speaker.

And further that the use of tablet computers be subject to the existing convention that any electronic device used in the Chamber must be on silent mode at all times.

**Recommendation Two:**

The Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures recommends that the use of tablet computers during formal Session be at all times subject to the overriding discretion of the Speaker to intervene to ensure order and decorum in the Chamber, and that if the use of any tablet computer is deemed to impinge on the decorum or dignity of the House, the Speaker may order the offending Member to discontinue use of the device.

**Recommendation Three:**

The Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures recommends that any necessary amendments to the Rules of the Legislative Assembly to permit the use of tablet computers in formal Session be brought forward for consideration of the Legislative Assembly in the February –March 2013 sitting of the Legislative Assembly;

And further that guidelines governing the use of tablet computers be incorporated into an appendix to the Rules of the Legislative Assembly to be entitled "Direction Regarding the Use of Electronic Communication Devices in the Chamber";

And furthermore that pending changes to the Rules of the Legislative Assembly, the recommendations in this report be treated as conventions and Members be permitted to use tablet computers in accordance with them.

Finally, the Committee urges all Members to continue to exercise courtesy and good judgement in using electronic devices in the Chamber so as not to distract fellow Members or in any way detract from the proceedings underway.