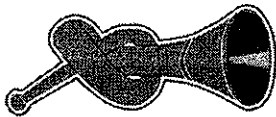


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Honorable Raseriti Johannes Tau

Chairperson
Ad Hoc Committee on the Protection of State Information Bill
National Council of Provinces,
Parliament of South Africa

3 May 2012

Dear Sir,

We note the announced changes to the schedule of meetings on the Protection of State Information Bill, allowing only two meetings to finalise the Bill in light of the volumes of concerns, comments and objections tabled during hearings. The committee is scheduled to meet once on Friday 4 May to consider amendments, allow the state law advisor a week to draft such amendments, and meet again on Friday 11 May to adopt the Bill and pass it forward to the House for a vote.

In the previous schedule, meetings were set for 24th April, 25th April, 26th April, 2nd May, 8th May, 15th May and 16th May. In light of the wide-ranging issues raised during the hearings, even that schedule seemed completely inadequate. We point out that the planned seven days of deliberation have been compressed into two. We would like to ask what circumstances have changes to motivate the Committee to attempt to deal with all the proposed amendments in all the submissions made, and consider the drafts proposed by the State Law Advisors, and vote on them, in just two days?

It is the usual practice to give the submissions of the public at least some cursory attention. For example, it is often the practice to request a summary of the issues in submissions prepared by the State Law Advisors, and then discuss them in committee. Alternatively the Law Advisors flag the major policy issues, and they are discussed with the opposition, so that consensus can be established where possible.

Is it the Committee's intention to dispose of this part of the process? Is a schedule of amendments already prepared without public discussion, or has a decision been taken in caucus that no amendments will be allowed, without that debate taking place in the committee?

This sudden development, on the back of extraordinary public and civil society opposition to the Bill in its current form, undermines the committee's pledge, through the Chairperson's public comments in recent months, that its work would not be rushed.

We therefore call on the committee to request an extension of its deadline, and reschedule its work with ample time for deliberations.

Sincerely,

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