

INTRODUCTION TO THE PARLIAMENTARY MONITORING GROUP

Report on presentation by PMG



FOREWORD

This manual is the result of a training conducted by Rashaad Alli and Monique Doyle of the Parliamentary Monitoring Group. The Civil Society Participation in Provincial Legislature Project, run by Democracy Works Foundation with co-funding and technical support from the European Union and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. Please see more information on Democracy Works Foundation and the CSSPL project [here](#).

CSPPL works with Civil Society Organisation partners in Limpopo, Northern Cape and the North West. DWF is grateful to PMG for opportunity to invite CSO partners from across these three provinces to this training. DWF would like to acknowledge the Action on Legislature Group, an independent collaboration between organisations and individuals working with parliament and provincial legislatures.

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What is the Parliamentary Monitoring Group?

The Parliamentary Monitoring Group, an information service, was established in 1995 as a partnership between Black Sash, Human Rights Committee and Idasa with the aim of providing those three advocacy organisations with a type of Hansard for the proceedings of the more than fifty South African Parliamentary Committees.

This was needed because there was no official record publicly available of the committee proceedings which are critical in parliamentary oversight and are referred to as “the engine room of Parliament”. The information is needed by social justice organisations to lobby the Parliament of South Africa on pieces of legislation, matters of democratic process and parliamentary oversight of the executive.

The PMG website was set up in early 1998 to make the information generated available to a wider audience.

Presently this is the only source for this type of information. PMG hopes that the PMG committee reports and other documents will provide the public with an insight into the Parliament of South Africa and its daily activity. Importantly, it provides a window into the performance and budgets of each government department and public entity over which each parliamentary committee has oversight.

PMG became a fully-fledged independent NGO in July 2009.

What does the Parliamentary Monitoring Group Do?

PMG aims to provide accurate, objective, and current information on all parliamentary committee proceedings in the form of detailed, unofficial minutes and documents and since 2007, sound recordings of the meeting.

PMG’s key activity is the attending of all Parliamentary Committee meetings in order to tape and minute the proceedings and obtain all documents tabled in the committees. Immediately after the meeting, the audio recording is published on the PMG website. Once a detailed written report has been compiled, it passes through an editorial and quality control process. It is then published on the PMG website within three working days of the committee proceedings along with all the relevant committee documents such as public submissions, working drafts of bills and briefings on policy & legislation.

Beyond the reporting of committee proceedings, PMG provides

- Early notification of calls for comment
- Details of public hearings
- Parliamentary programmes
- Legislative programmes for departments
- Bill Tracker - daily updates
- Ministerial replies to MPs’ written questions
- Research on the functioning of Parliament
- Access to your national, provincial and local representatives on its sister website, People’s Assembly

MAKE USE OF THIS INFORMATION

Please make use of PMG’s free email alert service and receive alerts for those government portfolios in which you are interested. We email you committee meeting reports and documents, new bills, request for submissions, ministry media briefings and speeches.

Currently PMG covers all national parliamentary committees (except Intelligence which is closed to the public). The PMG website has a record of all meeting proceedings and other documents between January 1998 and the present.

Certain committees were not covered prior to 2000 and if you cannot find what you are looking for, please contact info@pmg.org.za.

Introduction to the PMG website

The website includes:

- All committees and meetings
- Information about Members of Parliament and Members of Provincial Legislatures
- Legislation Tracker (Monitor bills before Parliament and those already passed)
- Ministerial Replies to MPs' Written Questions
- Open calls for comment
- Attendance trends in committees of the National Assembly and the NCOP
- A blog "That week in Parliament" where we cover issues of interest on a weekly basis
- Provincial Legislatures: Monitoring of WCPP & Information on other 8 PLs
- Sign up for committee meeting alerts, to let you know when meetings are happening
- Parliamentary Programme (committee and plenary schedules)
- Research on the functioning of Parliament
- Assorted Reports (Annual Reports, Legacy Reports, Budgetary Review and Recommendation Reports, Tabled Committee Reports)

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS INFORMATION

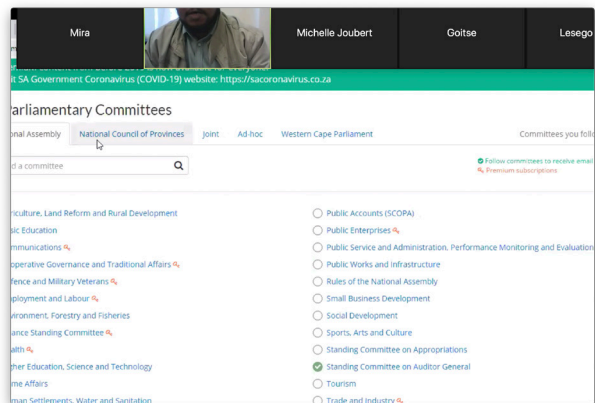
- To get the most out of the website, you have to create an account
- This allows you to follow those committees that are of interest to you.

Tips on effective use of the website

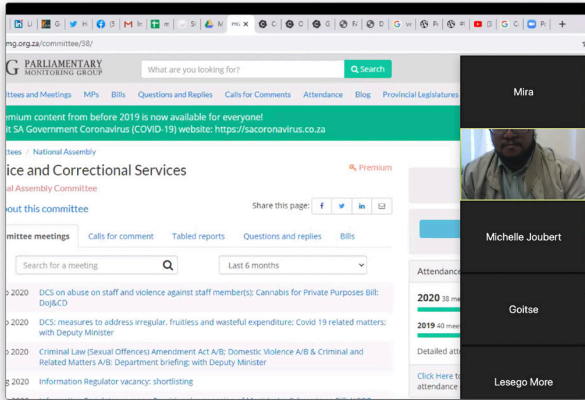
COMMITTEES AND MEETINGS TAB

You can choose between National Assembly, National Council of Provinces, Joint Committees, Ad hoc Committees, and Committees of the Western Cape Parliament. A key icon next to the stands for the premium/closed committees that you need a subscription to access. NGOs, CBOs and public education institutions are recognised as exempt organisations are not required to pay a subscription fee. If you fall into one of these categories and require access, send an email request to info@pmg.org.za so an account can be created for you.

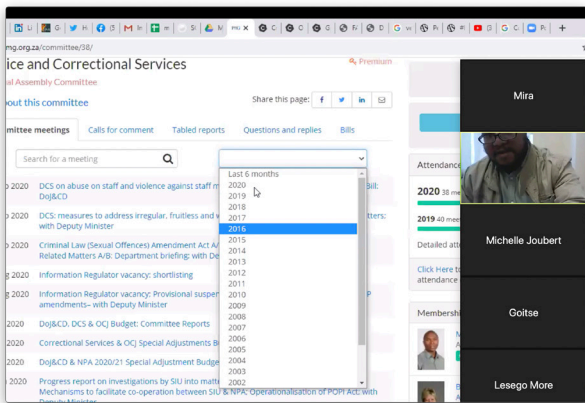
Using National Assembly as an example you can select the committees, as we have done here for the Standing Committee on Auditor General.



If you choose for example the Justice and Correctional Services tab, it takes you to the engagements of the Committee with the dates and the records that were taken by monitors in those meetings.



You can also click the time tab to go back in history.

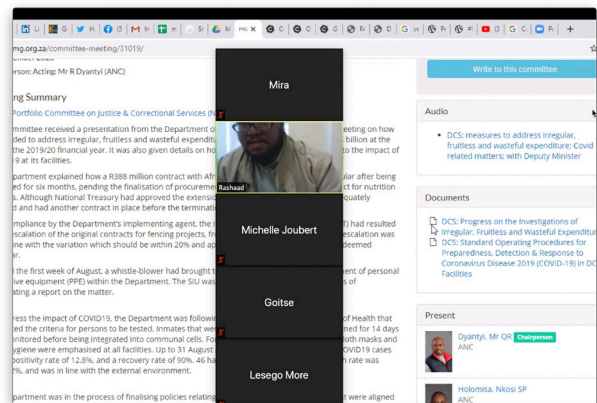


The summaries are based on the transcripts from those meetings which are summarised to reflect the highlights. The same link contains a more detailed transcript or report of the meeting.

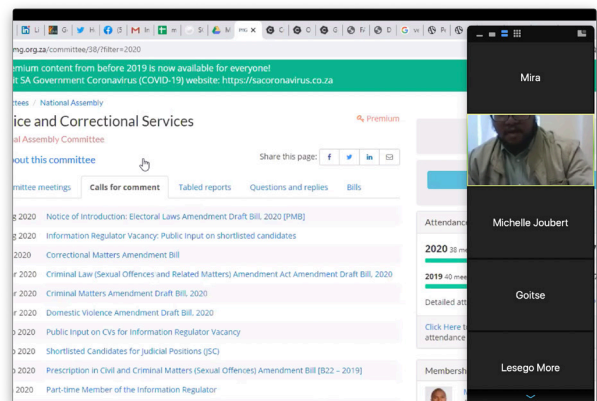
EXAMPLE

Justice and Correctional Services Committee meeting to discuss measures to address irregular, fruitless and wasteful expenditure; COVID-19 related matters with the Deputy Minister.

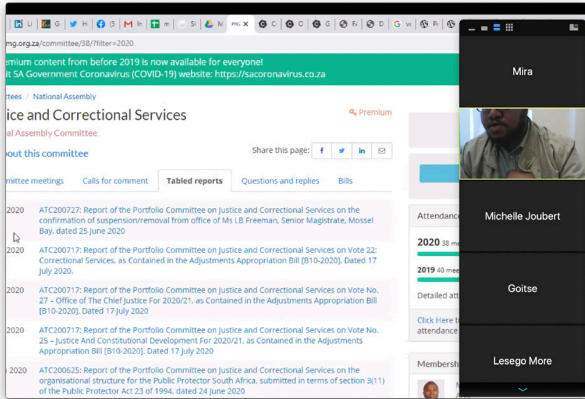
- Includes a detailed question and answer session, which is really democracy in action in the sense that the MPs are actively questioning and engaging with government's COVID-19 response. This is where the public can get the information to understand where political issues are at in the country
- The pages also include where possible Audio Recordings, and relevant documents that were on file for the meeting and the people that were present at the meeting.



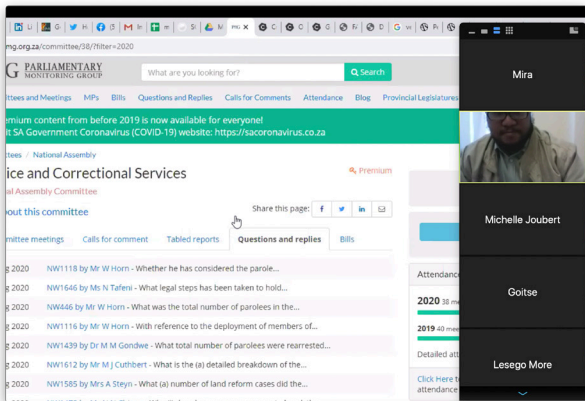
Under the selected Committees there are also notes for Calls for Comments for that Committee. If you are interested in the work of a specific Committee, it is a good idea to select these notifications as this is where you have the opportunity to make your voice heard.



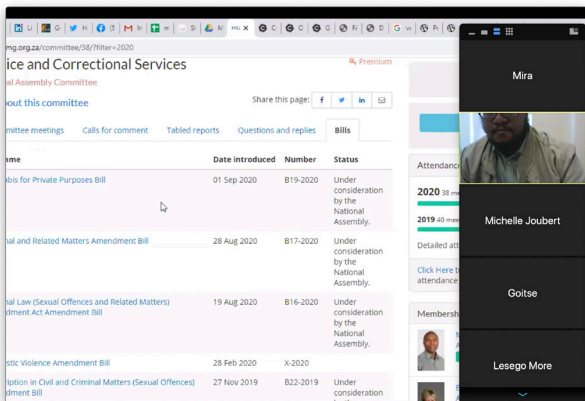
There is also a tab for Tabled Reports, which includes all the reports drafted by the Committee and the general topics covered in that specific report.



The section on Questions and Replies shows the list of inquiries made by MPs to the relevant Minister. This also gives you a good idea to understand which issues MPs are championing.

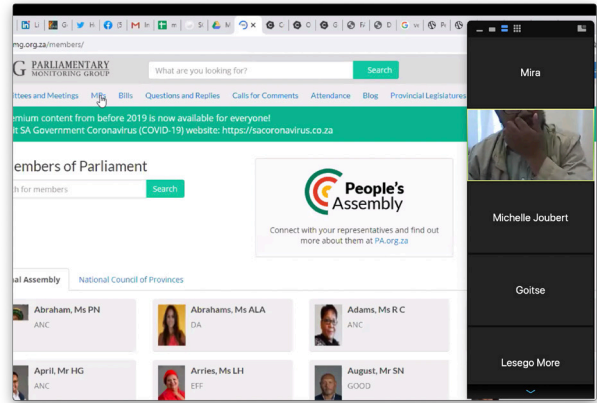


The next section on Bills shows the Bills that were referred to this Committee for processing and consideration. The date of introduction of the Bill, their official number and their current status is included in the information.

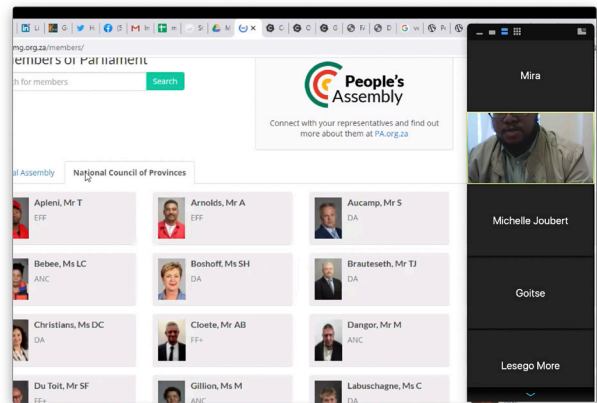


MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT TAB

This is used to access information about Members of Parliament. This relates to a PMG initiative called “The People’s Assembly” which can be accessed at www.PA.org.za.

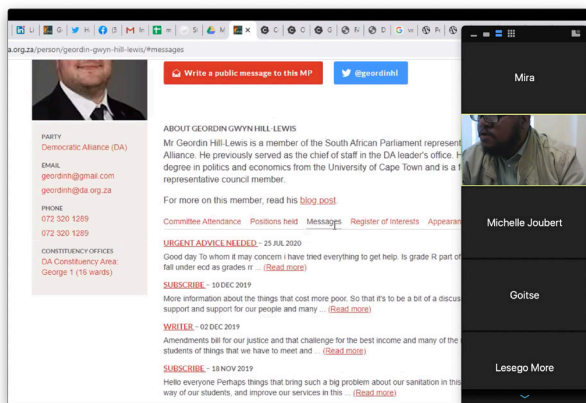
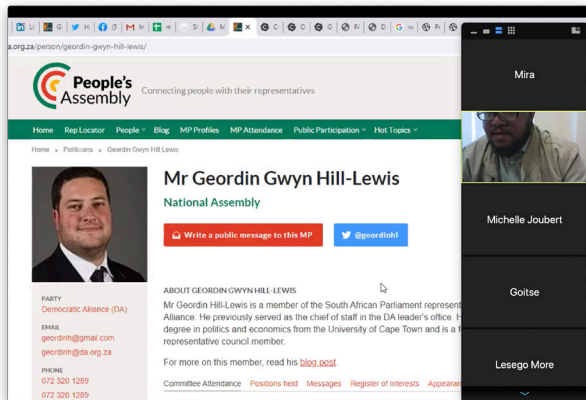


The same exists for the National Council of Provinces.

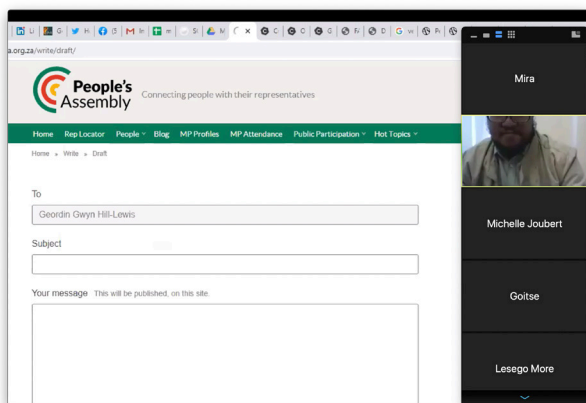


By selecting the tab for a member, eg Mr Geordin Gwyn Hill-Lewis (NA), we can see more details about this MP.

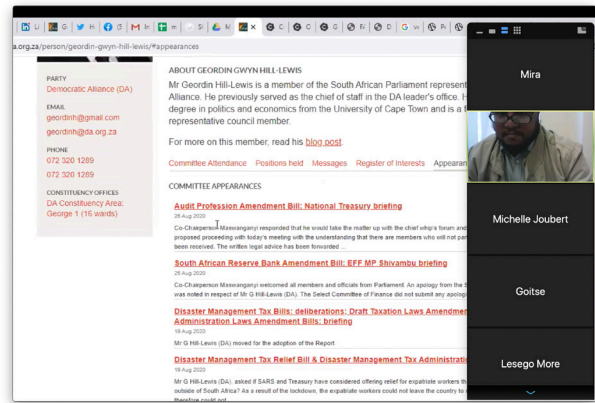
- Direct tab to contact this person through email or social media.
- Blog post about activities of interest
- Committees the MP attends
- Positions that they hold
- Messages and Register of interest such as gifts and assets.



- The messages are those that you can write using the red tab.



- Detailed list of appearances in the various committees and the inputs that they made.

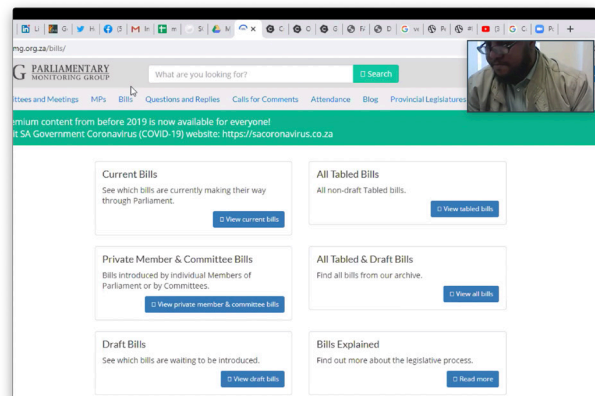


- Details such as the party email addresses, phone numbers and constituency offices and wards

BILLS

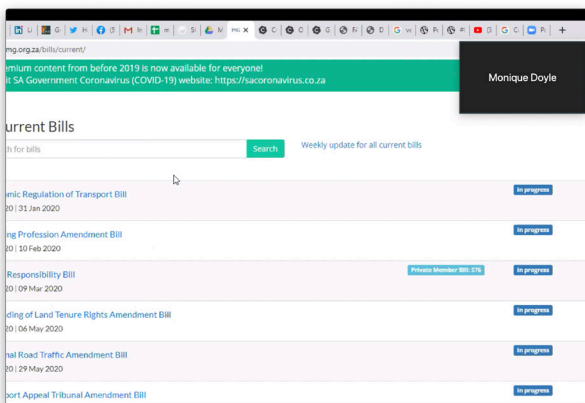
The section includes

- Current Bills (which are currently making their way through parliament.)
- All Tabled Bills (in non-draft Tabled bills)
- Private Member and Committee Bills (Bills introduced by individual members of parliament or by Committees)
- Tabled and Draft Bills (all bills from the archive)
- Draft Bills (Bills that are waiting to be introduced)
- Bills Explained (which proves you more about the legislative processes).

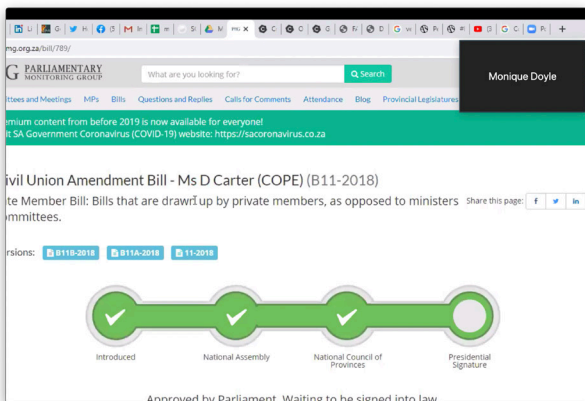


The Bill tracker gives you the full chronology of a Bill from the time it is introduced in Parliament, moves through the various stages and its final conclusion. This will give you a deeper understanding on the processing of a particular bill.

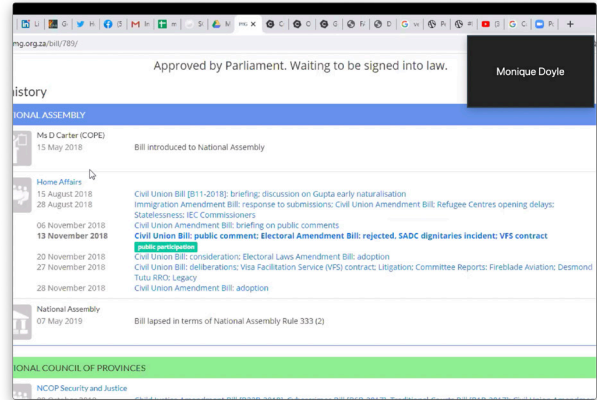
See example of all the information available regarding Current Bills, a notice on what are Private Member Bills tabled under Section 76 (Bills that are drawn up by private members as opposed to ministers or Committees) or Committee Bills and the status of those bills at the moment.



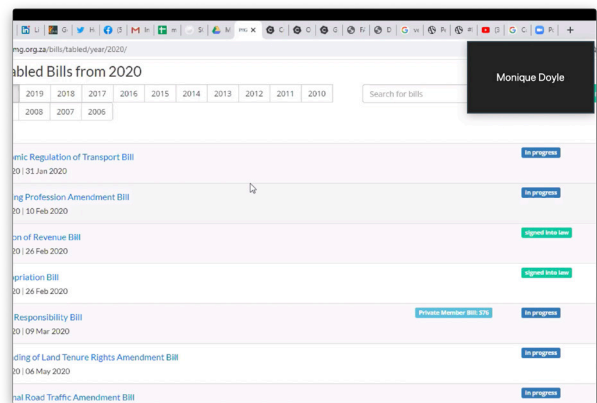
If you click on a bill that is a Private Member Bill like here or example the Civil Union Amendment Bill introduced by Ms D Carter) you also see the states of that bill as it works its way through parliament. The page includes links to the various versions that Bill was previously.



The page includes a history of the bill as it makes its way through the parliamentary process, including active links you can follow for more detail on each step. The documents can be downloaded for off line viewing.



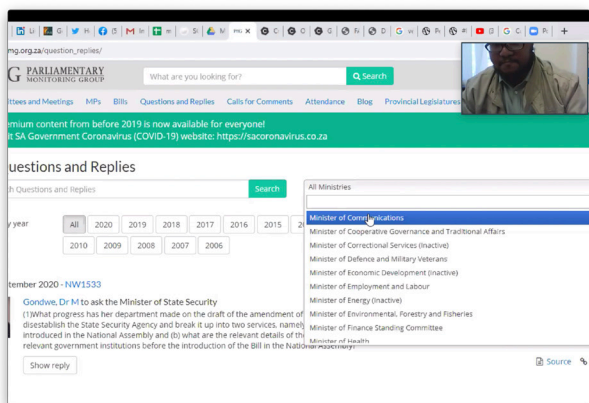
The next tab on bills refers to all the tabled bills which provides a historic account of the bills and their status for e.g. they were signed into law dating back to 2006.



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

In addition to oral questions asked in Parliament, MPs can ask government ministers written questions. These are often used to obtain detailed information about policies and statistics on the activities of government departments.

You can also search this tab in terms of specific Ministers for e.g. the Minister of Communications. Note that some ministers are not noted as inactive.

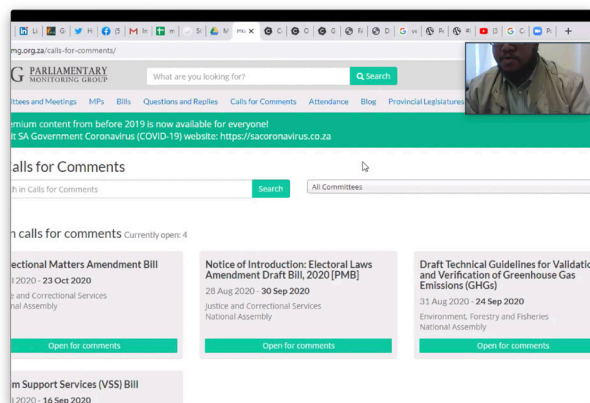


CALLS FOR COMMENTS

It is important for citizens to make themselves heard on matters affecting them, by making submissions to Parliament. The Constitution allows the public to participate in government's decisions in terms of law making, oversight and parliamentary processes.

When Parliament processes legislation, it will invite the public to comment, which allows citizens to present their views, grievances and suggestions to the relevant parliamentary committee. The submissions are considered by Members of Parliament and the submitter may be called upon to make an oral submission to the Committee during a public hearing.

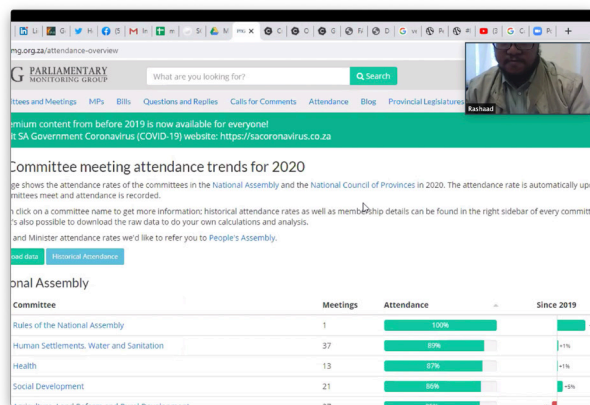
The next tab on the top navigation refers to the Calls for Comments. You can see the number of calls currently open is 4.



You can click on the green tab "Open for Comments" to access the public participation opportunities for this bill. This tab can also be searched according to which Committee's work you are most interested in.

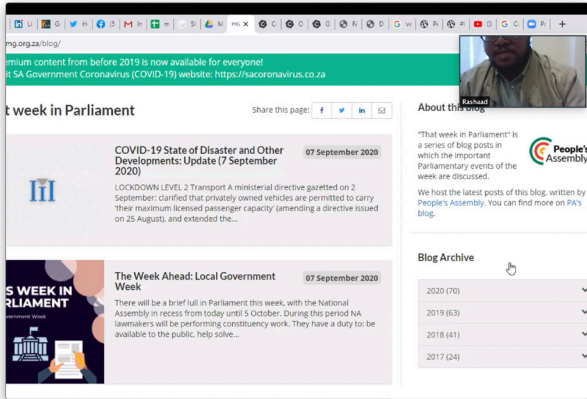
COMMITTEE MEETING ATTENDANCE

The next top tab refers to Committee meeting attendance trends for 2020. PMG is uniquely positioned to collect this kind of data which is compiled from our reports developed from meetings. The data is downloadable and provides a historic account. For specific MPs attendance you are referred to the People's Assembly website. The pages show positive or negative progress since 2019. The table can be sorted by which are the most and least attended Committees by clicking the small arrow next to "attendance" (Public Enterprises being the least and the Rules of NA being the most at the time of writing).



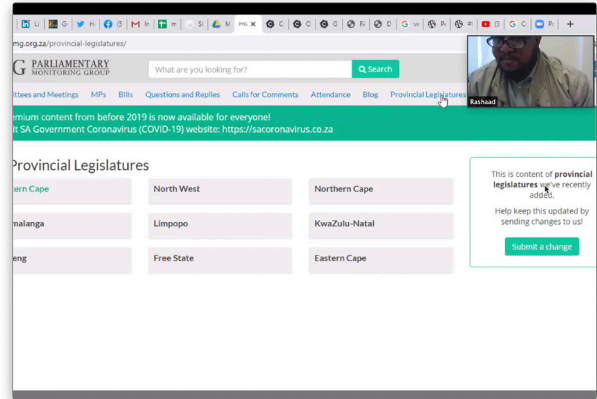
BLOG

The next top tab takes you to the Blog highlighting important issues that took place that week in Parliament including a historic archive.



PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURES

The next top tab refers to Provincial Legislatures. PMG is currently only monitoring 11 of the Committees in the Western Cape Provincial Parliament.

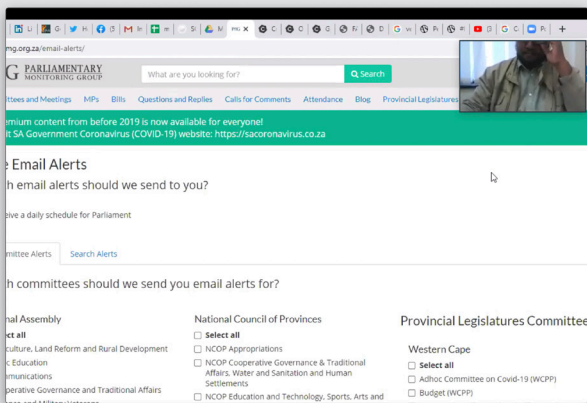


Note the Committee meeting minutes for the WCPP are also available under the Parliamentary Committee top tab. The information differs based on the Provincial Legislatures; some will include the programme while others list the Committees and some Members of Provincial Legislatures attending. The contact details of the PLs are also available as are the rules. Of interest are also the contact details father Speaker and the Secretary to the Legislatures, which would be your first port of call to engage those institutions.

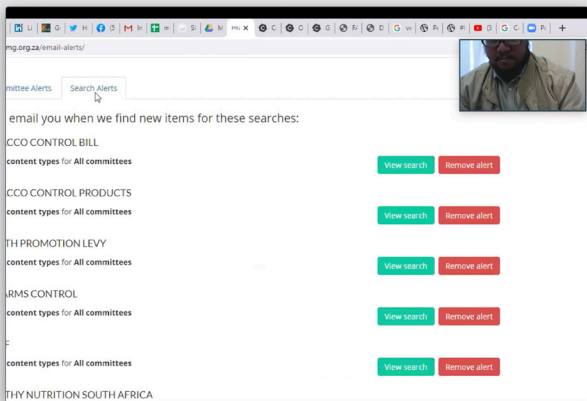
Throughout the website, there is a Correct This Page button so that we be informed of any errors. It is not easy maintaining a large database, especially on provincial legislatures, so we would appreciate any assistance in keeping this information updated.

HOW TO SET UP EMAIL ALERTS

- You must first create an account and then you can select the Committees which are of interest to you and then we will email you alerts on the email list provided what this Committee is doing and opportunities for you to engage. You can sign up for National Parliament Committees, NCOP Committees, Western Cape Provincial Legislature and Joint Committees,

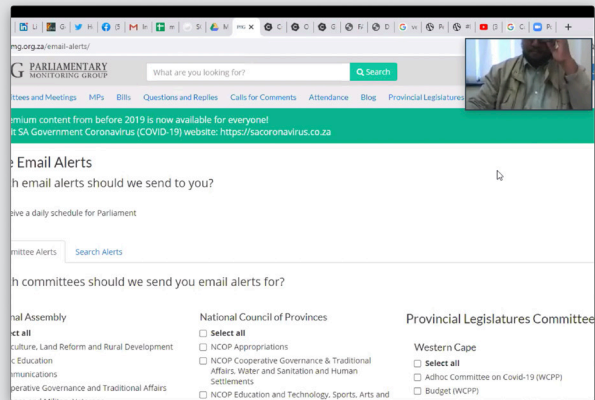


- You can manage and search alerts according to Bills covering various topics,

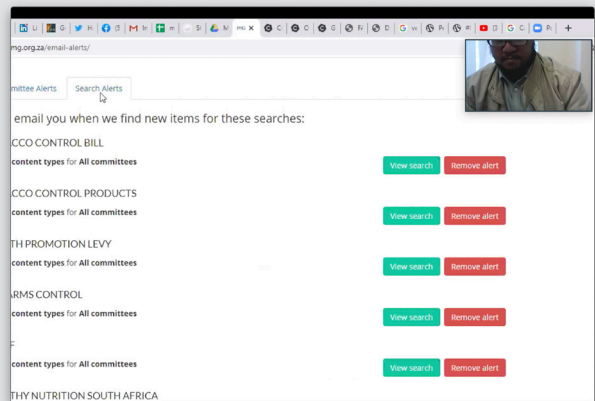


- There is also an option to search Setting up email alerts: you can select the Committees which are

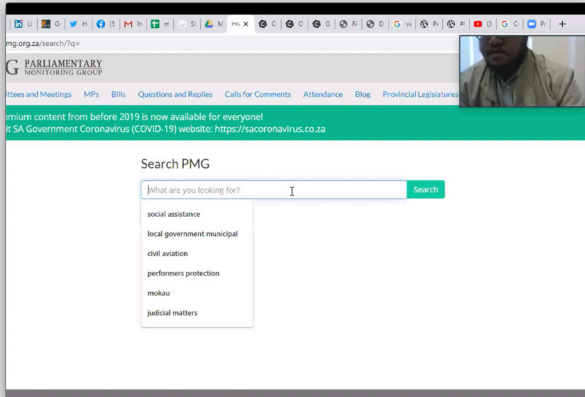
of interest to you and then we will email you alerts on the email list provided what this Committee is doing and opportunities for you to engage. You can sign up for National Parliament Committees, NCOP Committees, Western Cape Provincial Legislature and Joint Committees,



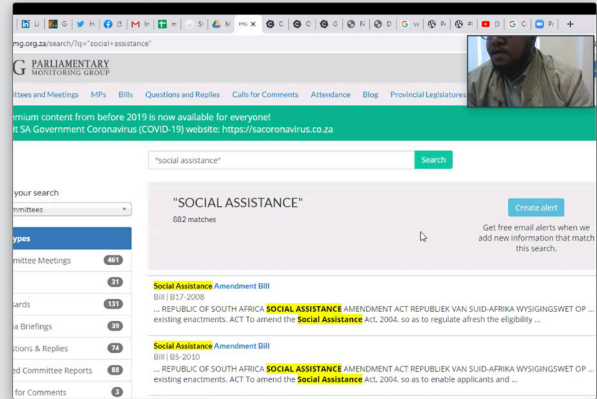
- You can manage and search alerts according to Bills covering various topics,



- There is also an option to search. Use “ ” to capture both words together.

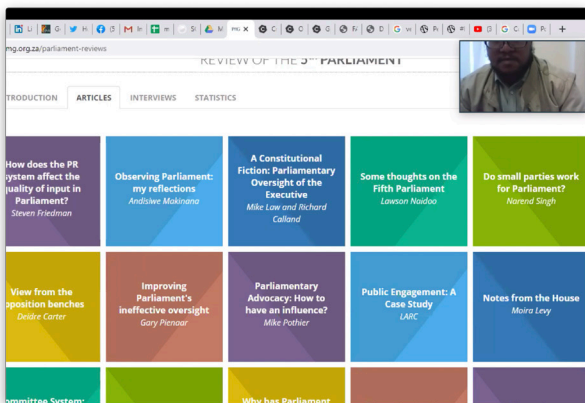


- For e.g. searching “Social assistance” provides you with all the activities that mention this key word in Parliament. There is also an option to allow you to set up alerts for these specific key words. In addition, you can set up the types of documents you want to search for e.g. meetings, briefings etc.



PARLIAMENT REVIEWS

Top tab “Parliament Reviews” analysis of the 5th parliament by researchers and commentators. It is important to note here that PMG does not itself provide analysis of the happenings at Parliament, it aims to objectively observe. The analysis section refers to experts in their fields and links to public debates. This section also links to Interviews, and Statistics.

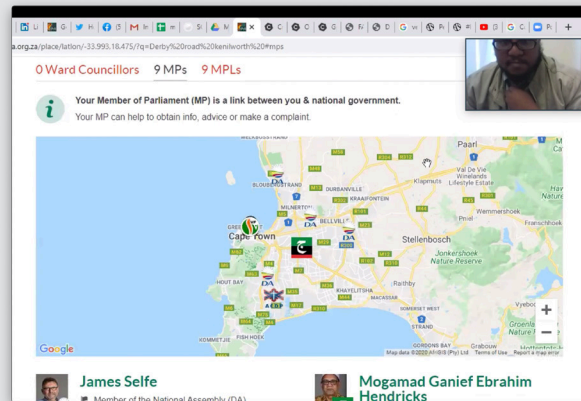


The statistics session includes MP and Committee

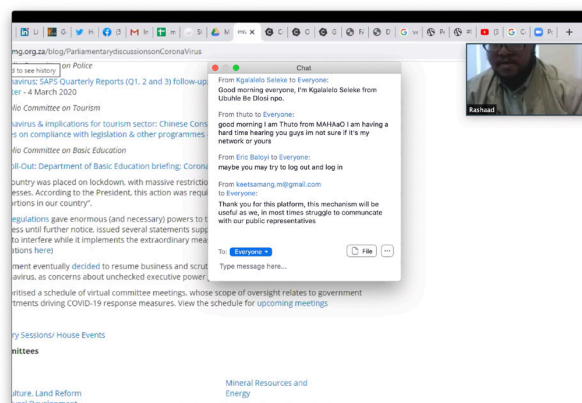
Turnover, Committee Agenda, Committee Activity, Legislative Performance and Written Questions and Ministers Replies.

NOTE ON THE PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY WEBSITE

The People's Assembly Website was designed to facilitate public engagement with elected representatives. It also allows you to publicly write directly to an MP and a Parliamentary Committee using the direct links. You can find out who represents you, by searching constituency offices and representatives through your address. Clicking the search tab will also provide you with a map showing the MPs that represent you through their Constituency Offices.



Feedback and Discussion



Chat/Comment

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