

The Senate

Committee of Senators' Interests

Report No. 1 of 2022

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MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Senator C Bilyk (**Chair**) (Tasmania)

Senator R Ciccone (Victoria)

Senator S Lines (Western Australia)

Senator M O'Sullivan (Western Australia)

Senator D Smith (Western Australia)

Senator A Urquhart (Tasmania)

Senator D Van (Victoria)

Senator L Waters (Queensland)

Contact:

Committee Secretary and Registrar of Senators' Interests

The Senate
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

(02) 6277 3020

senators.interests@aph.gov.au

www.aph.gov.au

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Introduction

The Committee of Senators' Interests, established under [standing order 22A](#), provides this report on its operations for the period 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2021. It provides background information on the registration of interests and the role of the committee and the requirements for the registration of interests and citizenship details. It also includes the requirements of the safe and respectful workplaces training program register, established in December 2021.

Registration of interests and the role of the committee

On 17 March 1994 the Senate adopted the [Senators' Interests Resolutions](#). The resolutions act as a safeguard against conflicts of interest, and the perception of such conflicts, by requiring senators to lodge statements of registrable interests to enhance transparency in relation to the exercise of their public duties.

Registrable interests range from assets and liabilities, interests in trusts and partnerships, directorships, gifts, sponsored travel and hospitality, and certain relationships with organisations. Senators may also choose to declare things that would not, on their face, appear to engage any of the listed registrable interests.¹ This is a matter for the judgement of individual senators.

From its inception, the committee has stressed that it is the responsibility of individual senators to interpret the resolutions and to determine which of their interests fall within its terms, rather than relying on external advice about what 'should' or 'should not' be declared. This reflects the unique status of members of Parliament as elected officers, responsible primarily to the electors and to the House to which they have been elected.

The committee has adopted [Explanatory Notes](#) to guide senators in meeting the requirements of the regime. It is to the resolutions, forms and notes, and to any other commentary by the committee, that senators should turn for assistance in determining how the disclosure regime applies to their own particular circumstances. Any senator may request from the committee clarification of any aspect or raise any matter relating to the form and content of the register. The committee may respond to such requests by providing individual guidance, by amending the Explanatory Notes or by proposing amendments to the Senators' Interests Resolutions.

1 The final item on the list of registrable interests is "any other interests where a conflict with a senator's public duty could foreseeably arise or be seen to arise".

During the reporting period, the committee received a submission in October from Senator Birmingham in his role as Leader of the Government in the Senate requesting the committee clarify what is required to satisfy the requirements of the Register in relation to the receipt of anonymous or ‘crowd funded’ donations to pay for legal expenses. After consultation with the committee, the Chair indicated that an earlier September communication with all senators, which had reiterated the importance of the explanatory notes in addressing the donations issue, was sufficient for these purposes.

No other submissions from senators or directions from the Senate in relation to the Senators' Interests Resolutions were received.

Requirements

A senator’s statement of interests includes a public statement of their personal interests and a confidential statement of the interests, of which they are aware, of their spouses or partners and dependent children.

Each senator must provide such a statement within 28 days of making and subscribing an oath or affirmation of allegiance AND within 28 days after the first meeting of the Senate after 1 July first occurring after a general election. Senators must also notify any alteration in these interests within 35 days of the alteration occurring.

Statements of registrable interests must accord with the Senators' Interests Resolutions and should be in the [form](#) determined by the committee.

The statements of senators’ interests are kept on a public register. Since 2011 the register has been available [online](#) on the committee’s web pages.

Statements of the registrable interests of a senator’s spouse or partner and of any dependent children remain confidential, except where the committee considers that a conflict of interest arises, at which time the committee may table the declaration. To date the committee has not had cause to consider taking this action.

The Senators’ Interests forms, explanatory notes and other relevant documents are published on the [committee’s website](#) and have been compiled into a handbook, also published on the website.

Online publication of the Register of Senators’ Interests

Statements of senators’ interests are published online, in accordance with the following procedures:

- Statements are published under each senator’s name.
- Statements are scanned without any watermarking or redaction.
- Notifications of alterations are added to the relevant senator’s published statement.

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- Updates are published at least weekly.

Maintenance of the Register

The committee requires the Registrar of Senators' Interests to write to all senators to remind them of their obligations under the resolutions at least twice a year. Senators were reminded of their obligations by the Registrar in May and November 2021.

Current statements (together with relevant alterations) are published to the online Register. Six-monthly compilation volumes of statements and alterations are also tabled in the Senate and published online.

During the reporting period, the committee tabled its annual report for 2020 (No. 1 of 2021).

Citizenship Register

On 13 November 2017, the Senate agreed to the establishment of a citizenship register which required senators to provide to the Registrar of Senators' Interests a statement containing a declaration that the senator did not hold citizenship of another country. The resolution also required other details such as the place of birth of the senator and his/her parents and grandparents; citizenship held at birth; the date of naturalisation as an Australian citizen if acquired separately; and – if applicable – details of attempts to renounce foreign citizenship.

The resolution required statements to be made in accordance with the resolution and in a format determined by the Committee of Senators' Interests. The Citizenship Register was subsequently published on 4 December 2017.

The register has been updated since then as new senators have filled casual vacancies.

Safe and respectful workplaces training register

On Monday 29 November 2021, in response to recommendations made by the *Review of the Parliamentary Workplace: Responding to Serious Incidents*, the Senate agreed to a motion (see Appendix 1) establishing a register on which senators are required to declare that they have undertaken the Safe and Respectful Workplaces Training Program conducted by the Department of Finance.

The resolution authorised the Committee of Senators' Interests to determine how the statements are made and that the Registrar of Senators' Interests would maintain the register.

The register, which is available on the committee's website, was published on Wednesday 15 December 2021, and is updated as new declarations are received.

Other matters

During the reporting period, the committee received one request only (discussed above) in relation to the form and content of the Register of Senators' Interests. No requests were received in relation to the Register of Official Gifts which is also administered by the committee. Similarly, no requests or submissions were made to the committee in relation to the Citizenship Register. Assistance was provided by the Registrar to a range of routine inquiries.

Enhancement of the Register of Senators Interests

In the previous report, it was noted that the committee had previously agreed to a proposal to enhance the transparency of the Register of Senators Interests, by developing a searchable database that will enable the Register to be searched.

The Senate endorsed the proposed enhancement to the Register by adopting the committee's recommendation on 13 November 2019.

It was intended that the database would be developed by the Department of Parliamentary Services Information Services Division in 2020, in consultation with the committee and the Registrar. However, the COVID pandemic required that ICT resources be redirected towards the development of flexible working arrangements to allow senators, members and parliamentary staff to work remotely, as well as other priorities.

Despite the optimism in the previous report, progress on the database remained, until very recently, stalled. However, it remains a priority and in November 2021 an ICT business analyst was made available to map out the scope of the project. It is hoped that the next report of the committee will be able to note significant progress.

Catryna Bilyk
Chair

February 2022

Senators' Interests Resolutions

1. Registration of Senators' Interests

(1) Within:

- (a) 28 days after the first meeting of the Senate after 1 July first occurring after a general election; and
- (b) 28 days after the first meeting of the Senate after a simultaneous dissolution of the Senate and the House of Representatives; and
- (c) 28 days after making and subscribing an oath or affirmation of allegiance as a senator for a Territory or appointed or chosen to fill a vacancy in the Senate;

each senator shall provide to the Registrar of Senators' Interests a statement of:

- (a) the senator's registrable interests; and
- (b) the registrable interests of which the senator is aware:
 - (i) of the senator's spouse or partner, and
 - (ii) of any children who are wholly or mainly dependent on the senator for support;

in accordance with this resolution and in a form determined by the Committee of Senators' Interests from time to time, and shall also notify any alteration of those interests to the Registrar within 35 days of that alteration occurring.

(2) Any senator who:

- (a) knowingly fails to provide a statement of registrable interests to the Registrar of Senators' Interests by the due date;
- (b) knowingly fails to notify any alteration of those interests to the Registrar of Senators' Interests within 35 days of the change occurring; or
- (c) knowingly provides false or misleading information to the Registrar of Senators' Interests;

shall be guilty of a serious contempt of the Senate and shall be dealt with by the Senate accordingly, but the question whether any senator has committed such a serious contempt shall first be referred to the Privileges Committee for inquiry and report and may not be considered by any other committee.

2. Citizenship Register

- (1) That not later than 5 pm on Friday, 1 December 2017 (and within 21 days of making and subscribing an oath or affirmation as a Senator) each Senator shall provide to the Registrar of Senators' Interests a statement containing the following:
 - (a) a declaration by the Senator that, at the time the Senator nominated for election to the Senate in this 45th Parliament he or she was an Australian citizen;
 - (b) a declaration that the Senator is not a citizen of any country other than Australia;
 - (c) a declaration stating:
 - the place and date of the Senator's birth;
 - the citizenship that the Senator held at the time of birth; and
 - if he or she did not obtain Australian citizenship at birth, the date he or she was naturalised as an Australian citizen;
 - (d) so far as the Senator is aware:
 - the place and date of birth of the Senator's parents and grandparents;
 - (e) whether the Senator has ever been a citizen of another country and if so which country or countries;
 - (f) what steps the Senator has taken to assure him or herself that they have not inherited citizenship of another country from a parent or grandparent;
 - (g) if the Senator has answered the question in paragraph (e) in the affirmative, then provide details and evidence of the date and manner in which the Senator's citizenship of that other country was renounced (if it was renounced) or the date and manner in which it came to an end in accordance with the laws of that other country;
 - (h) if the Senator's citizenship of that other country had not come to an end at the date of his or her nomination for the Senate, detail and provide evidence of any steps the Senator has taken to renounce the citizenship of that other country prior to the date of nomination; and
 - (i) if the Senator has declared that he or she was at the time of nomination or is now a citizen of a country other than Australia, on what basis the Senator contends that he or she is, nonetheless, not disqualified under section 44(i).

- (2) If at any time the Senator becomes aware that information provided in their statement is no longer accurate they shall update their statement as soon as practicable but not later than 21 days of being so aware.
- (3) Statements shall be made in accordance with this resolution and in a form determined by the Committee of Senators' Interests. The Registrar shall, in accordance with procedures determined by the committee, maintain a Citizenship Register comprising statements provided under this resolution. Other than as specifically provided for in this resolution, the committee has the same powers and functions in relation to the citizenship register as it does in relation to the Register of Senator's Interests.
- (4) The Registrar shall, upon the expiry of the time for providing statements under this resolution, and at other times determined by the committee, publish the register and any alterations or additions to the register on the Parliament's website.
- (5) Any Senator who:
 - (a) knowingly fails to provide the statement and evidence required by this resolution to the Registrar of Senators' Interests by the due date; or
 - (b) knowingly fails to correct an inaccuracy in his or her statement within the required timeframe; or
 - (c) knowingly provides false or misleading information to the Registrar of Senators' Interests;

shall be guilty of a serious contempt of the Senate and shall be dealt with by the Senate accordingly, but the question whether any senator has committed such a serious contempt shall first be referred to the Privileges Committee for inquiry and report.

3. Safe and respectful workplaces training register

- (1) Each senator who has undertaken the Training Program shall provide to the Registrar of Senators' Interests a statement declaring that they have undertaken the Training Program:
 - (a) within 28 days of this resolution, where the statement relates to the Senator having undertaken the Training Program prior to the date of this resolution; and
 - (b) within 28 days of having undertaken the Training Program.
- (2) Statements shall be made in accordance with this resolution and in a form determined by the Committee of Senators' Interests. The Registrar shall, in accordance with procedures determined by the Committee, maintain a Training Program Register comprising statements provided under this resolution. Other than as specifically provided for in this resolution, the

Committee has the same powers and functions in relation to the Training Program Register as it does in relation to the Register of Senators' Interests.

- (3) The Registrar shall publish the Training Program Register and any alterations to the Training Program Register on the Parliament's website.
- (4) Any senator who knowingly provides false or misleading information to the Registrar of Senators' Interests shall be guilty of a serious contempt of the Senate and shall be dealt with by the Senate accordingly, but the question of whether any senator has committed such a serious contempt shall first be referred to the Privileges Committee for inquiry and report and may not be considered by any other committee.