



# Set the Standard

## Implementation Update

July 2023



### Update from Vivienne Thom, Chair, Parliamentary Leadership Taskforce

I am pleased to provide a progress update as the independent Chair of the Parliamentary Leadership Taskforce. I would like to acknowledge Kerri Hartland, who concluded her role as the independent Chair in January 2023. I thank Kerri for her leadership over the first 12 months of the Taskforce, which culminated in the Taskforce's first [Annual Report](#) on progress implementing the 28 recommendations from the *Set the Standard* report.

There is still important work to do, and the Taskforce is meeting regularly to oversee the implementation of the remaining reforms to ensure that Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces are safe, inclusive and supportive for everyone.

### Alcohol policies in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces

One of the key areas of focus for the Taskforce is to encourage a culture of appropriate and responsible use of alcohol in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces.

The former Sex Discrimination Commissioner's *Set the Standard* report highlighted that a significant use of alcohol and a drinking culture was a risk factor for workplace bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces. This risk factor is exacerbated by the absence of consistent approaches in regulating the supply and use of alcohol. To address this gap, the *Set the Standard* report recommended there be consistent and comprehensive alcohol policies in place.

A policy helps to keep all in the workplace safe by assisting everyone to meet their existing duties under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*. Policies help ensure there is a common understanding of workplace expectations and can also identify how people can seek support, when needed. Different Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces might have different policies to suit their needs, however we all need to have a common baseline approach to alcohol in the workplace.

# Set the Standard

## Implementation Update



### *A common approach to policies*

As a first step, the Taskforce agreed on principles that should underpin alcohol and drug policies in all Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces.

Any policy should ensure people are fit for duty and free of any adverse effects of alcohol (or other drugs), outline legal and personal responsibilities, detail available support for those with alcohol dependency, include sanctions for non-compliance, and provide for alcohol education and training, while acknowledging different cultural views on alcohol consumption.

The principles support a safe, healthy and productive workplace by seeking to eliminate risks associated with the adverse effects of alcohol in the workplace.

### *Who will the policy principles apply to?*

Every Commonwealth parliamentary workplace should have a policy in place underpinned by the principles. This will include parliamentarians (including their staff and electorate offices), parliamentary departments, the press gallery and other occupants of Parliament House and Commonwealth Parliamentary Offices.

Many workplaces, such as the parliamentary departments, already have alcohol policies in place that are consistent with the principles.

### *How were the policy principles developed?*

The principles were informed by assessments to help identify risk factors of our workplaces that contribute to harm, the impact that alcohol have on our workplace and actions that can reduce this impact.

### *What is being 'fit for duty'?*

Being fit for duty means that a person is not impaired by the adverse effects of alcohol (or other drugs). This might be different between workplaces. Individual workplace policies can provide more guidance on what fit for duty means for that workplace.

### *Parliamentarian and staff policy*

A draft alcohol policy is being designed consistent with the principles, to provide a baseline standard for parliamentarians and their staff. Offices could further build upon the baseline standard policy to suit their individual workplace needs.

Parliamentarians and their staff will be consulted on the draft policy before it is finalised.

### **New human resources entity**

The *Set the Standard* report recommended the establishment of an 'Office of Parliamentarian Staffing and Culture (OPSC)' to provide centralised human resources support to parliamentarians and MoP(S) Act employees.

The Taskforce has been prioritising the implementation of this reform.

# Set the Standard

## Implementation Update



The new entity will be established as an independent statutory agency integrating the functions currently provided by the Parliamentary Workplace Support Service (PWSS). The agency will be named the PWSS instead of the OPSC, to reduce complexity and confusion. It is proposed that the statutory PWSS will have a Chief Executive Officer, an advisory board, and be supported by a consultative committee comprising external independent members, parliamentarians, and MoP(S) Act employees.

The PWSS bill is expected to be introduced into parliament early in the Spring sittings.

### Reforms to the MoP(S) Act

A 2022 review of the MoP(S) Act implemented recommendation 18 of the *Set the Standard* report. The review found that while the MoP(S) Act was broadly fit for purpose, it could be updated to align with developments in employment law and to better support a professional, safe and respectful working environment.

The Taskforce has reviewed the proposed legislative amendments to address the 2022 review's recommendations and modernise the employment framework to better support a safe and respectful workplace.

These legislative amendments are also expected to be introduced into parliament early in the Spring sittings.

### Staff consultation group

A cross-workplace staff consultation group has been established to engage on the *Set the Standard* reforms. Staff representatives include MoP(S) Act, parliamentary department and Press Gallery representatives.

A number of sessions have been held with the staff consultation group since its establishment in April 2023. The group has focussed on the design of the new statutory PWSS, reforms to be implemented by the new PWSS, and legislative reform to support MoP(S) Act employees.

I thank everyone who has participated in the consultation processes, offering invaluable insights and perspectives to shape these reforms. Your engagement has been instrumental in ensuring that the changes implemented are fit for purpose and aligned with the desired outcomes.

### How can you engage with this process?

There are different ways that you can engage.

You may wish to reach out to staff representatives, either on the staff consultation group or through your own workplace staff consultation committee.

I also encourage you to subscribe to the Taskforce website to receive alerts when updates are published. Click on the **SUBSCRIBE** button on the right-hand side of the [PLT website](#).