

KEITH PITT MP

Federal Member for Hinkler



21 October 2022

Ms Natalie Cooke
Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Procedure
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Procedure.Committee.Reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Ms Cooke,

Please find attached my submission into recommendations 10 and 27 of the Set the Standard:
Report on the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces.

If you require any additional information please let me know.

Yours Sincerely,

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INQUIRY INTO SET THE STANDARD: Report on the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces, Recommendations 10 & 27

Recommendation 10: Everyday respect in the parliamentary chambers

The Presiding Officers should review the Standing Orders and unwritten parliamentary conventions, including their application in practice, with a view to:

(a) eliminating language, behaviour and practices that are sexist or otherwise exclusionary and discriminatory

(b) improving safety and respect in the parliamentary chambers.

The Speaker or Deputy Speaker has the responsibility to maintain order in the House of Representatives or the Federation Chamber. This includes ensuring that the debate in the house uses appropriate language. The Speaker has the discretion to curb language and behaviour and should be utilising their position to do so, as they have done since Federation.

The professional behaviour and appearance of all parliamentarians in the House of Representatives should be maintained. This should include professional dress standards as have been expected of parliamentarians in the past. Some current parliamentarians are making a mockery of these dress standards and this should be addressed by the Speaker. The Speaker has the overall responsibility to ensure the smooth running of the House, which includes language, behaviour, and appearance of members of Parliament.

As noted in the Executive Summary of “Set the Standard”, there are limits to disciplining parliamentarians outside of the Chamber. However, there are very real and available consequences for those whose behaviour in the House needs to be addressed and the Speaker should be using these to maintain dignity and order. Ultimately voters will decide who they want to represent them in the Australian Parliament.

This in no way should be used to take away a Parliamentarians’ ability to speak their mind, especially under Parliamentary Privilege. The robust debate of important topics affecting our nation must continue, however disrespectful behaviour does not need to play a part and should be addressed by the Speaker. The ability to debate one’s point of view, and the point of view of one’s electorate, is essential for a parliamentarian. We are not all going to agree. However, there is no need for lively debate to be curtailed by additional legislated behaviour that should already be the responsibility of the Speaker. It is up to the House to appoint a suitably capable Speaker to manage not only the order of business but the debates that ensue.

Recommendation 27: Review of Parliamentary sitting calendar and Order/Routine of Business

The Procedure Committees of the House of Representatives and the Senate should review the Parliamentary sitting calendar and the Order/Routine of Business with a view to enhancing wellbeing, balance and flexibility for parliamentarians and workers in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces.

Respect for the parliamentarians who travel to Canberra to represent their electorate should also include recognition of the distance and time that this takes. Reducing the House hours in Canberra would only truly benefit the members who live in Canberra or in close proximity. For those of us who are away from our families and electorates, we are in Canberra to work. To debate issues affecting our nation; to see progress for all Australians. Shortening the hours Parliament sits simply shortens the debate time and does not allow those who have something to say to have their opportunity. This would also slow the workings of the House and reduce value for money for all taxpayers, with additional sitting weeks potentially needed to achieve the same amount of work.

At the end of the sitting weeks, regional members of Parliament's safety should also be taken into consideration. For some of my colleagues, travel home requires two flights and several hours by car. There is no point attempting to fly home in between double sitting weeks; by the time you land it's time to turn around and go back. Shortening the sitting hours would have a detrimental effect on regional electorates. In my view it is not in the best interest of taxpayers to shorten sitting hours in Canberra further.

Keith Pitt MP

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