



Dr Sophie Scamps MP Submission to Joint Select Committee on Parliamentary Standards

Thank you to the Committee Members and Government for this opportunity to provide a submission to this important topic of inquiry.

During the 2022 election, alongside climate action, integrity was the top issue of concern when I engaged with the community in Mackellar. People were frustrated by the conduct of members of the 46th Parliament, inside parliament, at events and inside electorate offices.

Exemplifying this, the Set the Standard: Report on the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplace (Set the Standard Report) exposed rampant bullying, harassment, and disrespectful behaviour with serious detrimental impacts on staffers and parliamentarians - who were mostly women.

These are but a small number of examples. Others include but are not limited to members not being transparent with disclosures of conflicts of interest including blind trusts, improper online trolling of opposing groups, misuse of public resources and awarding of contracts, and improper influence by outside stakeholders. These actions are eroding trust in government.

According to the 2022 Edelman Trust Barometer, trust that built up in Government over the pandemic period sharply declined in 2022.ⁱ This is not acceptable and is detrimental to a well-functioning society. It is only possible for the government to pursue tough reforms and actions when trust is high. Parliament also sets the culture for the rest of society.

Parliamentary standards (the Standards) for parliamentarians, their staff and the workplace are one measure of a suite of required reforms including, the National Anti-Corruption Commission, that can restore integrity in politics and trust in our representatives.

At present, there are lower professional standards in our Parliament which would be unacceptable in any other workplace in Australia. As a doctor, I had to abide by strict standards. Sporting codes, the legal profession, and businesses also have standards with regulatory agencies and consequences for behaviour that breaches these codes.

The Standards will provide strong ethical norms of behaviour for parliamentarians and their staff. This will reduce the ambiguity of what is and is not appropriate when an individual engages in actions. In view of the evidence presented in the Set the Standard Report and the public demanding action, we must now consider the proper elements of effective Standards.

The Parliament of Australia should consider these design principles when establishing the Standards:

- Robust, legislated Standards with broad scope to cover actions within parliament, electorate offices and external events;
- An independent oversight and complaints receiving body with a low but reasonable bar of referral of matters. The body can also provide confidential advice to Parliamentarians and their staff;
- Powers of inquiry given to the body at the same level as an Auditor-General;

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- A standing joint Parliamentary Committee with a non-government majority to oversee the independent body and to review and provide recommendations for improvement of the Standards;
- Transparent reporting of breaches of the Standards; and
- Clear remedies and sanctions for breaches of the Standards, strong enough to act as a deterrent.

As a starting point, the Independent Member for Indi's *Commonwealth Parliamentary Standards Bill 2020* should be considered as the best practice model. Australia can also look to overseas examples in other jurisdictions like the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and the Australian States and Territories for inspiration – taking the most effective components of each model.

As Parliamentarians and leaders of this nation, we must do better. Legislated Standards are an important component of improving the trust Australians and the people of Mackellar have in their politicians. Members of the 47th Parliament have a responsibility to act. Let us not wait any longer, Standards are overdue.

Sincerely,

Dr Sophie Scamps MP
Member for Mackellar

[Trust Barometer 2022 Australia | Edelman Australia](#)