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4 October 2023

Formal submission to the Standing Committee on Procedure for the inquiry into the maintenance of the standing and sessional orders.

Raising the Standard

On August 7th, the committee's report, *Raising the Standard*, responding to recommendations from Kate Jenkins' *Set the Standard* report was tabled in the House of Representatives.

Three days later, the Parliamentary Workplace Support Service (Consequential Amendments and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2023 was introduced in the House, giving effect to *Set the Standard* recommendations relating to MOPS staff and establishing the Parliamentary Workplace Support Service Advisory Board and the Parliamentary Workplace Support Service Consultative Committee.

That legislation passed through all stages in both Houses of Parliament on September 14th.

By contrast, no action has been taken on the recommendations of the Procedure Committee to address *Set the Standard's* recommendations to improve safety and respect in parliamentary chambers and eliminate sexist, exclusionary and discriminatory language. That action was highlighted by the member for North Sydney on September 7th when she says she was left feeling unsafe on the floor of parliament after an unnamed Coalition male had been "hostile", "aggressive" and "confronting" towards her.

The Speaker acknowledged parliamentarians' behaviour had fallen short of expected standards.

It is clearly time to act on the Procedure Committee's six recommendations responding to *Set the Standard*, especially:

- amending Standing Order 89 to rule out "sexist, racist, homophobic and otherwise exclusionary or discriminatory" language.
- amending Standing Order 94(a) to extend the Speaker's powers to direct a Member to leave the Chamber

- establishing a Standing Committee on Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- and reviewing standing orders to consider introducing gender-neutral alternatives.

If it is sufficiently urgent for the Parliament to pass expeditiously legislation designed to protect MOPS staff then it follows that similar action should be taken without delay to make sure all MPs feel safe in the Chamber, if only as a demonstration to the community that not only do we say what we mean but do as we say.

As I pointed out in my Second Reading speech on the PWSS Bill:

“...harassment and bullying were disproportionately aimed at female staff and MPs, and it was largely driven by power imbalances, gender inequality and exclusion and a lack of accountability.”

“In the past, it's been too easy to say, 'Parliament is a unique workplace; there's no other workplace like it.' This narrative has to stop. By speaking about parliament this way, either intentionally or unintentionally, we excuse antisocial behaviour. Yes, it's the national parliament; it's the imposing house on the hill. But the people who work here have every right to feel safe and respected. The people who work here should have the systems they need to go about their work in a safe and respectful environment—no exceptions.”

And that should include MPs, not only as a reminder to us, but as a demonstration to the community that if we are to demand safety in every other workplace then the House should not be the exception.

I note that the opposition tendered dissenting views I regard to the aforementioned recommendations on gender reforms.

I would contend that until the parliament accepts such recommendations it will be out of step with corporate Australia and much of our broader community and as such, I would encourage the government to embrace the committee's recommendations and in doing so to Set the Standard.

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