

The following is my submission to the *Inquiry into the practices and procedures relating to question time*

I have viewed telecasts of question time over an extended period sufficient to make an informed comment relevant to the inquiry.

My observation is that questions from the opposition (whichever party), are rarely "answered". Rather, there is avoidance, evasion, prevarication and misdirection in the responses I have observed, in a majority of instances. Even with redirects or "points of order", the substantive question addressed to a member invariably remains unaddressed.

Culturally, Australians despise such avoidance and evasion. I certainly do. If a direct question is asked, there is the expectation of a straight, honest and accurate (factual) answer. A failure to provide such an answer casts serious doubts on the integrity and honesty of our government and our process of government. It undermines community confidence in the parliamentary process.

The current conduct of question time in these respects make a farce of the process. As a process to make government accountable to the Australian people, it fails. It reinforces the proverbial question (and response): "How do you know when a politician is lying?" The answer being, "Their lips are moving." There is a juxtaposition, in that Australians (I do) have an expectation of honesty and integrity where actions to the contrary are viewed with the same abhorrence as perjury. Indeed, it is my understanding that misleading the parliament is considered in a similar way. Evasion or avoidance should not be a vehicle to misleading the parliament and consequently the Australian people.

I have corresponded to a previous speaker regarding these issues and the role of the speaker in providing a remedy. While present parliamentary rules may impede such action, the role of the speaker is to chair the discussion. The speaker *must*, in my opinion, be empowered and act to ensure that questions are *reasonably* answered. Specifically, where a direct question is made, the answer *must* specifically respond to and address the question being posed. Notwithstanding that there may be issues of security etc, these are exceptions but should be identified as a reason for a non response up front, rather than an excuse after-the-fact.

Confidence in the parliamentary process and the integrity and accountability of the Australian parliament through a review of question time and the role of the speaker to remove the practice of avoidance, evasion, prevarication and misdirection in responding to questions should be a fundamental outcome of this inquiry.

I am prepared to assist the deliberation of this inquiry in any further way that might be sought.

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