



PARLIAMENT of AUSTRALIA  
HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS**

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Submission No. 12

Ms Julie Owens MP  
Chair  
Standing Committee on Procedure  
Suite R1.43  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Owens

**INQUIRY INTO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMITTEES**

Thank you for your invitation to make a submission the Procedure Committee's inquiry into the effectiveness of House of Representatives Committees.

On behalf of the House Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations, I raise a concern that addresses (d) and (e) of the terms of reference; namely, 'the powers and operations of committees' and 'factors influencing the effectiveness of House committees, including resources and structural issues.

Committees should continue to be adequately resourced to conduct their core business. Among their core functions, is gathering of information and taking account of community views on issues under investigation. To this end committee inquiries require members to undertake, at times, extensive travel to canvass views and test evidence from stakeholders and communities.

The value of travelling to meet stakeholders in their own communities cannot be disputed. It allows committee members to experience the direct context in which concerns of stakeholders are raised and it also contributes an important outreach function of 'taking the Parliament to the people'.

On some occasions, logistics recommend against committee travel because of the remoteness of witnesses and the limited availability of committee members to travel. New technologies such as meeting by telephone or video conference have increasingly overcome difficulties of committee access to witnesses.

An additional option for a committee to take evidence is by inviting a witness to attend a hearing in Canberra. Travel to meet with committees in Canberra is undertaken as a matter of course by large, well resourced organisations but can present difficulties for smaller stakeholders who may be located in regional or remote Australia. *House of Representatives Practice* provides that 'At the discretion of the committee, payments may be made to witnesses. Payments would normally cover only witness' travel and accommodation costs regarded as reasonable.' (p.675)

Besides ensuring that all relevant parties, regardless of location, have the opportunity to address a committee directly, providing support for travel by witnesses may have the benefit of maximising the availability of committee members to hear and test evidence as hearings would normally be conducted in Canberra during weeks in which the House was sitting.

It is important that, where appropriate, payment to witnesses for travel be offered and that the onus is not placed upon the witness to request aid. We encourage the Procedure Committee to endorse the adequate funding for travel by committees and witnesses in the conduct of their inquiries.

Yours sincerely

**SHARRYN JACKSON MP**  
Chair