
The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Report concerning the registration and declaration of Members' interests during 2020

House of Representatives
Committee of Privileges and Members' Interests

February 2021
Canberra

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Membership of the Committee

46th Parliament

Chair Mr Russell Broadbent MP

Deputy Chair Mr Patrick Gorman MP

Members Hon Kevin Andrews MP

Hon Anthony Byrne MP

Hon Damien Drum MP (from 10 June 2020)

Hon Joel Fitzgibbon MP (nominee of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition)

Mr Ian Goodenough MP

Mr Julian Leeser MP (nominee of the Leader of the House)

Mr Llew O'Brien MP (to 24 February 2020)

Hon Warren Snowdon MP

Ms Anika Wells MP

Mr Trent Zimmerman MP

Committee secretariat

Secretary Mr Peter Banson

Registrar of Members' Interests Ms Catherine Cornish

Research Officer Ms Peggy Danaee

Assistant Ms Debbie Hardie

Introduction

1. Under the provisions of standing order 216 by which the committee is established, the committee is required, as soon as practicable after each 31 December, to prepare and table in the House a report on its operations in connection with the registration and declaration of Members' interests during that year.
2. This is the report of the committee for the calendar year 2020.

Responsibilities of the committee

3. Standing order 216 sets out the following terms of reference for the committee:
 - (a) A Committee of Privileges and Members' Interests shall be appointed to:
 - (i) inquire into and report on complaints of breach of privilege or contempt which may be referred to it by the House under *standing order 51* or by the Speaker under *standing order 52*, or any other related matter referred to it by or in accordance with a resolution of the House;
 - (ii) inquire into and report on the arrangements made for the compilation, maintenance and accessibility of a Register of Members' Interests;
 - (iii) consider proposals by Members and others on the form and content of the Register of Members' Interests;
 - (iv) consider specific complaints about registering or declaring interests;
 - (v) consider possible changes to any code of conduct adopted by the House; and
 - (vi) consider whether specified persons (other than Members) ought to be required to register and declare their interests.
 - (b) The committee shall consist of 11 members: the Leader of the House or his or her nominee, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition or his or her nominee and nine other members, five government and four non-government Members. When the Opposition is composed of two parties, the non-government Members shall consist of at least one member of the smaller opposition party.
 - (c) The committee may call for witnesses and documents, but when considering a matter concerning the registration or declaration of Members' interests it must not exercise that power or undertake an investigation of a person's private interests unless the action is approved by at least 6 members of the committee other than the Chair.

- (d) The committee may report when it sees fit, and must report to the House on its operations in connection with the registration and declaration of Members' interests during the year as soon as possible after 31 December each year.
4. A report in accordance with these terms of reference follows.

Arrangements made for the compilation, maintenance and accessibility of the Register

5. Since 1986 arrangements approved by the committee provide that the Register may be inspected, by appointment, between 10 am and 12 noon and 2 pm and 4 pm on working days in the office of the Registrar. In addition the Registrar may grant permission for the Register to be inspected outside of those hours if the Registrar is satisfied that the circumstances surrounding the request warrant the exercise of such a discretion.
6. The publication of the statements of Members' interests on the Parliament's website was implemented at the commencement of the 43rd Parliament and continues. This has been a very significant change to accessibility of the statements.
7. The physical Register was not inspected in 2020. The number of inspections has continued to fall as a result of making the Register available online. The Register's homepage on the Parliament of Australia website was viewed 15,263 times during the year.
8. On 9 September 2019 the Chair tabled a copy of the Register of Members' Interests for the 46th Parliament.
9. At its last meeting in the 45th Parliament the committee resolved to implement online registration of Members' interests from the commencement of the 46th Parliament, and to make the committee's explanatory notes in relation to registrable interests available on the website. This was implemented.
10. On 19 September 2019 the House amended clause (3)(c) of the resolution of the House relating to Registration of Members' interests to remove the requirement for the Committee to table in the House copies of the full register and alterations that are received from Members from time to time. The clause now requires that as soon as possible after the commencement of each Parliament the Registrar of Members' Interests publish online the completed register and also publish online from time to time any notification of alteration of those interests by a Member.

Proposals made by Members and others on the form and content of the Register

11. On 19 September 2019 amendments to the resolutions to replace the term ‘spouse’ with ‘spouse/partner’ were proposed and adopted by the House. The Explanatory Notes for Members were updated accordingly, noting that this change was not considered to change the scope of registration requirements, but to modernise the language. There were no proposals to alter the form and content of the Register in 2020 and no changes to the Explanatory Notes.

Specific complaints made about the registering or declaring of interests

12. In December 2019 the committee received a specific complaint about a Member’s compliance with the House resolutions on registration of Members’ interests. In 2020 the committee considered the complaint and corresponded with the Member whose statement was the subject of the complaint. The Committee did not uphold the complaint and informed the correspondent accordingly.

Changes to any code of conduct

13. The House has not adopted a code of conduct for Members.

Registration of interests by other classes of person

14. No issues were considered in this area during the year.

Russell Broadbent MP
CHAIR