

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Inquiry into Racism, Hate and Violence Against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

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**Submission: Parliamentary Conduct,
Responsibility, and the National Impact
of Behaviour in the House.**

My name is Eileen Clarke, a 52-year-old woman of the Butchulla, Woopaberra, Gunditjmara, and Muljarli nations. I am a grandmother of 10, a community justice leader, founder of a

legislated Community Justice Group, law student, advocate, and a woman who has lived the reality of racism every day of my life.

I write this second submission not from theory, but from lived experience — from the trauma I carry, the systems I have fought, the families I have supported, and the truth I have witnessed.

Racism is not a concept to me. It is my life.

It is my family's life.

It is my community's life.

I submit this to Parliament because racism, hate, and violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is not only ongoing — it is worsening, spreading, and being amplified through systems, institutions, and social media platforms that remain unregulated and unaccountable.

Introduction

This submission is made to address the urgent need for improved conduct, accountability, and cultural responsibility within the Australian Parliament. As elected representatives, Members and Senators hold positions of trust. Their behaviour — both inside and outside the chamber — directly influences public attitudes, social cohesion, and the safety of vulnerable communities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Parliament is not only a law-making institution. It is a national role model.

When Parliament behaves poorly, the nation follows.

Australians expect their representatives to act with dignity, respect, and professionalism. They do not expect to witness behaviour that would be unacceptable in any school, workplace, or community organisation.

Parliament Sets the Standard for the Country

Every Australian workplace is required to uphold standards of:

- respect
- professionalism
- anti-bullying
- cultural safety
- lawful conduct

Yet the public regularly witnesses behaviour in Parliament that contradicts these standards. During live broadcasts of Question Time and Senate debates, Australians see:

- shouting

- insults
- personal attacks
- racially charged exchanges
- disrespect between colleagues

These actions are not private. They are televised, shared online, and replayed across media platforms. The behaviour of Parliament becomes the behaviour of the nation.

When leaders model disrespect, the public imitates it.

Behaviour in Parliament Fuels Racism, Division, and Online Hate

When elected representatives use derogatory language or engage in hostile exchanges, it sends a message that such behaviour is acceptable. Media outlets have reported incidents where abusive language was used during Senate proceedings. These moments are broadcast live and immediately circulate across social media.

The public responds with:

- racist comments
- hate speech
- cyberbullying
- doctored images
- dehumanising cartoons
- targeted abuse toward First Nations people

This pattern is predictable and well-documented.

What happens inside Parliament becomes fuel for what the public posts online.

This creates what many community members describe as a “social media racism frenzy” — a wave of online abuse triggered by parliamentary behaviour.

Parliament Cannot Condemn Cyberbullying While Contributing to It

The Australian Government has acknowledged the harm caused by online bullying, especially for young people. New policies restrict social media access for those under 16 due to the psychological damage caused by online abuse.

However, Parliament itself:

- engages in behaviour that triggers online hate
- fuels social media racism
- contributes to public division

- creates the very environment it claims to protect young people from

This contradiction must be addressed.

If Parliament wants to reduce online bullying, it must first examine its own conduct.

Duty of Care and Public Trust

Members of Parliament are elected by the people. With that privilege comes a duty of care:

- to act responsibly
- to model respectful behaviour
- to uphold the dignity of the office
- to protect the wellbeing of the public
- to ensure cultural safety for all Australians

When politicians behave in ways that incite division, racism, or online hate, they breach that duty of care.

Australians do not vote for representatives to watch them fight, insult each other, or behave in ways that would violate any workplace code of conduct.

The public comes to Parliament for leadership — not conflict.

Impact on First Nations Communities

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are disproportionately affected by:

- racism
- online hate
- political rhetoric
- public division

When Parliament engages in behaviour that targets or undermines First Nations people, it emboldens the public to do the same.

This results in:

- unsafe online environments
- increased racial abuse
- trauma for First Nations women
- social division
- loss of trust in government

Parliament must recognise the national impact of its words and actions.

What Parliament Must Do

To restore public trust and reduce racism and online hate, Parliament must:

1. Implement a mandatory Code of Conduct for all Members and Senators

With clear consequences for breaches.

2. Introduce compulsory cultural competency and anti-racism training

Not optional — required for all elected representatives.

3. Establish an independent oversight body.

To investigate misconduct, bullying, racism, and harassment.

4. Model respectful behaviour at all times towards each other.

Even when political disagreements exist.

5. Acknowledge the influence Parliament has on social media behaviour

And take responsibility for the national impact of its conduct.

Conclusion

Parliament House is the heart of the nation. It is where our Prime Minister and other Politicians are supposed to resolve the problems do not create division. Its behaviour becomes the behaviour of the country. ***If Parliament wants Australians to treat each other with respect, it must lead by example. If Parliament wants to reduce racism, it must stop modelling it. If Parliament wants to reduce online bullying, it must stop triggering it. If Parliament wants unity, it must stop feeding division.***

Australians deserve a Parliament that reflects the values it expects from the people:

Respect. Responsibility. Leadership. Integrity.

This is not optional — it is the duty of every elected representative, should lead as role models to the people.