



The Hon
ALEX HAWKE MP
Federal Member for Mitchell



Friday 7 November 2025

Ms Sharon Claydon MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Procedure
By email: Procedure.Committee.Reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Chair

Thank you for inviting me to make a submission to your inquiry into 'disrespectful behaviour towards other members in the Chamber'.

I am pleased to provide a submission to the Committee in my capacity as the Manager of Opposition Business in the House.

Australians expect their elected representatives to behave in a professional and respectful manner at all times, not least in the Parliament of Australia. The Opposition strongly shares this view. The Opposition is committed to treating every Member with respect and engaging in good faith to carry out our duties on behalf of the Australian people. At the same time, we believe that the Parliament must be a forum for the free exchange of ideas and robust debate. We will not take a backward step in holding the Government to account.

As the Committee would be aware, the conduct of Members has attracted significant attention in recent years. Important work has been progressed by parliamentarians following the release of the *Set the standard: report on the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces* by the then Australian Human Rights Council's Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Kate Jenkins. As well, a significant body of work was completed in the previous Parliament which addressed the same issues as this committee is now inquiring into. The Committee should closely examine what apparent deficiencies were in these extensive programs of work that now warrants, at least according to some Members, revisions to existing powers and procedures. In my view, the cultural change within Parliament caused through these streams of work has done the most to help lift standards of behaviour. I note here, Chair, your own important work in this space over many years.

There has been ongoing discussion between Members about changes to the Standing and Sessional Orders to address the sorts of issues this Committee is inquiring into. Changes to the Standing and Sessional Orders require careful consideration so as to achieve intended outcomes. This Committee would be aware that I introduced a raft of suggested amendments to the Standing and Sessional Orders in July this year. It is not often that a party of government, from Opposition, puts forward such sweeping options for parliamentary reform. It remains disappointing that the Government chose to oppose the Opposition's package of parliamentary reforms.

It has been suggested by some Members that changes to the Standing and Sessional Orders might occasion a greater level of respect amongst Members. Two separate changes were put to the House for consideration on 23 July 2025. I note that these amendments were rejected by the Government. The proposed changes were sensible in sentiment but poorly constructed: they were either too vague and did not meaningfully enhance the Speaker's already well-established and well-understood powers. Generally, it is not always desirable to insert into the highly technical Standing and Sessional Orders matters which increase the scope of the Chair to make judgments on highly subjective matters.

It is mostly well-understood by Members, and noted extensively in *House of Representatives Practice*, that the Speaker from time to time has made statements or rulings about certain matters which have subsequently become the practice of the House without requiring changes to the Standing and Sessional Orders. These procedural traditions are frequently drawn upon during proceedings.

The current Speaker, the Hon Milton Dick MP, on the urging of the Opposition, has advanced the House's approach to dealing with disrespectful behaviour.. The Speaker, on 30 May 2024, accepted a point of order from the Opposition concerning 'undignified personal attacks.' The ruling on this point of order has now been cited on multiple occasions by the current Speaker to ensure a greater level of respect and civility amongst Members. I note that when the Speaker made his initial ruling, the Leader of the House described the situation as "absurd."

While the Opposition remains open to considering appropriate changes to the Standing and Sessional orders from all Members, it is important to note that changing these rules are but one of the many options open to the Committee to reflect on. The Committee ought to consider whether it might be desirable to request from the Speaker the making of some additional, more definitive statements concerning the behaviour of Members and the Speaker's attitudes to them. Another option could see the House pass a motion which concerns Members' behaviour.

Finally, I note that the recent optionality built into the Standing and Sessional Orders, which allows the Speaker to direct a Member to leave the Chamber for up to three hours, is yet to be exercised. This would suggest, at this time, that the current avenues open to the Speaker and other Members through the Standing and Sessional Orders are sufficient for dealing with disorderly behaviour in the Chamber.

If Members feel they are unsure about what constitutes disorderly behaviour and options to address it in the Chamber, then this Committee might consider recommending that Members be invited to attend optional workshops with relevant parliamentary staff to refresh their understanding.

Thank you again for your invitation to make a submission to this inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Alex Hawke MP
Manager of Opposition Business in the House