

## Cover letter to the Committee Secretary

Dear Committee Secretary,

Please find attached a submission to the Standing Committee on Petitions' inquiry into the Standing Orders relating to petitions.

This submission is provided in a constructive spirit and is intended to support the long-term accessibility, credibility, and sustainability of the parliamentary petitions process. It focuses on clarifying the distinction between vexatious conduct and persistent but lawful petitioning, the appropriate role of emerging technologies, and the importance of maintaining equal procedural standing for all citizens regardless of petition scale.

The submission is prepared solely for this inquiry and has not been published or circulated elsewhere.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's review. I would be pleased to provide any further clarification if required.

Thank you for your consideration.



John Crookston JP (Qual) Qld



**Date:** January 2026

# Submission to the Standing Committee on Petitions

## Inquiry into the Standing Orders relating to petitions (48th Parliament)

Submitted by:



John Crookston JP (Qual) Qld



**Date:** January 2026

### Executive Summary Introduction

This submission addresses the suitability of Standing Orders governing petitions, the impact of emerging technologies, and potential amendments to ensure accessibility, credibility, and sustainability.

#### Standing Order 220(a) – Verbatim

On 4 November 2025, pursuant to Standing Order 220(a), the Committee resolved to inquire, report, and provide recommendations on the work of the Standing Committee on Petitions in the 48th Parliament, with reference to:

- the suitability of the current provisions of the standing orders governing the form, submission, and consideration of petitions and e-petitions.
- the impact of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence and automated systems, on the integrity and authenticity of the petition process.
- potential amendments to the standing orders or administrative practices to ensure the petitions process remains accessible, credible, and sustainable; and
- any other related matters the Committee considers relevant.

## Main Submission Introduction

Parliamentary petitions are a foundational democratic mechanism allowing citizens to place matters of concern on the parliamentary record outside electoral cycles.

Repetition of subject matter must be distinguished from vexatious conduct. Vexatious petitions involve abuse or bad faith, whereas repetition often reflects unresolved concern.

Signature volume should not determine admissibility. Procedural equality must be preserved regardless of scale.

Emerging technologies may assist administration but must remain advisory with human oversight.

Accessibility and persistence strengthen democratic legitimacy.

## 1. Executive Summary

This submission supports the preservation and strengthening of the Australian parliamentary petitions system as a **foundational democratic right**, not merely an administrative process.

It argues that current Standing Orders and administrative practices risk **over-constraining participation** by conflating repetition with vexatiousness, and volume with abuse. A democratic system must allow:

- One petition or one thousand petitions
- One signature or millions of signatures

Provided each petition is:

- lawful,
- non-vexatious in intent,
- non-abusive in language, and
- genuinely expressive of citizen concern.

The submission further recommends that emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, be used **to protect accessibility and integrity**, not to suppress participation or centralise gatekeeping power.

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## 2. The Constitutional and Democratic Purpose of Petitions

Petitions are not merely correspondence. They are:

- a formal mechanism for citizens to place matters **on the parliamentary record**,
- a signal of **unresolved public concern**, and
- a safety valve for political pressure outside electoral cycles.

A system that limits citizens to a single petition on an issue, or treats multiple similar petitions as inherently vexatious, risks **silencing persistence**, which has historically been essential to reform.

Persistence is not abuse. Repetition can be a democratic signal.

### 3. Repetition vs Vexatious Conduct

The current rules correctly exclude petitions that are:

- frivolous,
- abusive,
- defamatory, or
- incoherent.

However, **repetition of substance alone should never be grounds for rejection.**

Examples of legitimate repetition include:

- multiple communities raising the same issue independently,
- new evidence prompting renewed petitions,
- evolving policy impacts over time,
- minority concerns sustained despite lack of initial political response.

#### **Recommendation 1:**

Standing Orders should explicitly distinguish between:

- *vexatious intent*, and
- *persistent democratic advocacy*.

Only the former should justify exclusion.

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### 4. Signature Volume and Democratic Equality

A petition with one signature and a petition with one million signatures must both be treated as **procedurally valid**, differing only in political weight, not legitimacy.

Administrative systems should not:

- privilege scale over substance, or
- suppress small or emerging voices in favour of mass campaigns.

#### **Recommendation 2:**

Standing Orders should affirm that **numerical scale does not determine admissibility**, only relevance and compliance with rules.

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## 5. Emerging Technologies and AI

Artificial intelligence and automated systems present both risks and opportunities.

Used poorly, they may:

- over-filter citizen speech,
- introduce opaque rejection criteria,
- centralise decision-making away from elected representatives.

Used properly, they can:

- detect duplicate text without suppressing intent,
- identify abusive language while preserving polite dissent,
- assist clerks without replacing human judgement.

### Recommendation 3:

AI systems, where used, must:

- be advisory only,
  - operate under transparent criteria,
  - never autonomously reject petitions, and
  - preserve a human-review override.
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## 6. Accessibility and Sustainability

The petitions system must remain accessible to:

- individuals without institutional backing,
- citizens outside major cities,
- those with limited digital literacy,
- minority or unpopular viewpoints.

Efficiency must not come at the cost of democratic openness.

### Recommendation 4:

Administrative practices should prioritise accessibility over convenience, and treat volume as evidence of engagement, not system failure.

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## 7. Recommendations Summary

The Committee is respectfully invited to consider the following amendments:

1. Explicitly protect **persistent but polite petitioning** from being deemed vexatious.
2. Affirm that **petition admissibility is independent of signature count**.
3. Require transparency and human oversight for any AI-assisted petition handling.
4. Codify accessibility as a primary objective of the petitions framework.
5. Reaffirm petitions as a **democratic right**, not a discretionary privilege.

## 8. Closing Statement

Democracy is not efficient. It is resilient.

A petitions system that allows citizens to return, repeat, refine, and persist is not broken, it is functioning as intended. The Standing Orders should reflect this reality and ensure that **Australian citizens retain the right to be heard, again and again, respectfully, until Parliament chooses to act.**

**Submitted by:**

Thank you for your consideration.



John Crookston JP (Qual) Qld



**Date:** January 2026

## Appendix A: International Petition Frameworks (Comparative Table)

Jurisdiction	Governing Body	Treatment of Repetition	Signature Thresholds	Language & Conduct Rules	Use of Technology
<b>United Kingdom</b>	UK Parliament	Multiple petitions on similar or identical topics are permitted. Repetition alone is not treated as vexatious. Moderation focuses on intent, clarity, and lawfulness.	Minimum signature threshold applies only to trigger debate or government response, not admissibility. Single-signature petitions are accepted.	Petitions must be respectful, non-defamatory, and lawful. Content moderation targets tone and legality rather than persistence.	Digital petitions system used to manage volume. Automated filtering supports moderation but does not replace human review.
<b>European Union</b>	European Parliament	Repeated or related petitions are explicitly allowed, particularly where issues persist, evolve, or affect multiple petitioners independently.	No numerical threshold for admissibility. Any EU citizen may submit a petition individually.	Focus on relevance to EU competence, respectful language, and factual coherence. Repetition is treated as evidence of unresolved concern.	Digital submission tools assist tracking and categorisation. Human committees retain decision authority.
<b>Canada</b>	Parliament of Canada	Citizens may submit multiple petitions on the same subject. Repetition is not, by itself, grounds for exclusion.	No minimum signature requirement for admissibility. Signature count affects visibility, not validity.	Petitions must be respectful, non-abusive, and comply with form requirements. Persistence is accepted as legitimate civic engagement.	Electronic petition system used for accessibility and verification, with clerks maintaining oversight.

## Appendix B: Lessons for Australia (Standing Order 220(a) Alignment)

Comparative practice supports clarifying repetition versus vexatiousness, affirming equal admissibility regardless of signature count, and ensuring human oversight of automated systems.

### Lessons for Australia (Mapped to Standing Order 220(a))

**Standing Order 220(a)** directs the Committee to consider the *suitability of current provisions*, the *impact of emerging technologies*, and *potential amendments* to ensure the petitions process remains **accessible, credible, and sustainable**. Comparative international practice suggests the following lessons.

#### 1. Suitability of Current Provisions Governing Form, Submission, and Consideration

**Lesson:**

Repetition of subject matter should not be treated as vexatious conduct.

**International Alignment:**

UK, EU, and Canadian petition systems accept multiple petitions on the same issue, provided they are lawful, coherent, and expressed in respectful language.

**Standing Order Implication:**

Clarify within Standing Orders or administrative guidance that:

- repetition alone does not constitute vexatiousness, and
- admissibility should be assessed on conduct and content, not frequency.

#### 2. Impact of Emerging Technologies on Integrity and Authenticity

**Lesson:**

Technology should support integrity without restricting lawful participation.

**International Alignment:**

Comparator jurisdictions use digital systems to:

- verify form and identity,
- assist moderation of language and legality, and
- manage volume without automated exclusion.

**Standing Order Implication:**

Any use of artificial intelligence or automated systems should:

- be advisory rather than determinative,
- operate under transparent criteria, and
- retain mandatory human oversight for petition acceptance or rejection.

#### 3. Accessibility, Credibility, and Sustainability of the Petitions Process

**Lesson:**

Equal procedural standing must be preserved regardless of petition scale.

**International Alignment:**

No comparator jurisdiction uses signature count as a condition of admissibility. Numerical thresholds affect response mechanisms only, not the right to petition.

**Standing Order Implication:**

Affirm that:

- petitions with one signature and petitions with many signatures are equally valid procedurally, and
- accessibility for individuals, regional communities, and minority viewpoints is a core objective of the petitions framework.

**4. Other Relevant Matters (Democratic Resilience)****Lesson:**

Persistent petitioning is a feature of democratic resilience, not a system failure.

**International Alignment:**

Repetition is treated as a signal of unresolved public concern rather than administrative abuse.

**Standing Order Implication:**

The Standing Orders should reflect that:

- democratic persistence is legitimate, and
- the petitions process exists to record continuing concerns, even where Parliament has previously considered similar matters.

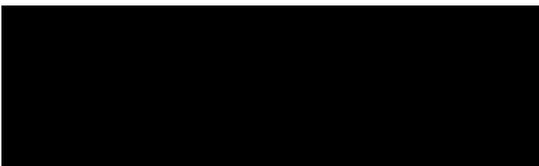
**Summary Alignment with Standing Order 220(a)**

Comparative practice indicates that Australia can strengthen its petitions framework by:

- protecting persistent but polite civic participation,
- using technology to assist rather than restrict access, and
- reaffirming petitions as a democratic right rather than a discretionary administrative process.

**Submitted by:**

Thank you for your consideration.



John Crookston JP (Qual) Qld



**Date:** January 2026