



Allegra Spender MP

FEDERAL MEMBER FOR WENTWORTH

9th December 2025

Committee Secretary

Standing Committee on Procedure

PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

By email: procedure.committee.reps@aph.gov.au

Re: Submission to the Inquiry into disrespectful behaviour towards other members in the Chamber

Dear Committee Members,

I appreciate the opportunity to provide both my views, and those of the Wentworth community regarding the '*Inquiry into disrespectful behaviour of Members in the Chamber*'. This submission is informed by my own experience as a Member of the House of Representatives since May 2022. It is also informed by a community survey I conducted which at the time of writing, was completed by over 1100 people over 7 days.

This survey included three multiple choice questions, and two options for respondents to provide free text responses about their views on parliamentary behaviour.

I believe these views to be significant, and I request that the Committee consider these survey results, alongside my views. The perception of parliamentarians and their conduct will continue to impact the Australian people's faith in our democracy. Continued civic engagement is of upmost importance to the integrity of our electoral system and it is critical that we listen to not only the views of those within the House of Representatives, but those we seek to represent as well.

Behaviour in the House

The behaviour we see in Parliament shapes public trust in our democracy and sets the tone for how disagreement is conducted across our society. Despite the presence of visitors in the galleries and a constant public livestream, mocking, insults and yelling continue largely unpunished.

While I welcomed the Government's implementation of the Behaviour Code for Australian Parliamentarians, which requires parliamentarians to behave with "dignity, fairness, courtesy and respect", the House's adoption of the Code alone is not enough to drive real behavioural change. Because parliamentary behaviour and procedure are dictated by the Standing Orders, any conduct standards must be embedded there to be enforceable.

A basic requirement of dignity, fairness, courtesy and respect in Parliament is neither unreasonable nor unachievable. Yet at present, there is no Standing Order which makes explicit reference to the Behaviour Code for Australian Parliamentarians or to enforceable behaviour



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standards. This means the Code of Conduct cannot be applied during parliamentary debate, and practical change inside the Chamber remains limited.

I have consistently pushed both the Government and the Opposition to follow the recommendations of the 2021 *Set the Standard* Review. This included Recommendation 21, which stipulated that a Code of Conduct should be enshrined within the Standing Orders of both Houses of Parliament. This was not adopted, and I was told by the Government this was unnecessary. Evidence from the community, however, is that this does not stack up. It is necessary.

Recommendation:

With these reflections in mind, my strong recommendation is that the Standing Orders be amended to include this requirement. Specifically, this would mean amending Standing Order 91 to add the following clause:

“A member’s conduct shall be considered disorderly if the member has... behaved in a manner that fails to treat others with dignity, courtesy, fairness and respect.”

Since becoming a Member of Parliament in 2022, I have heard consistently from my own community about their disdain and horror for the behaviour of their elected representatives in Parliament.

I’ve witnessed behaviour in the House which, if seen in a school or workplace, would likely lead to disciplinary action and would see some fired.

Every Question Time, I look up at the gallery to see primary school students watching the behaviour of our colleagues and feel embarrassed that such students are told we are role models – when many parliamentarians are in fact modelling behaviour they should not be replicating.

Respondents to my community survey shared comments about this behaviour, with one constituent remarking: *“Parliament should set an example for the country. At the moment it appears to be a cross between a schoolyard and a blokey pub.”*

Another shared, *“I think it’s likely most of our parliamentarians are genuinely good people with good intent. This behaviour makes me ashamed of them.”*

It has become clear that this sort of behaviour not only sets a bad example but also delays proceedings and takes time away from parliamentarians doing their job. It takes time for the Speaker to discipline Parliamentarians, to quieten down a raucous Chamber – and to follow procedure when a parliamentarian needs to be sent out of the chamber.

The Speaker has shown great dedication to improving behaviour in the House. However, the Speaker can only discipline, suspend or scold a parliamentarian when they are contravening standing orders, which are agreed upon by the major parties.

The 48th Parliament is attempting to solve some of the most significant policy issues Australian governments have seen. We should not let poor behaviour waste any of this precious time.



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Survey respondents reflected on this observation as well, with one sharing: *“Bipartisan approach is what we all people of Australia need. We want to find the right solutions to our increasing problems. There is no time to waste bickering.”* Another told me, *“It seems to me that a great deal more would be achieved if MPs behaved with respect.”*

Most survey respondents provided free text responses about the behaviour they've witnessed within Parliament, with one sharing: *“The behaviour and driving division in the community for the purpose of their own re-election is what is fuelling lack of faith in government. Be better.”*

I've consistently heard from my own community that in an increasingly polarising time, seeing elected representatives disagree with respect and humility is more important to them than ever. There will always be disagreement on fundamental issues, both in and out of Parliament; it is the nature of politics. But kindness and empathy must be woven into the fabric of all our leadership styles. We cannot expect our communities to show such behaviour if we do not lead by example.

This was echoed in one of the comments left by a survey respondent, *“The values of mutual respect and kindness must be enforced. It is possible to disagree respectfully.”*

Table 1: How important is parliamentary behaviour to you?¹

Response	Survey (% of respondents)
Not important	1%
Somewhat important	11%
Unsure	0%
Very important	88%

Table 2: The Parliamentary Code of Conduct sets four key values: dignity, fairness, courtesy and respect. Do you feel that the behaviour inside the chambers of Parliament reflect these values?²

Response	Survey (% of respondents)
No	63%
Sometimes	35%
Unsure/haven't watched enough to say	1%
Yes	2%

¹ This question was a multiple-choice question, with respondents only able to select one answer.

² This question was a multiple-choice question, with respondents only able to select one answer.



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Question Time & Answers

Question Time is the most watched part of the parliamentary day. School students file into the galleries to watch it live, and Australians across the country turn on their TVs expecting to see accountability in action. Instead, too often they see yelling, mockery and name-calling.

I consistently hear calls to turn Question Time into “Answer Time”. Because answers only need to be technically “relevant”, rather than directly responsive, governments can evade scrutiny and substitute accountability with political point-scoring. This leaves both constituents and parliamentarians justifiably frustrated at a moment that should be about transparency and trust.

Many constituents also expressed frustration about the amount of ‘Dorothy Dixer’ questions, with several survey respondents noting that they wished Dorothy Dixers did not exist at all or were at least reduced in number: *“Dorothy Dixers need to end and real debate needs to be had. We can't get anything done because it decends [sic] into party line agreements.”*

When I asked a Question in Question Time about the need for more specifications to make answers more prominent and useful; I received comments, calls and emails from many Australians who wanted to share their agreement with me, even if they may not have agreed with me on other matters.

While I appreciate this inquiry is about respectful behaviour in the Chamber, choosing to not answer the question deliberately can be disrespectful. I urge the Committee to consider solutions to solve this issue, as it is clear that the current guidance around relevance does not meet community expectations and can lead to disrespect and point-scoring.

There are many options on the table about how to solve this issue, whether it be that parliamentarians are required to directly answer a question or whether a fact-based question can be put on notice at the time of being asked with a time limited requirement to respond.

Table 3: How satisfied are you with how often questions asked during Question Time are answered?³

Response	Survey (% of respondents)
Very dissatisfied – questions are rarely answered	53%
Somewhat dissatisfied – questions are often not answered	34%
Unsure / haven't watched enough to say	3%
Somewhat satisfied – questions are often answered	9%
Very satisfied – questions are always answered	1%

³ This question was a multiple-choice question, with respondents only able to select one answer.



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Conclusion

Disrespectful behaviour towards other members in the chamber is unacceptable. Poor conduct sets a damaging example, undermines our ability to model how to disagree well, and delays the House from getting on with the important work we were elected to do.

I urge the Committee to seriously consider these recommendations and to take meaningful action to lift standards of conduct. Our Parliament should be a place we are proud for students to observe, not embarrassed by. We should be leading by example.

Kind regards,

Allegra Spender MP

Independent Member for Wentworth