



Inquiry into disrespectful behaviour towards other members in the Chamber

Parliamentary Workplace Support Service submission

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1. Introduction

The Parliamentary Workplace Support Service (PWSS) was initially established as a 24-hour counselling service in response to recommendations of a review conducted by Ms Stephanie Foster PSM – Review of the Parliamentary Workplace: Responding to Serious Incidents. A further independent review into Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces, led by the Australian Human Rights Commission highlighted systemic issues and risk factors in workplace culture, safety, and accountability across parliamentary settings, and called for the creation of a dedicated body to support cultural reform and provide independent, trauma-aware services to all parliamentary workplace participants.

Formally established as a statutory agency on 1 October 2023 through the *Parliamentary Workplace Support Service Act 2023* (PWSS Act), the PWSS in its final form was designed to deliver human resource services to parliamentarians and their staff, and to offer broader supports in all Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces (CPWs). These services include HR advice, training, counselling and support, complaint resolution, and work health and safety services. The PWSS is charged with promoting respectful workplace conduct, supporting CPW workers to thrive in their roles, and contributing to systemic improvements that foster safer, more inclusive work environments.

In October 2024 the PWSS Act was amended to establish the Independent Parliamentary Standards Commission (IPSC), an independent workplace investigatory body for Australian Commonwealth parliamentary workplace participants. As the IPSC is part of the PWSS but performs a separate independent function, the Chair Commissioner of the IPSC has provided commentary that is attached to this submission as **Appendix A**.

Robust debate is a cornerstone of democratic practice but should not come at the expense of dignity, safety, or respect. Parliamentarians must be able to have a vigorous exchange of ideas without resorting to abuse, insults and intimidation.

For some time, it has been clear that a number of parliamentarians find behaviour in the Chamber and in other parliamentary settings to be confronting, exclusionary, or inconsistent with the standards expected in other professional settings. This can have a significant and harmful effect on those who are subjected to this behaviour, with such effects continuing outside of the chamber to the professional and personal lives of parliamentarians and the staff who support them. Parliamentary proceedings are amongst the most visible political interactions and public perceptions of parliament, parliamentarians and the strength of our democracy are directly impacted by the behaviour seen in parliament. When behaviour is not aligned with broader societal and community expectations, and in fact doesn't even align with the codes set by parliament itself, the efforts to support cultural change more broadly are significantly undermined, as is respect for the parliament and those working in it. This in turn leads to a slow but inevitable decline in the strength of democracy, including when those who may have much to contribute are less inclined to participate in a parliament that may seem to them (at least on the face of it) more rude than robust.

This submission supports the view expressed in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's research report that 'in a modern parliamentary workplace, there is less justification for completely quarantining behaviour in the chamber from the workplace standards that apply beyond it.' It is difficult to mount a strong argument for why the cultural and behavioural expectations that govern other parts of the parliamentary workplace should not extend into the Chamber, albeit in a way that continues to preserve the ability for parliamentarians to conduct robust debate and questioning, and protect them from the consequences of speaking out. Not doing so risks undermining efforts to build a respectful and inclusive culture across the institution. This inquiry is timely not only for the House of Representatives but also for the Australian Senate, who may also be considering similar matters.

Leonie McGregor
Chief Executive Officer

2. Responses to specific questions for the PWSS

Request from Chair of the Procedure Committee

The committee would welcome views from the PWSS on:

- *What are the protocols when a matter overlaps with the chamber?*
- *What are the protocols when a matter relates to parliamentary committees?*
- *Are there any insights into useful training programs to ensure those in the Speaker's Chair have the skills to respond to incidents of bullying and harassment in the Chamber?*

2a. What are the protocols when a matter overlaps with the Chamber?

The PWSS can only review complaints about alleged misconduct if the conduct occurred between current or former Commonwealth parliamentary workplace participants in the course of performing their duties in a CPW. Conduct that occurs within parliamentary chambers are not within the PWSS's jurisdiction because parliamentary privilege protects conduct that occurs during formal proceedings in the chambers. This aligns with an observation in the [Set the Standard Report](#) that allegations of misconduct on the floor of a Chamber should be raised with the relevant Presiding Officer in the first instance.

In the event that matters were raised with the PWSS that occurred both in-Chambers conduct and out-of-Chambers conduct, the PWSS would need to consider the specific details of the conduct but would most likely only deal with conduct that occurred outside of parliamentary proceedings to avoid any overreach. It is also worth noting that the PWSS does not have the power to conduct investigations or make findings of fact in relation to conduct, so its involvement would be to facilitate local resolution pathways, where the goal would be to reach an outcome that satisfies involved parties and supports the safety and performance of the workplace and maintenance of respectful professional relationships.

2b. What are the protocols when a matter relates to parliamentary committees?

The PWSS considers any conduct occurring within a parliamentary chamber or other parliamentary proceeding (such as a hearing being held in a committee room or offsite) while the sittings are open as subject to privilege and therefore PWSS is prevented from investigating complaints in these settings. The PWSS may, however issue guidance or advice in relation to the codes of conduct (for example, the behaviour codes for CPW's) relevant to these settings.

2c. Are there any insights into useful training programs for the Speaker's panel?

The PWSS understands that both houses of Australian Parliament have relieving panels of members or senators who are rostered throughout sitting weeks to take the Chair in the House when the Speaker or President is not available. Senior officials from the relevant chamber will provide comprehensive procedural training to prepare them for these duties. They will also be on hand during proceedings to provide specific advice to respond to behaviour or procedural rulings. However, although an understanding of the Standing Orders provides relieving Chairs with sound procedural and legislative knowledge (including sanctions available to them to warn, name and suspend), some members may not feel confident managing and responding to disrespectful behaviour that is not in clear contravention of the standing orders.

Informed by an understanding of the specific challenges that Chairs and relieving Chairs encounter and the types of behaviour that they are seeking to improve in the Chamber, the PWSS could provide a customised training program focused on:

- familiarisation with the behaviour codes and standards that apply to parliamentarians and an applied understanding of their applicability to different types of exchanges
- strategies for identifying and responding to disrespectful behaviour, bullying and harassment from a position of leadership and authority
- de-escalation techniques to predict and discourage disrespectful behaviour, diffuse tension, and restore order and safety to debate
- communication skills to project fairness, authority, and uphold consistently high standards of conduct.

Training could be provided by the PWSS to temporary chairs or speakers whether or not the Standing Orders are amended to either give the Speaker explicit authority to intervene in response to conduct that does not align with the behaviour codes and standards. It could include strategies to respond to conduct that does not afford other members with dignity, courtesy, fairness, and respect. Training is aimed at empowering Speakers with confidence to identify, call out and respond to disrespectful behaviour within their powers under the existing Standing Orders.

3. Responses to the inquiry terms of reference

In the following section, the PWSS provides comment that relates specifically to this inquiry's terms of reference.

Inquiry terms of reference

To inquire into and report on approaches to address disrespectful behaviour in the Chamber, in particular:

- *The impact of any change to the standing orders;*
- *The preferred wording of any change to the standing orders;*
- *Other avenues to address disrespectful behaviour in the Chamber, including approaches taken in other parliaments.*

3a. The impact of changes to the standing orders

The PWSS would commend changes to the Standing Orders that more explicitly authorise the Speaker to uphold the behaviour codes in the parliamentary environment by their consistent intervention (including through warnings, rulings and sanctions) when disrespectful behaviour occurs. Moderating disrespectful behaviour more consistently and transparently would counter perceptions of bias (including accusations of partisan bias), go some way towards addressing negative views about the calibre and conduct of politicians held by the community and reinforce the legitimacy of parliamentary processes. Having the same behavioural expectations across all aspects of parliamentarians' work – inside and outside of the chambers – would provide clarity and consistency around what is expected of them at all times and drive improved behaviours.

Enforcing behavioural standards in the chambers would send a clear message: disrespect will not be tolerated in the workplace. It would strengthen public trust and confidence in Parliament and set a higher bar for civil discourse. It would also allow parliamentarians to showcase their professionalism and skills—rewarding the ability to debate with conviction on the topic at hand without devolving into personalised or intimidatory attacks.

The change would also give greater clarity to the Speaker or President, giving them the authority and language to act decisively without relying on subjective judgement. Over time, the cumulative effect of enforcement of behaviour codes for parliamentarians inside and outside of the Chamber, would foster a more inclusive and diverse environment in which all participants can contribute without fear of hostility or exclusion. This positive change will make representative political roles more palatable to a broader range of citizens and enrich the quality of representation and debate in the nation's parliament.

However well-intentioned changes may be, the PWSS also cautions that addressing disrespectful behaviour in parliament will not be as simple as introducing the proposed amendments to the standing orders. If behavioural standards are not clearly defined or consistently applied, their introduction could suppress legitimate debate and discourage open discussion. The line between what constitutes free and open debate and what constitutes discrimination can move with time and shifting community standards. It would be important both in the wording of any amendment to standing orders and in the daily actions of the Speaker that this line is clearly drawn and consistently held. Overreach could undermine parliamentary privilege and freedom of speech, damage trust in parliamentary processes, and lead to orders being misused as a political tool to shut down dissent and debate rather than address real misconduct.

The PWSS would support an insertion to the Standing Orders to maintain alignment with the behaviour codes if it is accompanied by robust training for the Speaker and relieving members or senators. This training should be informed by the work of the PWSS and IPSC in dealing with complaints and referrals about workplace conduct and should focus on objective assessment of whether conduct is discriminatory or disrespectful and intervention, to avoid overreach or stifling parliamentary debate.

3b. The preferred wording of changes to standing orders

The PWSS understands that the committee is considering a proposal by crossbench members of parliament to revise the standing orders of the House of Representatives to give the speaker greater and more explicit authority to intervene in response to behaviour by parliamentarians that would, in any other context, be in breach of behaviour codes that have been endorsed by both houses of parliament and given effect in the PWSS Act. That is, to supplement Section 91 of the Standing Orders (below) with clause 7 of the Behaviour Code for Australian Parliamentarians.

House of Representatives Standing Order 91: Power of Chair to enforce order

A Member's conduct is considered disorderly if the Member has:

- *persistently and wilfully obstructed the House;*
- *used objectionable words, which he or she has refused to withdraw;*
- *persistently and wilfully refused to conform to a standing order;*
- *wilfully disobeyed an order of the House;*
- *persistently and wilfully disregarded the authority of the Speaker; or*
- *been considered by the Speaker to have behaved in a disorderly manner*

Behaviour Code for Australian Parliamentarians

Clause 7: Parliamentarians must treat all those with whom they come into contact in the course of their parliamentary duties and activities with dignity, courtesy, fairness and respect.

The PWSS supports an additional point being added to the list of members' conduct considered disorderly: 'failed to treat others with whom they come into contact during parliamentary proceedings with dignity, fairness, and respect'.

3c. Other approaches to address disrespectful behaviour in the Chamber, including approaches taken in other parliaments

Legislatures within Australian and around in other Commonwealth nations around the world are increasingly recognising that traditional practices and protections for parliamentarians to act with impunity are at odds with modern expectations around workplace conduct. Improving behaviour and performance within these institutions is seen as one way to restore public trust and strengthen democratic institutions. This reflects a growing acceptance that accountability, fairness, and respectful conduct can be achieved through clearer standards and enforcement mechanisms without impeding robust debate. Behaviour is often guided or regulated by a behaviour code or standard (for conduct outside of Chambers) and Standing Orders or other rules and guidelines (for conduct during parliamentary proceedings), with varying approaches to enforcement through independent bodies, presiding officers, party leaders, and parliamentary committees.

The Review of Bullying, Sexual Harassment and Sexual Misconduct in NSW Parliamentary Workplaces (the Broderick Review) reported that it found a culture of bullying, sexual harassment, and misconduct with one in three parliamentary workers reporting such experiences over a five-year period. The review identified power imbalances between MPs and staff, a lack of accountability, and inadequate reporting mechanisms as key enablers of harmful behaviour. It recommended a range of actions to address these issues including independent complaint pathways, strengthened codes of conduct, trauma-informed reporting systems, and leadership-driven cultural reform.

Subsequently, in July 2024, the New South Wales Legislative Council Procedure Committee released a report recommending updates to the standing orders to promote respectful behaviour in the chamber, including in relation to sexism and racism. It drew on the abovementioned Broderick Review as well as international example to recommend reforms that would foster a safer and more inclusive parliamentary environment. The report was initiated in response to growing concerns about the culture of parliamentary debate and the need to align chamber conduct with community expectations and legal obligations under the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*, *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977*, and work health and safety legislation. Key proposals included amending Standing Orders to explicitly require respectful behaviour, empowering the President to make rulings on conduct, and clarifying the limits of parliamentary privilege when it comes to offensive language. The committee considered multiple options but ultimately recommended stronger wording in the standing orders and a cultural shift toward accountability and professionalism in parliamentary debate and committed to commissioning an independent evaluation after two to three years to assess progress implementing the recommendations.

Internationally, parliaments in the United Kingdom (UK), New Zealand, and Canada have taken various approaches to addressing disrespectful behaviour in parliamentary workplaces, both within and outside of Chambers.

The UK moved from self-regulation to independent oversight in the 1990s. A Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards was established as an independent officer in the House of Commons in 1995 and a code of conduct was added in 1996. These standards initially focused on misconduct such as bribery and improper handling of conflicts but were expanded in 2018 to encompass sexism and sexual misconduct.

Behaviour in the UK House of Commons is governed by both formal rules and conventions, including the Standing Orders and the Rules of Behaviour and Courtesies in the House of Commons. The latter rules are a formal set of guidelines issued by the Speaker and Deputy Speakers to maintain order, fairness and respect during proceedings. They prohibit personal insults, accusations of deliberate falsehoods and unparliamentary expressions, and also outline expectations of 'general courtesy' that must be afforded to other parliamentarians. Members of the House of Lords are required to comply with a Code of Conduct that prescribes rules against bullying, harassment, and sexual misconduct.

In New Zealand, a series of independent reviews were undertaken into the culture of the parliamentary workplace, with their findings referred to as the Francis Reports. The first major report, released in 2019, reported widespread issues including bullying, harassment, and sexual assault. It made 85 recommendations to improve workplace safety, accountability, and culture. New Zealand subsequently introduced a Parliamentary Code of Conduct to shift norms and expectations around behaviour, aligned with principles of respect, integrity and

accountability. Members are protected when speaking in the House, but this does not exempt them from behavioural standards – the Speaker has discretion to intervene (through Speaker’s rulings or investigations by the Privileges committee) if member behaviour is deemed to have undermined the dignity or order of the house.

Rules of Order and Decorum: Canadian House of Commons Procedure and Practice

‘Members are expected to show respect for one another and for viewpoints differing from their own; offensive or rude behaviour or language is not tolerated, and emotions are to be expressed verbally rather than acted out. Thus, the right to speak is tempered by the written rules of the House which, in general, impose limitations on what may be said and when, by whom and for how long.’

Behaviour in Canadian parliamentary debates is governed by a combination of standing orders, Speaker’s rulings, and parliamentary conventions. The Rules of Order and Decorum aim to balance freedom of speech with a requirement to conduct debates and other proceedings in a civil manner. The Speaker is responsible for maintaining order in the Chamber by ensuring that the House’s rules and practices are respected, including rules governing the civility of remarks directed towards both Houses, individual Members and Senators, representatives of the Crown, judges and courts. These rules aim to balance robust debate with respectful conduct, ensuring that Parliament functions effectively and maintains public trust.

It may be prudent for the inquiry to seek direct information from other jurisdictions in Australia and internationally about what they have considered or implemented to address disrespectful behaviour in the chambers, and any lessons learned as a result, to inform Australia’s approach.

4. Further considerations in support of addressing disrespectful behaviour in the Chamber

Parliament House is not only the heart of Australia’s parliamentary democracy, it is also the most high-profile workplace in the country with proceedings open to allow members of the public to visit the chambers, watch live on-line or later on-demand.

Recent findings from the McKinnon Index (2025) underscore the urgency of cultural reform in parliamentary settings. While 76% of Australians believe democracy is the best form of government, only 54.5% are satisfied with how it functions. Trust in federal politicians is markedly low at 35.9%, and 62% of Australians perceive corruption as a problem in government. These figures highlight the importance of visible improvements in parliamentary behaviour to help rebuild trust and confidence in democratic institutions. For more information, see the McKinnon Index: <https://mckinnon.co/index>.

The PWSS is uniquely positioned to provide insight into the wide-ranging impacts of disrespectful behaviour in parliamentary settings. The following sections of this submission are based on observations from the PWSS through its direct interface with parliamentarians, their staff, and other CPW participants through the range of services it provides, including HR advice and support, work health and safety guidance and incident/hazard management, training and professional development, counselling, and the handling of complaints about conduct. These comments relate more to the compelling need to do something and less to the specific mechanisms for preventing disrespectful behaviour.

4a. Work health and safety

Parliamentary Chambers are unique environments characterised by high stakes, high pressure, and high levels of interest from the public. They are also steeped in tradition – demonstrated by the customs and procedures that reflect their historical, symbolic and constitutional roles – and they are often cautious about change. At the same time, parliaments around the world have realised they need to modernise their practices to be more representative, transparent, accountable and inclusive. They are also increasingly recognised as workplaces,

which means that all parliamentarians, staff and supporting workers are entitled to work, health and safety protections, including the prevention of psychosocial injury or harm.

Parliamentary privilege may protect parliamentarians and leaders from legal action and interference, but it does not exempt them from work health and safety obligations under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (WHS Act), even during debates, committee work or other chamber activities. There is not a single Commonwealth department or agency responsible for the primary duty of a person conducting a business or undertaking to ensure the health and safety of workers or other persons (eg. visitors) in their business or undertaking, so far as is reasonably practicable. Rather several agencies concurrently share these duties and the responsibility for discharging the duty overlaps.

As ‘Officers’ under the WHS Act, senior leaders such as Clerks, Department Heads and Presiding Officers have a duty of due diligence, which means they must understand work health and safety matters (including psychosocial risks such as bullying, harassment, excessive workload, unsafe power dynamics, and unclear expectations) and ensure that appropriate resources and processes are in place.

4b. Risk to parliamentarians’ mental health

Psychosocial hazards can be amplified in parliamentary settings by additional factors such as the adversarial nature of politics, public scrutiny, and the high-stakes decision-making environment. Researchers have referred to a ‘taxonomy’ of stressors – both unique and universal – that impact upon politicians. A cross-national study in the UK, Australia, New Zealand and Norway found that a higher proportion of parliamentarians than the general public experience stalking, harassment and intrusive or aggressive behaviours,¹ and a recent article by a 40-year veteran political reporter in the UK referred to parliamentary traditions as a ‘hiding place for prejudices and behaviours that would be dismissed as abusive and unprofessional in any other workplace.’ In Australia and other parliaments around the world, there is diminishing tolerance for parliaments to harbour and protect behaviours that harm not only individual participants but democracy itself.

‘A taxonomy of institutional, societal, psychological and political and personal stressors ... characterise politicians’ work lives, including adversarial political culture and combative debate styles, abuse and harassment, loss of privacy and personal boundaries, fear of embarrassment, and partisan/ideological conflict.’

Matthew Flinders, Ashley Weinberg, James Weinberg, Marc Geddes, Richard Kwiatkowski, *Governing under Pressure: The Mental Wellbeing of Politicians*, Parliamentary Affairs, Volume 73, Issue 2, April 2020, Pages 253–273, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsy046>

When left unmanaged, psychosocial hazards can significantly impact mental health and politicians are no less susceptible to harm from the behaviour they encounter in the workplace than other occupations. International research has found strong evidence to indicate that parliamentarians experience poor mental health than among the general population and than comparative occupational and sociodemographic groups². Stress, anxiety, depression, burnout, and even post-traumatic stress experienced by politicians can impair concentration, decision-making, interpersonal relationships, and risk judgment—functions that are critical to their role and, by extension, to the functioning of a healthy democracy.

1 James DV, Farnham FR, Sukhwai S, et al. Aggressive/intrusive behaviours, harassment and stalking of members of the United Kingdom parliament: a prevalence study and cross-national comparison. *J Forensic Psychiatry Psychology* 2016; 27:177–97. doi:10.1080/14789949.2015.1124908

2 Poulter D, Votruba N, Bakolis I, et al. Mental health of UK Members of Parliament in the House of Commons: a cross-sectional survey. *BMJ Open* 2019; 9:e027892. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2018-027892

‘Decision-making capacity and the ability to concentrate, perform complicated tasks, successfully interact interpersonally, and to apply appropriate risk aversion, are all linked to one’s mental health. Given the profound impact of Parliamentary decisions and performance on the wellbeing and welfare of their constituents, it follows that the mental health of Parliamentarians may ultimately influence the health of our democracies.’

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. **Mental Health Toolkit for Commonwealth Parliaments**. By Dr. Leandri Hattingh. London: Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Headquarters Secretariat, 2022.
https://www.cpahq.org/media/cczlingr/mentalhealth_toolkit_final_web.pdf

4c. Promoting robust debate

Contrary to the view that regulating behaviour can be equated with restricting parliamentary debate, the PWSS sees abusive behaviour during proceedings as significantly undermining the quality and integrity of democratic discourse. The PWSS recognises the role of robust debate in democracy, but notes that there is a difference between robust debate (attacking the ‘ball’) and disrespectful behaviour (attacking the ‘player’). Should parliamentarians engage in personal attacks, intimidation, or discriminatory language, it shifts the focus away from policy and constructive dialogue, reducing debate to point-scoring, diversion and spectacle. This not only degrades the deliberative function of Parliament but also discourages open and honest participation, especially from those who may feel vulnerable or targeted.

Such behaviour can also have broader societal consequences. It contributes to a toxic political culture that normalises incivility and polarisation, which in turn affects public perception and trust in democratic institutions. Abuse in the chamber can deter individuals from entering or remaining in public life, fearing for their safety or mental wellbeing. It also risks silencing voices, as elected representatives may avoid controversial topics to protect themselves from further abuse. Ultimately, this diminishes the diversity and robustness of democratic debate; the result of which is a less inclusive and effective decision-making environment.

‘Standing for election and representing your community is something anyone should be able to aspire to. But the current climate of toxic political discourse is having a corrosive effect on our democracy, and is discouraging people from participating in our democratic process.’

Hoyle, Lindsay. **Speaker’s Conference Calls for Urgent Action to End Abuse of MPs and Candidates**. UK Parliament, 27 Oct. 2025, <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/741/speakers-conference-2024/news/209904/speakers-conference-calls-for-urgent-action-to-end-abuse-of-mps-and-candidates/>.

4d. Flow-on impacts to other staff

Disrespectful behaviour in parliamentary chambers doesn’t stay confined to the chamber—it affects others, including parliamentary staff. When a member is repeatedly targeted or when poor conduct escalates, staff often experience increased stress and anxiety. Their morale and sense of safety can be undermined, especially when aggressive or harassing behaviour spills over into electorate offices or public events.

Staff are frequently left to manage the fallout. They may face a surge in phone calls, emails, and in-person visits from constituents reacting to what they’ve seen or heard in the chamber. This disrupts their ability to focus on core responsibilities and adds to their emotional workload. It shifts attention away from meaningful policy debate and engagement with the needs and perspectives of constituents and in the community, reinforces negative perceptions of politics as combative and self-serving. Alternately, when elected representatives are silenced or avoid difficult topics to protect themselves from abuse, constituents may feel unrepresented.

Leading for Change: Independent Review of Bullying, Sexual Harassment and Sexual Misconduct in NSW Parliamentary Workplaces 2022

‘You only have to look at how [Members] behave towards each other in Question Time and how such behaviour is celebrated to see how that culture is set from the top, which then flows down to the staff and others in Parliament.’

Quote from consultation participant

Equally, when poor behaviour is normalised in parliamentary chambers, it is reasonable to assume that it sets a tone that can influence how staff behave and interact with others. If parliamentarians engage in personal attacks or disrespect, it can signal that such conduct is acceptable, lowering standards across the broader parliamentary workplace.

Appendix A: Independent Parliamentary Standards Commission submission

Ms Sharon Claydon MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Procedure
PO Box 6021
Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

21 November 2025

Dear Ms Claydon

The Independent Parliamentary Standards Commission (IPSC) welcomes this important inquiry into disrespectful behaviour in the Chamber. Established under the *Parliamentary Workplace Support Service Act 2023*, the IPSC provides an independent mechanism for investigating conduct complaints involving those who work in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces. Specifically, the IPSC is responsible for investigating and determining disciplinary sanctions for misconduct which breaches the Behavioural Codes and Standards for Parliamentarians, their staff and people that work in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces.

Although parliamentary privilege limits the IPSC's jurisdiction over conduct during formal proceedings of parliament, we remain committed to supporting cultural reform and ensuring accountability for behaviour outside those proceedings. We are pleased to collaborate with the Committee and share insights from our work to help foster a respectful and inclusive parliamentary workplace.

Regards

Rachel Hunter AO, PSM
Chair Commissioner
Independent Parliamentary Standards Commission

Submission by the IPSC

Under the *Parliamentary Workplace Support Service Act 2023* (the Act) and its amendments establishing the IPSC, there are important limitations regarding the investigation of conduct that occurs inside parliamentary Chambers. The IPSC investigates breaches of the Behaviour Codes and Standards. It can investigate misconduct such as bullying, harassment, assault, and breaches of the Behaviour Codes and can impose sanctions or refer serious breaches to the relevant Privileges Committee.

The IPSC provides two primary pathways for matters to come before it: complaints and referrals. Referrals may be made by third parties, including Presiding Officers, party leaders, or the Chief Executive Officer of the PWSS, where they become aware of potential breaches of the Behaviour Codes or Standards. This recognises that misconduct may be raised either through first-hand reporting or through observation and leadership oversight.

Complaints may be lodged by an eligible person who is or was directly affected by the alleged conduct. A person may be 'affected' by conduct of which they were the target, or by conduct they have witnessed. Eligible complainants include parliamentarians, staff employed under the *Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984*, designated workers such as volunteers or interns, and other participants who work predominantly in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces (for example, members of the press gallery or COMCAR drivers). The complainant must have been a Commonwealth parliamentary workplace participant at the time of the alleged conduct. It is not uncommon for the IPSC to receive complaints from members of the public following inappropriate behaviour by a parliamentarian. This reflects a significant community expectation that the country's most visible workplace should be setting an example for the nation and ensure consistency with modern employment frameworks, including Work Health and Safety laws.

What are the protocols when a matter overlaps with the Chamber?

The key distinction between what the IPSC can and cannot investigate is whether the conduct occurred during parliamentary proceedings, because these interactions are protected by parliamentary privilege. Any conduct that forms part of official parliamentary proceedings is outside of the IPSC's jurisdiction.

Since the IPSC commenced operations, matters have been raised due to alleged conduct that has occurred during parliamentary proceedings. On these occasions, the IPSC did not deal with the matter as it falls outside of the legislated remit. Conduct that engages parliamentary privilege is dealt with by the respective Houses of Parliament in accordance with their procedures.

Should matters be raised with the IPSC that include conduct that has occurred both inside and outside of parliament, the IPSC would only investigate allegations that do not form part of proceedings in Parliament. An IPSC Commissioner is able to confer with a Presiding Officer (or a person authorised by a Presiding Officer, such as a Clerk) to assist with determining whether conduct forms part of proceedings in Parliament.

What are the protocols when a matter relates to parliamentary committees?

The IPSC cannot investigate conduct that forms part of proceedings in Parliament. This includes debates, speeches, question time, voting, and any other formal parliamentary business conducted within the chambers. It also includes parliamentary business conducted in other physical locations, such as Parliamentary Committee hearings that are conducted in committee rooms.

Conduct that occurs outside of the place of parliamentary business (for example, in the corridors or offices or suites of Parliament House) could potentially be investigated by the IPSC, even if it is while proceedings are underway, occurs between parliamentarians and relates to parliamentary business. Similarly, if conduct were to occur in a physical location such as the Chamber or a parliamentary committee room but outside of official proceedings (that is, before the Presiding Officer Speaker takes the Chair or after the Speaker has declared the House adjourned) this may be within the IPSC's remit to investigate. As noted previously, the IPSC is able to confer with the Presiding Officer to determine if a matter is excluded due to Parliamentary Privilege or not.

Are there any insights into useful training programs for the Speaker's panel?

The IPSC is not a provider of training but does have legislated powers to recommend that respondents who have been the subject of a conduct complaint undertake training or professional development and can also impose sanctions including the requirement to undertake training or professional development within a specified period.

**Submission into inquiry into disrespectful behaviour towards
the members in the Chamber**



IPSC Commissioners recognise that knowledge and capabilities are fundamental to improving workplace behaviours and that skills in setting and upholding standard – and responding to unacceptable behaviours – are important leadership capabilities. Accordingly, we recommend that the inquiry seek and consider advice from the PWSS on training that could support the Speaker’s panel to manage and respond to behaviour during parliamentary proceedings in line with behaviour codes and standards or any new expectations that may be set by amendment to the Standing Orders.