

THE HON MILTON DICK MP
Speaker of the House of Representatives

26 February 2026

Ms Jodie Belyea MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Belyea

Submission to the Inquiry into the Standing Orders relating to petitions

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Standing Committee on Petitions: Inquiry into the Standing Orders.

I make this submission in my capacity as the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Making parliament and democracy accessible across Australia has been a major priority for me since I took the Speaker's Chair on 26 July 2022.

Australia is one of the 10th oldest democracies in the world. This is something we should be proud of, and something that should not be taken for granted.

Every citizen of this country should have the opportunity to raise their concerns with the Parliament and have the power to participate in decision-making. Having active and engaged citizens is one of the key pillars of a strong democracy.

As Speaker, I have visited hundreds of schools as part of my civics programs, bringing Parliament out of Canberra and into the regional and remote communities of Australia. I have been to hundreds of citizenship ceremonies as the Federal Member for Oxley. And one thing is very clear to me – Australians of all ages, and all walks of life *want* to engage, and it's our responsibility to provide those opportunities to them.

Trust in institutions and civic engagement has never been more important, with the rise of digital media, misinformation and disinformation and artificial intelligence.

Our petitions process has a distinctive and longstanding place in Australia's democracy.

For many Australians, initiating or signing a petition can be one of the most immediate and accessible interactions with the Parliament. They are often an entry point to broader civic participation and engagement with democratic institutions, not only in Australia, but across the world.

The right to petition Parliament is the right of every Australian.

The introduction of e-petitions in 2016 through the amendment of the standing orders, has significantly expanded access and participation, moving with the shift to citizens' preferences to engaging online, whilst balancing it with the traditional methods others may be familiar with.

Emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, are already shaping how Australians communicate, engage and keep up to date with civic life. With the correct approach and guardrails in place, these technologies can be used with confidence rather than apprehension.

Artificial intelligence has the potential to transform and strengthen democratic participation, by assisting citizens to articulate concerns more clearly, improving accessibility for people with disabilities, supporting translation across languages, and helping citizens better understand parliamentary processes. While keeping civic intent in the back of mind, we should be looking at how artificial intelligence can assist participation.

As a custodian of the House's procedures, and as a strong advocate for civic engagement, I consider it essential that the petitions process remains accessible, credible and meaningful. In these times of technological change, we need to show a willingness to adjust our practices, balancing them with tradition and values that have made Parliament so strong.

Suggestions for reforms

Simplify the petition requirements using plain English

The Standing Orders and supporting information should be reviewed to reduce unnecessary jargon, complex language, formatting and procedural requirements. Clear, plain English explanations and examples would make it easier for individuals and community groups to participate, with a focus on community members without prior knowledge or experience with parliamentary processes.

Design and launch a public awareness campaign on the petitions process

Improving awareness would support informed civic participation and reinforce confidence in the petitions process. The Standing Committee on Petitions should develop a public awareness campaign, supported by clear and accessible materials, to improve public understanding of the petitions process, particularly school students.

This could include guidance and digital resources explaining how petitions are created, submitted, and considered by the Parliament.

Embrace AI while safeguarding authenticity

People should be able to use artificial intelligence and other digital tools to help them take part in petitions, as long as those tools make their message clearer or easier to understand.

At the same time, the Parliament should continue to monitor for fake or automated mass submissions and deal with them fairly and openly.

Make accessibility the centre of any future changes

Accessibility considerations should be explicitly incorporated into the Standing Orders or guidelines. This includes accessibility for people with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and those with limited digital access.

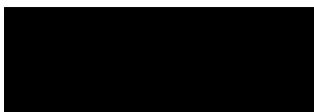
Strengthen the connection between petitions and parliamentary committees

The Standing Committee on Petitions plays an important role in receiving and reporting on petitions presented to the House. This role could be strengthened by new and clear pathways linking petitions to parliamentary consideration, such as bringing common themes to the attention of relevant committees or inquiries. This would strengthen the value of petitions from a citizen's perspective.

The Australian petitions process is a clear example of how the Parliament can connect with the public, as well as hear about issues that are important to citizens on the ground. As technology changes and develops, we should explore options to allow us to increase civic participation.

I thank the Committee for their important work in this space and would welcome the opportunity to provide evidence at a private hearing, should the Committee wish.

Yours sincerely



THE HON MILTON DICK MP