

THE PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

THE SENATE

COMMITTEE OF PRIVILEGES

PERSON REFERRED TO IN THE SENATE

(MRS ESTHER CRICHTON-BROWNE)

(59TH REPORT)

DECEMBER 1995

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REPORT

1. On 22 November 1995 the President of the Senate, Senator the Honourable Michael Beahan, received a letter from Mrs Esther Crichton-Browne seeking redress under the resolution of the Senate of 25 February 1988 relating to the protection of persons referred to in the Senate (Privilege Resolution 5). The letter referred to statements made by Senator Sue Knowles during the adjournment debate in the Senate on 15 November 1995. The President, having accepted Mrs Crichton-Browne's letter as a submission for the purposes of the resolution, referred the letter to the Committee of Privileges on 22 November 1995.
2. The Committee first met in private session on 29 November 1995, and agreed, pursuant to paragraph (3) of Privilege Resolution 5, to consider the submission from Mrs Crichton-Browne. The response, which the Committee now recommends for incorporation in *Hansard*, has been agreed to by Mrs Crichton-Browne and the Committee in accordance with Resolution 5(7)b).
3. The Committee recommends:

That a response by Mrs Esther Crichton-Browne, in the terms specified at Appendix 1, and agreed to by Mrs Crichton-Browne and the Committee, be incorporated in *Hansard*.

**Baden Teague
Chairman**

**RESPONSE BY MRS ESTHER CRICHTON-BROWNE
AGREED TO BY MRS CRICHTON-BROWNE AND
THE COMMITTEE OF PRIVILEGES
PURSUANT TO RESOLUTION 5 OF THE SENATE OF
28 FEBRUARY 1988**

Pursuant to Resolution 5 of the Senate of the 28 February 1988 I wish to raise the matter of Senator Knowles' speech to the Senate on 15 November 1995.

Senator Knowles' speech has caused hurt and suffering to myself and my children.

Senator Knowles states in her speech *"While I do admit to knowing of the most serious event, because he told me the day after what he had done, and he subsequently told others, I have not sought to use that against him in the six years that have elapsed, in spite of his greatest provocation."*

Senator Knowles has conveyed her version of events to a wide range of people and in the process has caused much pain and anguish to our family. My privacy and that of my children was ignored and disregarded.

Senator Knowles stated *"It disturbed me, as a consequence, that the Senator's estranged wife - whom, I might add, I assisted to stay in hiding for over 12 months - telephoned me just after midnight soon after the disclosure of the restraining order this year and accused me of betraying her trust. I also totally reject that ..."*

I am most certainly not estranged from my husband and I am offended by that assertion by Senator Knowles. Senator Knowles did not assist me to stay in hiding as she puts it. The circumstances of my telephone call to Senator Knowles are as follows:

On 27 March 1995 our family travelled to Geraldton for the funeral of my father who had died of cancer, which was to be held the following day. To add to our distress my husband had that morning received a disgusting "dirt sheet" by facsimile which alleged to set out some circumstances surrounding the restraining order.

I had been aware for some time that Senator Knowles was quite openly discussing the matter so the evening of my father's funeral, upon returning home I was extremely upset and I rang Senator Knowles, told her I had just returned from my father's funeral and said I wanted to talk to her. Senator Knowles attacked me and as I was in no state to respond I said goodnight and put the telephone down.

I believe that Senator Knowles obtained a copy of the restraining order and had it reproduced in her office. I have in my possession a statutory declaration obtained by me which supports my belief. I ask Senator Knowles why was it necessary to give it to anyone. Why did she reproduce it and distribute it, particularly given that she claims to have been *"totally supportive and retain the expected respect for my position associated with such a totally distressing time"* as she cares to describe it.

One matter of particular concern to me is Senator Knowles' public claim as to my professional relationship with Mr Viner. Her assertion is wrong. For any responsible Senator to claim knowledge of client lawyer relationship is, I submit, very wrong. That can only be within the knowledge of the client and the lawyer.

I conclude on this note. This matter has caused enormous distress, trauma and anguish to myself and my three children. I have always been an intensely private person notwithstanding my husband's public office. The ensuing publicity has totally engulfed my children and myself. The public humiliation and attention to our family has been compounded by harassment and intimidation to my children and me by the media. There have been occasions when we have feared and have been unable to enter or leave the family home because of the media.

ESTHER CRICHTON-BROWNE