



# Set the Standard: Report on the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces

November 2021



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### Acknowledgements

**Senior Policy Executive:** Natasha de Silva

**Review Director:** Somali Cerise

**Directors:** Amanda Alford (Research), Kate Lee (Engagement), Prabha Nandagopal (Legal).

**Review team:** Alexia Derbas, Christopher Hills, Craig Purcell, Gabriela Sanchez, Georgia Waters, Grace Gardiner, Helen Karatasas, Jack Jacobs, Jessica Phillips, Jessica Xu, Katie Harris, Kerin Leonard, Liz Lindberg, Louise Close, Matthew Clayfield, Nevo Rom, Rosie Ashley, Ruby Lew, Sally Cobb, Sarah Haid, Tess Connolly, Trish Low.

**Other Commission staff:** Amy Lamont, Claire Hart, Connie Chung, Gabrielle Flax, Graeme Edgerton, Lauren Jones, Leah Pitt, Leon Wild, Lisa Stewart, Robin Perry, Sara-Evison Rose, Sonia Litz, Tara Crisp, Tara Sarathy.

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**Australian Human Rights Commission**

GPO Box 5218, SYDNEY NSW 2001

Telephone: (02) 9284 9600

Email: [communications@humanrights.gov.au](mailto:communications@humanrights.gov.au)

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**Australian  
Human Rights  
Commission**

Sex Discrimination Commissioner

**Kate Jenkins**

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30 November 2021

The Hon. Senator Michaelia Cash  
Attorney-General  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Attorney,

**Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces**

I am pleased to present to you *Set the Standard*, the Commission's report on the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces.

This Review makes findings and recommendations to ensure that Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces are safe and respectful and that the nation's Parliament reflects best practice in the prevention and handling of bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault.

The report is furnished to you under the functions and powers conferred by section 11 of the *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986* (Cth).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate Jenkins".

Kate Jenkins  
**Sex Discrimination Commissioner**

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# Commissioner's Foreword

The Commonwealth Parliament sits at the heart of Australia's representative democracy. As one of the country's most prominent workplaces, it should serve as a model for others and be something Australians look to with pride. It is in every Australian's interest for our Parliament to attract the best talent and for all participants to be able to perform at their absolute best. For many reasons, these are unique and powerful workplaces.

However, Australians have heard resoundingly that change is needed in these workplaces. The global #MeToo movement and associated momentum for reform has seen numerous brave women publicly sharing their experiences of workplace violence and harassment. In February 2021, Brittany Higgins courageously shared her experience. In this context, our Parliament as a workplace came under intense scrutiny, resulting in the Australian Government, with the support of the opposition and crossbench, establishing this Independent Review of Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces. I commend our Parliament for commissioning this Review, and urge it to promptly consider and implement the sensible, interconnected, evidence-based recommendations contained within this Report.

This Report is the result of seven months of deep engagement with individuals who work or have previously worked in such workplaces. More than four thousand people work in Australian Parliament House on any given sitting day. Thousands more work in other locations around the country supporting the work of parliamentarians. People work in a wide

variety of roles, come from many walks of life, and bring passion, drive, loyalty and dedication to the important work they do. It was a great privilege to hear from so many of them.

This Report outlines what we heard. While we heard of positive experiences of work within the Parliament, there were others who shared experiences of bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault. Too often, we heard that these workplaces are not safe environments for many people within them, largely driven by power imbalances, gender inequality and exclusion and a lack of accountability. Such experiences leave a trail of devastation for individuals and their teams and undermine the performance of our Parliament to the nation's detriment.

People who work in the Parliament—current and former—are the experts in this Report. I thank all those who participated, I know it was an act of bravery, generosity and trust for you to make time to share your experiences with us which reflected your desire for real cultural and systemic change. I hope you will see the impact and influence of your experiences in the recommendations we have made.

We concluded that while Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces are unique, they are not exceptional. It is time for our best workplace practices to live in these workplaces. Power and influence run in many directions in these workplaces, so we have proposed five shifts designed to ensure that power and influence always lean towards safety and respect, enabling high performance.





This is an opportunity for the leaders of our country to transform Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces to become what they already should be: workplaces where expected standards of behaviour are modelled, championed and enforced, where respectful behaviour is rewarded and in which any Australian, no matter their gender, race, sexual orientation, disability status or age, feels safe and welcome to contribute. By acting on this Report this Parliament has the unique chance to leave an historic legacy for future generations of people working in the Parliament and, through them, for all Australians.

This aim is an important one, because it is only by reflecting the whole of Australian society, and living up to community expectations, that Parliament can perform its function in a representative democracy: making good decisions that will positively impact Australian society. The recommendations in this Report are designed to make the Australian Parliament the sort of workplace and institution in which Australians can be rightly proud.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate Jenkins". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends under the word "Jenkins".

Kate Jenkins  
**Sex Discrimination Commissioner**

30 November 2021