

## Scott Morrison apologises to Brittany Higgins as parliament acknowledges past bullying and sexual assault

Former Liberal staffer Brittany Higgins was in attendance as federal parliament delivered an apology to victims of bullying, harassment and sexual assault within Commonwealth workplaces.



Former Liberal staffer Brittany Higgins (left) and Prime Minister Scott Morrison. Source: Supplied

Federal parliament has delivered a formal acknowledgement of past bullying, harassment and sexual assault to recognise those who have faced harm within Commonwealth workplaces.

The recognition in both houses responds to the first recommendation of the workplace review conducted by Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins.

Former Liberal staffer Brittany Higgins, whose allegation of rape in a ministerial office in 2019 led to the inquiry being called, was among a small group in attendance to witness the statement.

### Scott Morrison and Anthony Albanese apologise to Brittany Higgins

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House of Representatives Speaker Andrew Wallace delivered the acknowledgement, saying the parliament had failed to serve as a model workplace for the nation.

"We acknowledge the unacceptable history of workplace bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces," he said.

"This issue is of the greatest importance and the responsibility of all people who work in this place."

Prime Minister Scott Morrison then addressed parliament, recognising Ms Higgins's attendance, saying her "courage is the reason we are all here today".

He also delivered an apology directly to Ms Higgins, as well as others who had faced experiences of bullying, sexual harassment and assault.

"I am sorry. We are sorry. I am sorry to Ms Higgins for the terrible things that took place here," he said.

"The place that should have been a place for safety and contribution, turned out to be a nightmare.

"I am sorry for far more than that. All of those who came before Ms Higgins. And enjoyed the same, but she had the courage to speak, and so here we are."



Brittany Higgins attends the acknowledgement in the House of Representatives. Source: Supplied

Former political staffer Rachelle Miller, who has alleged she faced bullying during her time in parliament, was also in attendance during the statement.

An investigation into her allegations against Cabinet Minister Alan Tudge remains unresolved, but he denies wrongdoing.

### **Grace Tame calls response an 'electioneering stunt'**

The Coalition is under pressure from Labor, the Greens and crossbenchers to implement all 28 recommendations from the Jenkins report.

The landmark report found more than half (51 per cent) of all people surveyed in the review had experienced at least one incident of bullying, sexual harassment or actual or attempted sexual assault.

Its findings were underpinned by concerns parliament was not a safe environment to work in because of systemic concerns around "gender inequality and exclusion and a lack of accountability".

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Mr Morrison said the exploitation of this "power imbalance" in parliament had led to "terrible traumatic and harrowing experiences".

"This has to change, it is changing, and I believe it will change," he said.

"Parliament cannot be a place of cruelty, nor can it be a place where instability towards each other is some approving of strength."

But former Australian of the Year Grace Tame expressed scepticism, criticising the response on social media.

"How about some proactive, preventative measures and not just these performative, last-minute bandaid electioneering stunts?" she tweeted.



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Current and former politicians and staffers were among 1,723 people, mostly women, who contributed to the review that involved nearly 500 interviews.

It also recommended all parties needed to push for gender parity to change the workplace culture, the creation of a new code of conduct for MPs and their staff, and to set up an independent complaints body.

Opposition leader Anthony Albanese said the Jenkins report was a reminder of parliament's obligation to lead by example.

"No word any of us says in here is worth a thing if it does not lead to action," he told parliament.

"We can make a difference but it would take real and sustained effort to create the lasting cultural change that we need."

The federal government has established a task force that it says will work through addressing the recommendations of the report.

"We must and we can, and we will do better," Mr Morrison said.

"I am determined that we deliver the outcomes of the Jenkins review and make our Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces safer for everyone."

**If you or someone you know is impacted by sexual assault, call 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732 or visit [1800RESPECT.org.au](https://www.1800respect.org.au). In an emergency, call 000.**

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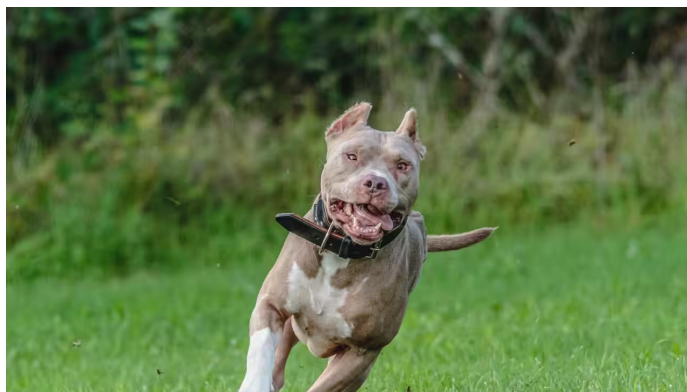
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