

An Open Letter To the Parliament of Tasmania

The Tasmanian Government has acted swiftly and with empathy during this COVID-19 crisis. Premier Gutwein has not only been swift to act, he has communicated his decisions clearly and transparently.

Supporting the Government has been individual Members of Parliament working in good faith.

Given the extraordinary powers given to the Government during this period, now is the time for the establishment of a multi-party select committee to enable scrutiny of the various Government programs dealing with the COVID-19 crisis.

We note the existence of the Subordinate Legislation Committee that reviews all Notices issued under the COVID-19 Bill. However, the review of Notices and the ability for disallowance motions is, in our view, not the standard of accountability required in this current crisis.

The Australian Federal Parliament, the New Zealand Parliament and the Australian Capital Territory have all set up some form of oversight committee for the COVID-19 crisis.

The most transparent and powerful model is the one that has been established already in New Zealand to help fill the accountability gap. The New Zealand Committee is an all-party special Select Committee with similarly broad powers as those of a Privileges Committee regarding calling witnesses and the provision of documents. The committee was set up by consensus with all parties represented, and hearings are publicly broadcast.

Like Australia, New Zealand has shut down its Parliament due to COVID-19. However, NZ has found a non-partisan alternative to maintain accountability.

We the undersigned call on our Tasmanian Government to immediately establish a New Zealand style multi-partisan Select Committee to enable the proper accountability and scrutiny of the Government decisions and programs in dealing with the COVID-19 crisis.

Signatories --

Hon. Meg Webb MLC
Independent Member for Nelson

Rodney Croome AM
Spokesperson, Equality Tasmania

Robin Banks
Human Rights and Public Interest
Lawyer, Anti-Discrimination
Commissioner, Tasmania (2010-2017)

Richard Griggs
Tasmanian Director,
Civil Liberties Australia

**Professor Benjamin J.
Richardson**
Professor of Environmental Law,
Faculty of Law, University of Tasmania

Leanne Minshull
Tasmanian Director,
The Australia Institute
Jane Hutchison
Chair, Community Legal Centres
Tasmania

Rick Snell
Adjunct Associate Professor in Law,
University of Tasmania

Christine Milne AO
Former Senator for Tasmania

Anna Reynolds
Hobart City Councillor

Rosalie Martin
Tasmanian of the Year 2017