

Making effective submissions and giving evidence at hearings

Bill Browne

Democracy & Accountability Program

Plan

1. Why parliamentary inquiries matter
2. How parliamentary inquiries work
3. Making an effective submission
4. Giving evidence at a hearing
5. Committee report, government response

Part 1: Why inquiries matter

Algal bloom exposes 'limitations' in government monitoring programs, Senate inquiry finds

By Thomas Kelsall

Environmental Management

Tue 11 Nov



The 207-page report tabled on Tuesday makes 14 recommendations. (ABC News: Che Chorley)

The **Australia Institute**

Research that matters.

Asking questions of power

Greens senator threatens Woolworths CEO with six months in prison for contempt of Senate

By business reporter Gareth Hutchens

Supermarkets

Tue 16 Apr 2024



Woolworths CEO Brad Banducci is threatened with contempt by Greens senator Nick McKim.

Bringing new information to light

Sayers, Seymour round on Burrowes' global role

Maxim Shanahan and
Edmund Tadros

Aug 2, 2024 – 12.35pm



Listen to this article
3 min

Former PwC chief executives Luke Sayers and Tom Seymour have rounded on Kevin Burrowes' secretive arrangement with PwC International, telling a parliamentary committee the undisclosed dual roles went against the firm's ethos and would be perceived as a conflict by partners.

It emerged earlier this year that Mr Burrowes is being paid \$1.2 million per year by PwC International while chief executive of the Australian firm, a fact that was not initially disclosed to the Senate when Mr Burrowes was asked about his salary in February.

Speaking without risk of retaliation

‘Violated and humiliated’: Julie Bishop ‘laughed at’ crying academic



Julie Hare
Education editor

Aug 12, 2025 – 3.40pm



Listen to this article
5 min

Four current and former members of the Australian National University council have given evidence to a Senate inquiry about an atmosphere of threats and intimidation, including allegations chancellor Julie Bishop blocked a door during a heated meeting.

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Committees can change law and regulation

Andrew Leigh

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Senate rejects Coalition attack on charities - Media Release

POSTED BY ANDREW LEIGH **58SC** ON NOVEMBER 25, 2021

SENATE REJECTS COALITION ATTACK ON CHARITIES

They can even have constitutional ramifications

Unions NSW v New South Wales [2019]

JSCEM recommended that before decreasing the cap to \$500,000, the New South Wales Government consider whether there was sufficient evidence that a third-party campaigner could reasonably present its case within that expenditure limit. No material has been placed before the Court which suggests that such an analysis was undertaken.

Archetypal example: The Murphy Report

Analysis

Online gambling reform had rare bipartisan support thanks to a brave MP. So why has Labor put action on hold?

By political correspondent Brett Worthington

Gambling

Tue 13 Aug 2024

Murphy Report on gambling reform delayed by sports bet lobby

by Rex Patrick and Philip Dorling | Dec 28, 2023 | Business, Latest Posts

Cup Day shame: Government still at the barrier on gambling reform

Wesley Mission

Crossbench calls for a governmental response to the Murphy Report on its 2nd anniversary

28 June 2025

A letter to Anthony Albanese could allow Labor MPs to speak up on gambling reform

By investigative reporter Steve Cannane

Government and Politics

Sat 8 Nov

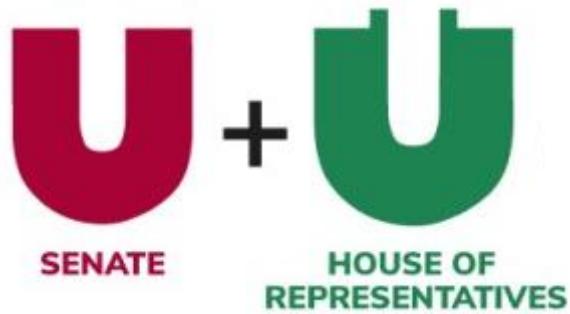
Australians lose while our government fails to ban gambling ads

Albanese scuttles Murphy inquiry gambling reforms

Suzanne James

February 6, 2025, Issue 1423, Analysis

Part 2: How parliamentary inquiries work



Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters



Inquiry into the 2025 federal election

Part 3: Making an effective submission

1. Type up your thoughts
2. Send them to the email address listed on the inquiry's webpage.

Finding an inquiry



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Current Inquiries

Senate Committees

House of Representatives Committees

Joint Committees

Community Affairs Legislation Committee

- **New** Aged care - review of legislative instruments

Community Affairs References Committee

- Impact of microplastics and other toxics on human health
- Support at Home Program
- The Transition of the Commonwealth Home Support Program to the Support at Home Program

Economics Legislation Committee

- Corporations (Review Fees) Amendment (Technical Amendments) Bill 2025

Education and Employment Legislation Committee

- Education Legislation Amendment (Integrity and Other Measures) Bill 2025
- Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers
- Tertiary Education Legislation Amendment (There For Education, Not Profit) Bill 2025

Education and Employment References Committee

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Written submissions can be lodged via the inquiry webpage. Submissions in other formats, including video, should be emailed to em@aph.gov.au. Further information about making a submission to a parliamentary committee is available [here](#).

Submissions to the inquiry close on Saturday, 28 February 2026.

Committee Secretariat contact:

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Phone: [+61 2 6277 2374](tel:+61262772374)
em@aph.gov.au

About this inquiry

The Committee will inquire into and report on all aspects of the conduct of the 2025 federal election.

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Past Public Hearings

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10 Dec 2025: Brisbane

20 Nov 2025: Parramatta

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2 other matter

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Terms of reference

That the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters inquire into and report on **all aspects of the conduct of the 2025 federal election and related matters**, including consideration of the following:

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- assessment and review of the purported increase in incidents of **aggressive conduct, deliberate obstruction, and intimidating behaviour** towards voters, political participants, volunteers, and Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) officials;
- potential reform of **safety and security arrangements**, including consideration of the powers, processes, and capacity of the AEC to manage and address increasingly threatening or disruptive behaviour;
- the suitability and potential reform of measures to ensure **universal voter access**, including polling booth availability and location, early voting, remote polling, and postal voting arrangements; and
- the suitability of the current **authorisation framework** and requirements, having regard to the evolution of communication methods and technology.

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- the suitability of the current **authorisation framework** and requirements, having regard to the evolution of communication methods and technology.

The Special Minister of State has also asked the Committee to consider the interaction with the following:

- the implementation and operation of the **electoral reform passed by the 47th Parliament**, particularly regarding the use of money or capital in the most recent election;
- reforms to address the **ongoing threats of interference in our electoral system**, both foreign and domestic; and
- the composition of the Parliament as a whole, including: the **length of the parliamentary term**; the potential for **fixed terms**; and the **number of elected representatives relative to the growth in population and the electorate**.

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8 other subs

Example topics

- Your experience voting (harassment, convenience, instructions, etc).
- Political parties in the postal vote process.
- Mass spam texts.
- Misleading political advertising.

Your submission is a “source”

- An inquiry report is like a uni assignment
- What information can I give a busy person to:
 - Prove my bona fides
 - Help them answer the “question” posed by the terms of reference
 - Prompt them to look at other submissions differently

What is useful?

- Personal experience
- Alternative points of view
- Evidence/arguments that the committee can put to *other* witnesses
- Recommendations

Things to look out for

- Committee claims ownership of your submission
 - Submission delayed for “right of reply”
- Hearings are sometimes held before submission due date
- Ask if you can make a late submission
- Parliamentary privilege – ONLY on their website

Part 4: Appearing at a hearing



Iron Man 2

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Research that matters.

Invitation

- Most submissions do not result in hearing invitations
- You'll be given some notice of a time and date for the hearing
- Ask the Secretariat if there's any questions
- You can almost certainly decline

Structure

- Chair will introduce the committee, your rights, illegal to lie, etc.
- Chance for opening statement.
 - One from each organisation/expert appearing.
- Each committee member is entitled to a time block; chair will keep time.
 - Any number of members may turn up.
 - Any number of members may have questions.
 - No guarantee that you'll get questions from every party.

Opening statement

- Short (maximum 3 minutes)
- Flag what questions you're interested in answering
- Flag any limitations/gaps in your expertise

What can you be asked?

- About your submission
- About your background and expertise
- About your opinion on other submissions
- About your opinion on other topics the inquiry has covered.

Sharing questions

- Tip: Can divide topics between colleagues beforehand.
 - As a starting point only.
- Can piggyback on questions asked of other organisations (but read the room).

Fielding difficult questions

- Take it on notice
- Entitled to give broader context
 - If asked about motives, can talk about outcomes
 - Don't fall for “yes or no question”
- Entitled to not have an opinion
- You can decline questions outside the terms of reference

Logistics

- Dress code
- Planning to use parliamentary privilege?
Seek advice
- Appearing alone or with a colleague
- Appearing online or in person

Preparing

- Watch/read transcripts of earlier hearings
- Read other submissions
- What's the simplest way to explain my ideas?
- What are some likely criticisms and concerns?

Follow up

- Check Hansard transcript.
- Answer any questions on notice.
 - These might not come from the hearing.
- Provide supplementary information (if you like).

Part 5: Report and response

- Most inquiries will end with a report.
 - Findings
 - Recommendations
- Some publish interim reports.
- Some never get a chance to report.
- Reports depend on evidence received.

Multipartisan committees don't always make multipartisan recommendations

- Main report
- Dissenting report
- Additional comments

Government response

- Timeliness and level of detail is inconsistent.
- Options include: Noted, supported, not supported, supported in part

Government Response to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters report:
Conduct of the 2022 federal election and other matters – Final Report

Majority:

#	Recommendation	Government Response
1	The Committee recommends the Government consider asking the Committee to inquire into increasing the size of the House of Representatives to reduce malapportionment and improve the ratio of electors to MPs.	<p>Noted</p> <p>The Government notes this recommendation.</p> <p>The process for electing members of the House of Representatives involves a combination of provisions from the Constitution and the <i>Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918</i> (Electoral Act).</p> <p>The Government notes that the membership of the House of Representatives increased from 125 to 148–151 members in 1984, although since then the population of Australia has increased significantly. If Members of Parliament's (MPs') divisions are too populous, this may negatively impact democracy and the MPs' capacity to represent their constituents.</p> <p>Whilst the Government does not propose to increase the membership of the House of Representatives, this important issue requires further inquiry and consideration.</p>

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