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Part C- Questions (Optional)

The following questions are focussed on your experiences and expectations of Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces.

These questions are a guide and you do not have to answer these questions. You can answer some or all of the questions. You can also make a submission by emailing your submission to the Review Team at CPWReview@humanrights.gov.au.

- 1. How would you describe the workplace culture(s) of the Commonwealth parliamentary workplace(s) where you work/have worked? Please outline specific strengths and/or weaknesses in terms of workplace culture(s), based on your experiences, as appropriate.**

[Free text box]

William Pitt 'The Elder', Earl of Chatham and former British Prime Minister, said in a speech to the House of Lords on 9 January 1770, that "Unlimited power is apt to corrupt the minds of those who possess it."

The historian Lord Acton in 1887 expressed his opinion that "power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men."

I introduce my submission from the perspective where people in roles of significant power can manifest their powers in a suboptimal way. It is the nature of people, and it should be moderated through appropriate checks and balances.

In Australian Parliament House (APH) the political representatives see themselves as law makers who in many ways are above the law when they are in residence.

I am reporting as a Senior Executive of the [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] who has been associated with Parliament House since [REDACTED] and having some 26 years of observing, participating, and being impacted by the workplace culture of that place. I have worked in Commonwealth agencies providing advice and interchange with Ministers, I have been seconded to work in Minister's offices and I have also worked with the Parliamentary Departments.

In [REDACTED], the behaviour and professionalism of politicians and staff was considerably better than the present-day occupants. The communications and



exchanges with the politicians and staff in [REDACTED] were pleasant and professional, and focused on serving the needs of the people of Australia. Without exception the politicians had a sense of humour and were willing listen and engage in the debate of politics versus policies. They listened to sound advice, understood the issues of probity and procurement, and explained when they needed to alter course due to a political priority or electoral promise. The staff in Minister's offices were professional and often had been seconded from Commonwealth Departments for the experience of advising politicians on policy, communications, and public administration. The public servants were confident to provide independent advice balanced with understanding the policies of the Government of the day. Knowing that the advice would be respected, and decisions were transparent and well documented in Ministerial correspondence.

By contrast in [REDACTED] when I last was working in APH, the behaviour of politicians and staff had degenerated to the extent where it was "do as I say". These were instructions, clear and simple. If you did not do as instructed, then you would pay the consequences. There was a clear and direct instruction from your Executive that if you did not comply with the political wishes from a Minister's office that you would be removed from your role and deployed to another role that was less attractive and your career would be jeopardised. Direct and independent advice was NOT valued nor required, just quite simple briefs and recommendations that accord with the wishes of the Ministers of the day. Any form of analysis or alternate options or opinion was not favoured.

The staff culture in Minister's offices has also changed. Today those staff are political appointments and favoured aspiring apparatchiks. It is a common pun that Parliament is run by 25-year-old advisers with little or no real-world experience. Those staff are aspiring 'politicians' who will do anything to gain favour with their senior staffers and Minister's, and their party. Anything at all. Truth, integrity, and self-respect are the casualties of being a political staffer.

This juxtaposition illustrates the changes that have occurred in the Parliamentary system and culture over the past 26 years. The evidence is based on what I have seen and experienced over those 26 years.

2. Based on your experiences, what are the factors that already do, or could contribute to a safe and respectful environment in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces?

[Free text box]



There are no checks or balances in the provision of safe or respectful parliamentary workplaces. Drug and alcohol abuse is common place. Staff take advantage of the fact that it is no subject to powers of entry by the Australian Federal Police. All policing matters are governed by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House. Neither exercise their powers to the extent used by the police in the community.

The Executive Powers need to be limited to their respective Chambers. Parliament House Ministers Wing and all other areas need to be under the jurisdiction of the AFP.

3. Based on your experiences, what are the factors that may contribute to workplace bullying, sexual harassment or sexual assault in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces?

[Free text box]

An independent employment authority created under statute needs to employ staff in APH. Political appointments need to be limited to one staff member in B Member and Senator Offices. Ministers should be allowed to appoint up to 3 political staff appointments.

All other staff should be appointed under the Statutory Authority as permanent parliamentary staffers and create a professional career based service.

This will remove the abuse of power from senior politicians and officials. The Statutory Authority would handle complaints and workplace disputes in the first instance.

As an Authority it would be governed by a Board with a number of expert members. Such Terms of Reference would need to be developed by an independent commission and consult with Members, Senators and the Parliamentary Departments.

This would present a good opportunity to dissolve Ministerial and Parliamentary Services in the Dept of Finance and the Dept of Parliamentary Services. Both of which are failing to deliver the necessary administrative functions.

The review report provided by Ms Stephanie Foster provides a dispute mechanism but fails to address culture change in the House.



Are you familiar with any Commonwealth parliamentary workplace policies, processes and/or practices in relation to staff and worker safety and wellbeing, workplace bullying, sexual harassment or sexual assault? If so, please outline your understanding of how these policies, processes and/or practices operate.

[Free text box]

No.

During your time working in a Commonwealth parliamentary workplace(s), have/did you receive any education or training in relation to worker safety and wellbeing, and/or how to prevent or respond to workplace bullying, sexual harassment or sexual assault? If yes, please outline your experience of the training and whether it was useful in increasing your knowledge and/or skills in relation to preventing and responding to workplace bullying, sexual harassment or sexual assault.

[Free text box]

No.

Are you aware of how you and/or other people working in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces can report workplace bullying, sexual harassment or sexual assault (either formally or informally)? If yes, please specify what reporting options exist, and outline your experience with accessing and/or using those reporting options if applicable.

[Free text box]

Yes.

Are you aware of any supports available in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces to people who experience workplace bullying, sexual harassment or sexual assault? If yes, please specify what supports exist, and outline your experience with accessing and/or using those supports if applicable.

[Free text box]

Yes.

Based on your experiences, do you have any suggestions or recommendations on how to improve the prevention of and



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responses to workplace bullying, sexual harassment and sexual
assault in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces?**

[Free text box]

No.

4. Is there anything else you would like to tell the Commission?

[Free text box]

No.

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