



CROSSBENCH CALLS FOR PARLIAMENT TO SET THE STANDARD

Members of the crossbench have written to the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition urging them to support a change to the rules of parliamentary debate, aimed at lifting the tone of discussion and setting a better example for the nation.

The letter proposes a simple update to Standing Order 91 — which governs disorderly conduct — to make it clear that an MP's behaviour will be considered disorderly if they act in a way that “fails to treat others with dignity, courtesy, and respect”. These are the standards of behaviour in the Parliamentary Code of Conduct, but that code of conduct does not currently apply within the Chamber which instead is governed by the Standing Orders.

Neither the Government nor Opposition have offered to support this sensible change to lift the standard of parliamentary behaviour.

The Government today introduced its changes to Standing Orders, including stronger powers for The Speaker so he can eject members for longer periods under Standing Order 94A.

“I’m pleased to see the powers of The Speaker strengthened,” says Wentworth Independent MP Allegra Spender. “I hope that makes a difference to behaviour, but it’s hard to see why the Government won’t also support the better definition of disorderly conduct proposed by crossbench MPs.”

“The change proposed by the crossbench proposed would align the rules of debate in the House of Representatives with the new parliamentary Code of Conduct and give practical effect to a key recommendation from the 2021 *Set the Standard* report.

“I welcome the decision by the Leader of the House to refer our amendments to the Procedures Committee for review.

“In our diverse democracy, we need to disagree well. We expect robust debate in our schools, universities and workplaces to be conducted with dignity, courtesy, fairness and respect. It is time the Parliament held itself to the same standard at the very minimum.

“My community expects a better standard of behaviour in Parliament, and I will be asking the community for their judgement of whether Parliament meets the standards we have a right to expect.”

Crossbench MPs say the start of the 48th Parliament is a valuable opportunity to reset expectations and restore confidence in Australia’s democratic institutions.

The call comes amid growing concern about the tone of political debate in Australia and a turbulent few years of rising social division. As members of parliament, crossbenchers say it is more important than ever to show leadership by modelling how to disagree well.



Allegra Spender MP, Member for Wentworth:

“In our diverse democracy, we need to disagree well. We expect robust debate in our schools, universities and workplaces to be conducted with dignity, courtesy, fairness and respect. It is time the Parliament held itself to the same standard.”

“Parliament should set the standard, but in the last parliament debate and behaviour in the House fell well short of community expectations.”

“The crossbench and the community will be closely monitoring the parliament and Question Time. We support robust debate but expect our Parliamentarians to lift their standards.”

Dr Helen Haines MP, Member for Indi:

“The public holds us to high standards, but too often they are let down by behaviour that doesn’t align with community expectations.”

“When school groups visit Parliament and witness question time, they tell me they are shocked by the behaviour they see in the chamber. It’s no wonder public trust in politicians is as low as it is.”

“There is no reason we can’t have robust debate while upholding basic standards of respect and courtesy.”

Dr Monique Ryan, Independent for Kooyong:

“It’s embarrassing to have to apologise to schoolchildren for your colleagues’ behaviour. We have to set a better standard in the House. Treating each other with courtesy and respect should be non-negotiable.”

Kate Chaney, Independent for Curtin:

“Parliamentarians should be setting the standard of behaviour for the country, not falling far behind it. Dignity, courtesy, and respect would be expected in any boardroom, classroom or clubroom in Australia, so it should also be required in the House.

“Resetting a culture of civil but robust debate is an important step in rebuilding trust in our political system.”

Nicolette Boele, Independent for Bradfield:

“Parliamentary behaviour isn’t a side issue - it shapes how Australians see and trust our democracy. Too often, the tone in the chamber betrays community standards. We can’t call for respectful, constructive debate in public if our leaders won’t model it themselves.”