

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

PART C: Submission

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.

The offices I have worked in have generally been positive. Strengths: My MP is someone I can speak with candidly. I can work to my strengths, try new things and feel appreciated. There has been some flexibility, which has improved over the years. There is no overt bullying. He has never been inappropriate and tends to operate with integrity.

Weaknesses: There is an expectation that the job is 24/7. It can be a stressful environment and many times I (and others) have worked beyond our capacity - physically, resource-wise and even beyond our ability. This did not improve until we had a strong Office Manager who could insist on appropriate workplace standards. While my Boss is a good man, he works incredibly hard and expects the same of us. It has at times been difficult to manage expectations. He has inadvertently created environments where there was mistrust between staff and I have been undermined by these staff on too many occasions. At one point I ended up leaving for a few years. However, these days, with strong office management, things have improved. I am more aware of how he operates, which is not malicious, but does not always create the trust with other staff. In addition, there has been some difficulty differentiating between work and personal tasks and what tasks are appropriate for staff assistance. These days, they can be "grey" areas. the fact is, we all spend so much time together it is hard not to be treated over-familiarly.

I spent a number of years working in Canberra for sitting weeks. As an [REDACTED] (I am aged in [REDACTED] and have been in the system for over a [REDACTED]) I was aware it was a very youthful environment. A lot of younger staff sought me out. I witnessed some disgusting bullying and abuse. This came from men and women MPs and Senators. Staff were yelled out, ridiculed, alienated and belittled. They received abusive phone calls at all hours, were expected to pander to the emotional moods and needs of their bosses. They were blamed for things outside of their control. I have seen a MP lock staff out of her Canberra office, making it impossible for the staff member to get personal items and get back to their accommodation. I've seen part time employees expected to travel to Canberra for four nights but only be paid for two or three, meaning they had to also cover the expenses at their own cost. I have witnessed MPs throw items at their staff. I have witnessed Senators scream at their staff.

In addition, senior staff in Parliamentary / Ministerial offices have treated other staff appallingly. Young women were often expected not to fight sexual advances. I even heard some young women giving others advice on who to "cooperate" with, even seek out, for the good of their careers. These women told me if a Senator or MP made advances,

they felt powerless to fight it and genuinely expected it would help their careers. Sometimes senior staff and the Member would gang up on younger people and humiliate them or make it impossible to seek assistance from within the office.

I have at times approached senior advisers in the Leader / PM's offices. The first time, I was informed by the [REDACTED] [REDACTED] "the staff member should consider moving office." When I explained that it didn't fix the problem and in fact just provided fresh victims, she told me "there's nothing we can do." Other times I've been assured that staff would undergo training. But the impetus was always on staff.

I enjoy a drink. I love being able to gather during the stressful times in Canberra and unwind with some drinks and my colleagues and comrades. Unfortunately, for many years, there was an expectation for staff to drink to excess. Often the Members would be out with staff and this created some awkward situations. It also added to "cliques". If a younger person was invited to have a drink with senior staff and MPs/Senators etc, they were being invited into an elite circle of people. This then made it difficult for those young people to rebuff any advances.

In addition, I know of offices where the boss will ask staff to share accommodation while travelling to save costs. This can be very difficult for employees.

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?

Over the years as some Parliamentarians have resigned over workplace practices (far too few) and the more recent accounts being shared by brave women, has created an awareness of the issues and a sense of comfort for those who have experienced issues but never been heard or never felt they could share stories.

There needs to be independent complaints offices and processes. Staff who make complaints need to be protected and believed.

Parliamentarians need to receive serious training (not tokenism) in workplace practices and management of staff. They need to know what behaviour and practices are not appropriate.

There needs to be a way Parliamentarians can be called out for their behaviour and significant penalties. They should have to have a code of conduct and have genuine penalties for breaches.

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

These scenarios highlight the "human condition." It's not unique to Parliament, something I learnt working in a variety of industries. What does make it difficult is the fact that you can spend 40% or more of the year away from home. When in Parliament, there is an expectation staff stay as late as their bosses and even later if tasks have to be completed. In the EO there is at least some semblance of a normal life and personal and family obligations.

There is a sense of being part of something bigger than yourself. This is an amazing and wonderful feature of the job. But it creates a sense of "life and death" at times. Deadlines are not always set to work with the capacity of those who have to meet those deadlines. I think most staffers feel privileged for the opportunity to do the jobs they have. But there can be that "bubble" experience, when there is a sense that nothing else is more important.

I have been fortunate to have an intelligent boss with a large capacity to devour information, get across the brief and respond intelligently to it. Not all MPs and Senators have this capacity. Regardless, they all rely heavily on their staff to help them be, or at least appear to be, at the top of their game. In addition, staff live and die by their boss' performance. There is never a sense of permanency or security and this can weigh heavily. It can also lead to inflated egos. There is a sense of entitlement that can replace that sense of privilege. Being away from home, working in a bubble, being close to power can create a sense of entitlement amongst staff and the Members.

Related to this is the sense that making a complaint is akin to disloyalty. The Party structure and the 24 hour media cycle mean any leaks or complaints can potentially bring down a Government, lose an election and destroy reputations. There is a lot of pressure for staff to be the scape-goats or to participate in cover-ups or to stay silent.

4. 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.

I have read the material. But to be honest it feels far removed from the daily workings in the EO and Parliament. The "tick and flick" style of online training does not really promote those practices. Rather, some sort of 360 review process so staff and Members are appraised regularly, by peers, superiors and colleagues would assist. This would promote better practices and hold people to account. In addition, it would assist in addressing issues before they become a problem. This should be managed independently

5. 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.

I do not recall training as such. More of an on-boarding I think. I tend to respond directly to these things but have had very few positive experiences where good outcomes resulted. I am aware of the EAR but have never found it useful. It tends to be all online with no one to "talk" to. Maybe, workplace champions would be better. People in various locations who can be called upon. Or an office position, much like a WHS or first aid officer. Someone who knows who to call or where to seek assistance.

6. 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.

Until now, there has been little understanding of where to go. I always felt that as staffers we should go through other mechanisms than the department. That is, via the Party or the Leader's office. It's been frustrating. I think the reporting mechanisms haven't taken our unique environment into account. If we reported workplace bullying about a Parliamentarian, how on earth could a public servant deal with that? I confess, it has not felt like an option.

7. 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.

I know of EAR. It's not really that helpful or accessible. I think there should be better systems (as I've mentioned) that take into account the unique situation of Parliamentary staffers.

8. Based on your experiences, do you have any suggestions or recommendations on how to improve the prevention of and responses to workplace bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces?

- 1) independent complaints offices and processes.
- 2) Staff who make complaints need to be protected and believed.
- 3) Training for everyone, including Parliamentarians, on workplace issues. Not tokenism, real face-to-face training.
- 4) Training and support to Parliamentarians and senior staff on management practices and procedures.
- 5) Real consequences, especially for Parliamentarians. They need to be called out and have real consequences.
- 6) code of conduct and have genuine penalties for breaches.

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

I've worked in [REDACTED] MP offices as well. The Clerk of the Parliament is the employer, whereas in the Federal system, the Member is responsible for staff. It wasn't necessarily better. Parliamentarians are not endowed with knowledge and values that contribute to healthy workplaces. Yet all the attention is on the staff. But at least you could speak to HR and the Clerk even. He just had no mechanism to do not except give them a stern talking to. I don't know how to improve it. I think we need to ensure Members can have some say in who they employ. But there needs to be systems in place to support them as managers of those people and support for the staff.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]