

PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Your voice can change our future

Inquiry into the future of petitioning in the House

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions

February 2019
CANBERRA

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Foreword

The introduction of e-petitioning during the 45th Parliament has modernised the way Australians petition the House of Representatives. Petitioners can now choose to submit a paper petition in the traditional way, or lodge an e-petition via an online portal on the Australian Parliament House website.

The Committee has witnessed firsthand the success of e-petitioning, with almost 400 e-petitions approved for presentation to the House to date. In addition, approximately 300 paper petitions have been presented during this Parliament.

With the successful introduction of e-petitioning, the Standing Committee on Petitions (the Committee) felt it was an opportune time to reflect on its own role and the practices and procedures of petitioning more broadly. The Committee compared its practices with procedural reforms made in other parliaments in Australia and overseas. Some of these reforms have led to greater public awareness and engagement with petitioning, both by members of the public and by parliamentarians themselves.

The Committee is particularly interested in some of the innovative reforms introduced by the UK House of Commons. These reforms, which include Parliamentary debates on petitions, have improved engagement with the public on petitioning, and have sparked greater public interest in the wider workings of the UK Parliament.

Initiating debate on petitions is an action currently available to Members in the House during private Members' business time and the Committee encourages Members to take up this opportunity in future parliaments. In addition, the Committee believes that petitions that gather at least 20,000 signatures should be considered for debate during a dedicated time in the Federation Chamber. The Committee is of the view that such a change would stimulate further interest in petitioning in the House.

The Committee's recommendations aim to reinforce the fundamental principles of petitioning. All Australians should have the opportunity to express themselves directly to the Parliament. The rules for petitioning should therefore be as simple as possible, and should not unduly exclude people wishing to voice their concerns.

The Committee considers that the recommendations from its previous inquiry into e-petitioning, to simplify the House petitioning web pages and provide clear simple instructions on how to petition the House, will complement the changes suggested in this report. By implementing these recommendations, the Committee is confident that the 46th Parliament will continue to foster public engagement in petitioning the House.

I would like to express my thanks to the Deputy Chair, the Hon Justine Elliott MP, and to my colleagues on the Committee, for their ongoing support of petitioning in the House. On behalf of the Committee, I warmly extend my thanks to the inquiry participants, who prepared submissions or gave their time to the Committee. In particular, I thank the parliamentarians and staff from other jurisdictions in Australia and overseas, who shared their experiences of petitioning, for the benefit of the Committee's considerations.

I commend this report to the House of Representatives. On behalf of the Committee I thank all Australians who continue to show interest in petitioning the House.

Lucy Wicks MP

Chair

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Membership of the Committee

Chair

Mrs Lucy Wicks MP

Deputy Chair

Hon Justine Elliot MP

Members

Mr Russell Broadbent MP

Hon Scott Buchholz MP (to 28/8/18)

Mr Steve Georganas MP

Mr Ben Morton MP

Mr Ken O'Dowd MP

Hon Jane Prentice MP (from 10/9/18)

Committee secretariat

Jason Sherd, Committee Secretary

Renee Toy, Inquiry Secretary

Rebeka Mills, Senior Researcher

Stephanie Lee, Researcher

Terms of Reference

That the Committee inquire into and report on:

- The role and operations of the Standing Committee on Petitions; and
- Petitioning the House of Representatives, including a review of Standing Orders and other relevant practice and procedures.

In conducting this inquiry, the Committee will give consideration to the petitions processes and procedures of other jurisdictions.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

- 2.42 The Committee recommends that standing orders be amended to allow Members of the House of Representatives (outside of the membership of the Committee) to present petitions during the allotted petitions time at 10.00 am until 10.10 am on sittings Mondays, should any time remain following the Chair's statement.

Recommendation 2

- 3.48 To reduce the number of out of order petitions, the Committee recommends that petitions be considered as 'addressed to the House' if they are either addressed to the House of Representatives, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Federal Government, the Parliament, a federal Minister, or a Member of the House of Representatives.

Recommendation 3

- 3.49 The Committee recommends that the process of creating a petition be streamlined so that petitioners complete one online form hosted on the Australian Parliament House website, to create either an e-petition or paper petition.

Recommendation 4

- 3.61 The Committee recommends that standing order 204 (e) should be updated so that a petition cannot include any Universal Resource Locators (URLs) or reference to specific web links.

Recommendation 5

- 3.87 The Committee recommends that standing orders be amended to require that a person creating or signing a petition must either be a resident or citizen of Australia.

Recommendation 6

- 4.19 The Committee recommends that Members be encouraged to give notice for debates on petitions during private Members' business time.

Recommendation 7

- 4.20 The Committee recommends that:
- petitions with at least 20,000 signatures be considered for debate during a dedicated period for petitions debates in the Federation Chamber;
 - The Procedure Committee consider the necessary changes to the standing orders to enable such debates; and
 - Should this measure be implemented, the Petitions Committee review the 20,000 signature threshold during the 46th Parliament.

Recommendation 8

- 4.21 The Committee recommends that standing order 209 be amended to recognise any verbal responses to a petition given during a debate on that petition.

Recommendation 9

- 4.82 The Committee recommends exploring the opportunity for the Department of the House of Representatives, in collaboration with the Parliamentary Education Office, to develop educational resources about petitioning in the House, to be targeted at school-aged children.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions (the Committee) has been in operation since the 42nd Parliament.
- 1.2 The Committee's primary role is to receive and process paper and electronic petitions (e-petitions). Further, the Committee can inquire into and report to the House of Representatives (the House) on any matter relating to petitions and the petitions system.¹

Background to the inquiry

- 1.3 In May 2018, the Committee completed its *Inquiry into the e-petitioning system*. The inquiry considered the extent to which the e-petitions system had met the expectations of Parliamentarians and members of the public and what future enhancements might be made to the system going forward.
- 1.4 As part of the e-petitions inquiry, the Committee heard evidence from other parliaments that use e-petitioning systems. In addition to sharing their experiences of e-petitioning, some of these parliaments canvassed wider changes they had made to their petitions procedures and the role of their committees. It was submitted that these changes had enhanced public and parliamentary engagement with petitioning. While outside of the scope of the e-petitions inquiry, the Committee considered that this evidence was nevertheless valuable in offering a comparison to current House petitioning procedures.
- 1.5 Following the conclusion of the e-petitions inquiry, the Committee determined to undertake a review of its role and operations, as well as the practice and procedures for petitioning the House of Representatives more

¹ Standing order 220.

broadly. In undertaking this inquiry, the Committee would have regard to the petitions processes and procedures of other jurisdictions.²

- 1.6 On 15 August 2018, the Committee resolved to inquire into and report on the future of petitioning in the House.
- 1.7 The terms of reference to the inquiry are found on page ix of this report.
- 1.8 The Committee received 14 submissions which are listed at Appendix A. The Committee also received one exhibit, which is listed at Appendix B.
- 1.9 The Committee met with the Chair of the Petitions Committee in the UK House of Commons in a public hearing held via videoconference on 27 November 2018. Details of that public hearing are listed at Appendix C.
- 1.10 Because of the continued relevance of evidence provided to the e-petitions inquiry, the submissions made at that time have been considered in this report, and are listed as exhibits at Appendix B.
- 1.11 Further appendices outlining events of the 45th Parliament include Member presentations (Appendix D), campaign petitions (Appendix E), petitions statistics (Appendix F) and current relevant standing orders (Appendix G).

Scope of report

- 1.12 This report considers the perspectives provided by the various submitters to this inquiry regarding the ongoing role of the Committee and the future of petitioning in the House.
- 1.13 The report also identifies issues that have arisen during the 45th Parliament regarding the role and operation of the Committee and the standing orders relating to petitioning in the House.
- 1.14 Chapter two of this report considers the role of the Petitions Committee. This includes receiving, processing and presenting petitions, and conducting inquiries on matters relating to petitions and the petition system.
- 1.15 Chapter three identifies issues relating to the form and content of petitions that have arisen during the 45th Parliament. Issues are discussed with consideration given to form and content requirements for petitions in other parliaments.
- 1.16 Chapter four considers what actions may be taken on petitions once they have been presented. Comparisons are made to actions taken on petitions in

² Recommendation 3, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions, *Making voices heard: Inquiry into the e-petitioning system of the House of Representatives Petitions Committee*, May 2018.

other parliaments around Australia and overseas. This chapter also considers how the Committee engages and educates the public about petitioning, with reference to the experiences of other parliaments.

- 1.17 From these chapters, options for possible changes to the standing orders and procedures for petitioning the House are identified. It is envisaged that these options will inform the development of standing orders for the upcoming 46th Parliament.

2. The Standing Committee on Petitions

Role and operation of the Petitions Committee

- 2.1 The Standing Committee on Petitions first commenced operations in the 42nd Parliament, holding its first meeting on 12 March 2008. The establishment of a dedicated petitions committee was aimed at enhancing the status of petitions and acknowledging the fundamental role they play in the democratic process.¹
- 2.2 In proposing the establishment of a petitions committee, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure (the Procedure Committee) envisaged that a dedicated petitions committee could deal with or respond to petitions in a number of ways, by
- forwarding the petition to the relevant Minister with a request that they consider the terms and respond appropriately;
 - recommending the House refer the terms of the petition to the relevant subject matter committee;
 - holding an informal briefing on the terms of the petition through discussions with the principal petitioner and those who could address the issues raised (Ministers, departmental officers, others as appropriate);
 - holding formal public hearings on the terms of the petition; and

¹ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, *Making a difference: Petitioning the House of Representatives*, August 2007, pp. 3-4, and p. 18.

- other actions as determined by the petitions committee.²
- 2.3 Ten years into its operation, the Committee's role has been established in House standing orders as twofold:
- to 'receive and process' petitions; and
 - to 'inquire into and report to the House on any matter relating to petitions and the petitions system'.³
- 2.4 These standing orders are broad and do not prescribe how the committee should conduct its business. It has instead been left to the committee of the day to determine how to fulfil its role most effectively.⁴
- 2.5 How the current Committee, and previous committees have exercised their powers and functions are detailed further below.

Receiving and processing petitions

- 2.6 In undertaking its 'core business' of receiving and processing petitions, the Committee has been consistently concerned to work within its jurisdiction and to appropriately manage the expectations of petitioners.⁵ The Committee has always taken an impartial role in processing petitions, and takes the view that it cannot solve the problems raised in petitions; nor change government policy; nor force a Minister to respond to a petition.⁶
- 2.7 With these limitations in mind, a principle of objectivity has underpinned the Committee's operations since its establishment.⁷ The Committee has long considered that its role in receiving and processing petitions does not extend to making value-based judgments about the terms or request of a petition, beyond the requirements for form and content set out in the standing orders.

² House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, *Making a difference: Petitioning the House of Representatives*, August 2007, pp. 3-4, and p. 17.

³ Standing order 220.

⁴ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions, *The work of the Petitions Committee: 2010-2013*, June 2013, p. 9.

⁵ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions, *The work of the first Petitions Committee: 2008-2010*, June 2010, p. 9, 15.

⁶ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions, *The work of the first Petitions Committee: 2008-2010*, June 2010, p. 9.

⁷ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions, *The work of the first Petitions Committee: 2008-2010*, June 2010, p. 9.

- 2.8 Although not necessarily agreeing with the terms of every petition, the Committee strives to respect the fundamental rights of the citizen to petition the House on any matter of importance to them—provided the petition complies with the rules of the House. This principle is reflected in the standing orders, which provide that a petition that complies with the standing orders shall be approved for presentation to the House.⁸
- 2.9 During the 44th Parliament 255 paper petitions were presented to the House.⁹ In comparison, as at 3 December 2018, 299 paper petitions and 395 e-petitions (a total of 694 petitions) have been approved by the Committee and presented to the House during the 45th Parliament. These petitions have comprised over 784,014 signatures, with one e-petition obtaining 104,185 signatures. The increase in total petitions from the previous parliament can be attributed primarily to the introduction of e-petitioning at the beginning of the 45th Parliament.
- 2.10 Further discussion of the Committee's role in assessing a petition can be found in chapter 3.

Inquiries

- 2.11 The Committee is also empowered to inquire into and report to the House on any matter relating to petitions and the petitions system.¹⁰ Since its establishment, the Committee has exercised this by
- conducting formal inquiries relating to the petitions system; and
 - conducting roundtable meetings and public hearings about specific petitions or petition topics, and the petitions process.

Formal inquiries

- 2.12 Over a number of parliaments, the Committee has conducted two inquiries relating to e-petitioning in the House. Following the first of these inquiries, conducted during the 42nd Parliament, the Committee made recommendations about the proposed model for an e-petitions system. A House e-petitioning system was then launched at the commencement of the 45th Parliament. The second inquiry, conducted during this 45th Parliament, sought feedback on the initial implementation of the e-petitioning system.

⁸ Standing order 206 (b).

⁹ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions, *The work of the Petitions Committee: 2013-2016*, May 2016, p. 9.

¹⁰ Standing order 220.

The Committee made a number of recommendations for further enhancements.

- 2.13 As noted by the Clerk of the House of Representatives, Mr David Elder, each Petitions Committee has reported on its work and operations at the end of each Parliament, discussing any notable issues and publically outlining petitions statistics and trends over the reporting period.¹¹
- 2.14 A list of reports produced by past committees is outlined below.
- **42nd Parliament**
 - Electronic petitioning to the House of Representatives
 - The work of the first Petitions Committee: 2008 – 2010
 - **43rd Parliament**
 - The work of the Petitions Committee: 2010 – 2013 – An established part of the democratic process
 - **44th Parliament**
 - The work of the Petitions Committee: 2013 – 2016
 - **45th Parliament**
 - Making voices heard: Inquiry into the e-petitioning system of the House of Representatives Petitions Committee

Informal inquiries

- 2.15 The Committee of the 43rd Parliament noted that it chose not to inquire into specific aspects of the petitioning system. Instead, the Chair used the petitions statement every sitting Monday as an informal mechanism to report on significant issues and activities relating to petitions matters.¹² This reporting mechanism is still used today, and is discussed further in the context of presenting petitions, below.
- 2.16 Since the establishment of the first Petitions Committee, previous committees have informally inquired into petitions matters by holding roundtable hearings with principal petitioners and senior officers of relevant government agencies, to follow up on issues raised in specific petitions and ministerial responses.¹³

¹¹ House of Representatives, *Submission 9*, p. 1.

¹² House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions, *The work of the Petitions Committee: 2010-2013: An established part of the democratic process*, June 2013, p. 8.

¹³ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions, *The work of the first Petitions Committee: 2008-2010*, June 2010, p. 14.

- 2.17 Committees have held these informal hearings predominantly at Parliament House, inviting public servants to discuss responses to petitions that had been presented during particular periods. Hearings have also occurred interstate, where the Committee has taken the opportunity to speak to principal petitioners living near the city or town where the hearing was held. Transcripts of all hearings were made available to petitioners and to the public.¹⁴
- 2.18 Reflecting on the purpose of roundtable hearings held during the 43rd Parliament, the then Committee commented:
- These [roundtable hearings] are intended to facilitate a public dialogue on the petition issue raised and not to investigate the matter with a view to resolving or following-up any individual petition concern...¹⁵
- ... These public discussions enable explanation and exploration of issues beyond that allowed by the petition's 250 word limit.¹⁶
- 2.19 These principles were upheld during hearings held throughout the 44th Parliament, as the Committee reiterated that it would facilitate a public dialogue on the issues raised in a petition, rather than investigate a petition with a view to 'concluding, recommending any action, or of resolving matters'.¹⁷
- 2.20 The Clerk of the House further explained the Committee's objective in these hearings as being to air a petition's contents and responses, rather than act as advocate or opponent of the causes raised in petitions.¹⁸
- 2.21 The Clerk of the House noted that the Committee may wish to consider whether hearings or roundtable discussions might be useful to initiate in the future. It was envisaged that the Committee might make use of video

¹⁴ House of Representatives, *Submission 9*, p. 3. For a list of public hearings and roundtable meetings (non-inquiry related) held in previous parliaments, see House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions, *The work of the first Petitions Committee: 2018-2010*, June 2010, Appendix C; *The work of the Petitions Committee: 2010-2013: An established part of the democratic process*, June 2013, Appendix B; *The work of the Petitions Committee: 2013-2016*, May 2016, Appendix B.

¹⁵ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions, *The work of the Petitions Committee: 2010-2013: An established part of the democratic process*, June 2013, p. 18.

¹⁶ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions, *The work of the Petitions Committee: 2010-2013: An established part of the democratic process*, June 2013, p. 19.

¹⁷ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions, *The work of the Petitions Committee: 2013-2016*, May 2016.

¹⁸ House of Representatives, *Submission 9*, p. 3.

conferencing facilities now available at Parliament House to enable the committee to undertake such work in the future, should it wish to do so.¹⁹

- 2.22 It is clear that while the Committee's powers broadly capture the original scope anticipated by the Procedure Committee, in practice the Petitions Committee has taken a narrower role than was originally canvased.²⁰
- 2.23 Professor George Williams AO, Mr Sam Lee and Mr Daniel Reynolds were of the view that the Committee's traditionally narrow interpretation of its broad power to 'inquire into and report to the House on any matter relating to petitions' has limited its ability to respond to petitioners' concerns and improve public engagement with Parliament and its democratic processes.²¹ This issue will be discussed in further detail in chapter 4, as part of a wider discussion of what actions can be taken on individual petitions.

Committee comment

- 2.24 Since the establishment of the Petitions Committee some 10 years ago, the core business of the Committee has been to receive and process petitions. This role has expanded during the 45th Parliament, with the introduction of e-petitioning in the House.
- 2.25 The second facet of the Committee's power relates to the ability for the Committee to 'inquire into any matter relating to petitions and the petitions system'. This power has been used in a number of ways since the Committee's establishment. This includes reporting to the House on petitions matters and related issues through the Chair's statement every sitting Monday; conducting formal inquiries into the House petitioning processes; and facilitating more informal inquiries into individual petitions, by holding public hearings or roundtable discussions.
- 2.26 In the 45th Parliament, holding roundtables and public hearings on individual petitions has not featured in the Committee's work. This can be attributed largely to the introduction of e-petitioning and the associated increase in number of petitions received for processing. In addition, the Committee focused on conducting an *inquiry into the e-petitioning system*, as a means of receiving feedback on the system and developing recommendations for further enhancements.

¹⁹ House of Representatives, *Submission 9*, p. 3.

²⁰ See Professor George Williams AO, Mr Sam Lee and Mr Daniel Reynolds, *Submission 5*, pp. [6-7].

²¹ Professor Williams AO, Mr Lee and Mr Reynolds, *Submission 5*, p. [7].

- 2.27 The Committee considers that holding roundtables and public hearings about individual petitions matters remains a worthwhile way to assist some petitioners to voice their concerns and receive information from relevant representatives of government on issues raised in their petition.
- 2.28 This discussion will be continued further in chapter 4, in the context of taking action on petitions.

Presenting petitions in the House

- 2.29 Once a petition has been approved by the Petitions Committee as meeting the requirements for form and content, it is presented to the House. A petition may be presented by the Chair of the Petitions Committee during the allocated petitions time at 10.00 am on each Monday that the House meets.²² Alternatively, it can be presented by any other Member of the House, during one of the following times:
- 90 second statements in the House and Federation Chamber;
 - 3 minute constituency statements in the Federation Chamber;
 - Adjournment debates in the House or Federation Chamber;
 - Grievance debate in the Federation Chamber.²³
- 2.30 When a Chair or Member presents a petition to the House, it does not mean the Chair or Member necessarily agrees with its terms. Rather, the Chair or Member presents the petition to the House on behalf of the principal petitioner.
- 2.31 This principle has been affirmed by previous Committees:
- Members do not need to support a petition they present; similarly the Petitions Committee may or may not agree with the content of a petition it approves for presentation. Accordingly, when the Chair of the Committee presents petitions he may personally agree with some, and disagree with others, but this is irrelevant in his independent role as Committee Chair.²⁴

²² Standing order 207 (a).

²³ Standing order 207 (b).

²⁴ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions, *The work of the Petitions Committee: 2010-2013*, p. 9.

The Chair's presentation

- 2.32 During the allocated petitions slot on Monday morning, the Chair presents a report listing all petitions that have been approved for presentation by the Committee since the last statement. The Chair also presents responses to petitions that have been received by the Committee.
- 2.33 It has been the practice of the Chair to make a short oral statement in addition to presenting the above-mentioned report. This statement does not refer to each petition that has been listed in the report, but instead speaks to general petitions trends, petitions of note due to factors such as the signature count, and the current work of the Committee.
- 2.34 The Clerk of the House observed that this statement is often brief, meaning there is often several minutes left over from the Committee's allocated time.²⁵ Mr Elder considered that to make full use of the allocated time, options for consideration of the Committee could include:
- enabling another member of the Committee to take up the remainder of the time with a statement (this is currently allowed under the standing orders);
 - altering standing orders to allow other Members to present petitions during this period; or
 - altering standing orders to reduce the presentation period to five minutes.²⁶
- 2.35 The Clerk also queried the current process of the Chair presenting a report, rather than reading out a summary of petitions requests and the number of petitioners for each individual petition. While the full terms of petitions are available in the Hansard record the following day, the efficiency of presenting a report rather than reading out a summary of petitions requests and the number of petitioners may obscure the action of petitioners bringing to the attention of parliament their concerns and requests.²⁷

²⁵ House of Representatives, *Submission 9*, p. 2.

²⁶ House of Representatives, *Submission 9*, p. 2.

²⁷ House of Representatives, *Submission 9*, p. 2.

Presentation by individual Members

2.36 If a Member wishes to present a petition personally, they are encouraged to first refer it to the Petitions Committee for consideration of whether the petition is ‘in order’. Once the petition has been approved by the Committee, the individual Member is free to present the petition at specified times provided in the rules of the House.²⁸

2.37 As at 5 December 2018, individual Members (other than the Chair of the Petitions Committee) have presented 40 paper petitions and 10 e-petitions during the 45th Parliament, as approved by the Committee. Table 2.1 below provides a summary of all petitions presentations in the House. For more information about Member presentations, refer to Appendix D.

Table 2.1 Presentation of Petitions

	Paper	Electronic	Total
Presented	299	395	694
▪ By Chair	259	385	644
▪ By Member	40	10	50

Source: Standing Committee on Petitions

2.38 Individual Members of the House have presented a higher proportion of paper petitions than e-petitions. This might be attributed to the greater use of paper petitions by local communities to raise awareness about issues more relevant to an individual electorate. Further, it could be inferred that constituents are more likely to choose to submit a paper petition through their local Member, and more likely to request their local Member present a paper petition on their behalf. Conversely, e-petitions are lodged directly through an online portal on the Australian Parliament House website, so individuals are perhaps less likely to contact their local Member to present a petition on their behalf. In this way, the petition may not come to their local Member’s attention.

2.39 In several instances, Members have presented both an e-petition and a paper petition in identical terms, from the same principal petitioner. For example, on 23 October 2018 Hon Dr David Gillespie presented an e-petition and a

²⁸ Standing order 207 (b).

paper petition regarding access to supply of Pharmaceutical Benefits in Bonny Hills, New South Wales.²⁹

Committee comment

- 2.40 The Committee has observed that Members (that is, Members of the House of Representatives, outside the membership of the Committee), have been enthusiastic about engaging with petitions to the House, including presenting petitions on behalf of constituents from their electorates.
- 2.41 The Committee considers that the current opportunities for Members to present petitions in the House and the Federation Chamber should be maintained. However, the Committee supports the inclusion of an additional opportunity for individual Members (outside of the Committee) to present petitions to the House during the Chair's allocated time on sitting Mondays. The standing orders currently provide that the Chair is able to present petitions at that time, with the Chair and one other member of the Committee allowed to 'make statements concerning petitions and/or such reports presented'.³⁰ As noted by the Clerk of the House, the Chair's statement does not currently utilise the allotted 10 minutes of speaking time. The Committee envisages that if the Chair's statement was limited to four minutes, up to three Members could also present a petition and speak for up to two minutes on the petition.

Recommendation 1

- 2.42 The Committee recommends that standing orders be amended to allow Members of the House of Representatives (outside of the membership of the Committee) to present petitions during the allotted petitions time at 10.00 am until 10.10 am on sittings Mondays, should any time remain following the Chair's statement.**

²⁹ Petitions EN0709 and PN0380.

³⁰ Standing order 207 (a).

3. Form and content of petitions

- 3.1 As discussed in chapter 2, one of the Committee's primary roles is to receive and process all petitions to the House.¹ The Committee assesses each petition against the requirements for form and content that are outlined in the House standing orders.²
- 3.2 Over the course of this Parliament, the Committee has reflected on the current rules regarding the form and content of a petition, including the requirements for a petition to:
- contain moderate language;
 - refer to a matter of which the House has the power to act; and
 - be addressed to the House.
- 3.3 Other issues regarding the form and content of a petition considered by the Committee include:
- the use of hyperlinks and URLs in e-petitions;
 - the use of any attachments;
 - duplicate petitions;
 - citizenship/residency requirements for creating or signing petitions; and
 - a signature threshold for submitting a petition.

¹ Standing order 220.

² Standing orders 204 and 205.

Moderate language

- 3.4 In assessing a petition, the Committee must consider whether the petition:
- contains terms that are not illegal or promote illegal acts; or
 - contains moderate language.³
- 3.5 In assessing the language used in a petition, the Committee has regard to the House standing orders which prohibits the use of offensive or disrespectful words and personal reflections in debate in the House.⁴ As outlined in *House of Representatives Practice*:
- ... petitions should not impugn the character or conduct of the Parliament, the courts or any other tribunal or constituted authority. However, it is considered that a petition is acceptable if its language is courteous and moderate, provided it conforms with the standing orders in other respects.⁵
- 3.6 The Committee explored the language requirements of other parliaments to determine whether the House's requirements remain fit for purpose.
- 3.7 The ACT Legislative Assembly, for example, requires:
- Every petition shall be respectful, decorous and temperate in its language, and shall not contain irrelevant statements. If, in the opinion of the Speaker, the subject matter is not within the ministerial responsibility of the Territory or is critical of a character or conduct of a person, contains unbecoming expressions, is not respectful, decorous or temperate in its language or offends any standing order other than those relating to petitions, the paper shall be returned to the Member who lodged it.⁶
- 3.8 The majority of state and territory parliaments contain similar language requirements to the ACT Legislative Assembly.⁷

³ Standing order 204.

⁴ See: Standing orders 88-90; *House of Representatives Practice*, 7th edn, p. 633. 'Personal reflections' includes casting reflections upon the Queen, members of the Royal Family, the Governor-General, members of the judiciary, or Members and Senators.

⁵ *House of Representatives Practice*, 7th edn, p. 633.

⁶ ACT Legislative Assembly, standing order 94.

⁷ NSW Legislative Assembly: Standing order 121 (6); NSW Legislative Council: Standing order 70 (2); NT Legislative Assembly: Standing order 119 (1); Queensland Parliament: Standing order 121 (4); South Australian House of Assembly: Standing order 82 (1); South Australian Legislative Council: Standing order 82 (1); South Australian Legislative Council: Standing order 89; Tasmania House of Assembly: Standing order 58; Tasmanian Legislative Council: Standing order 42 (8); Victorian Legislative Assembly: Standing order 45 (4); Victorian Legislative Council:

- 3.9 In the Scottish Parliament, a petition is admissible unless it is ‘frivolous’ or ‘contains language which is offensive’. The Scottish rules require that
- Petitions should not contain language that is offensive or inappropriate, for example swear words, insults, sarcasm or other language that could reasonably be considered offensive by a reader.⁸
- 3.10 The New Zealand Parliament has the following language requirements:
- 1 A petition must be respectful and moderate in its language.
 - 2 A petition must not contain irrelevant statements.⁹
- 3.11 The current language requirements in New Zealand are similar to previous standing orders in the House.¹⁰ The current language requirements in the House were introduced alongside the Standing Committee on Petitions in 2008.¹¹
- 3.12 The New Zealand Clerk of the House of Representatives, Mr David Wilson, told the Committee that when lodging an e-petition, members of the public did not always appreciate the potential consequences of posting sensitive personal information as part of a public petition. Mr Wilson, stated:
- ... At times, petitions make serious allegations without authentication or hyperbolic statements that fail to meet our requirements to be respectful and moderate; we have had petitions that refer to named individuals as being “poisonous”, or that talk about “state-sanctioned killings” in a way that cannot be hosted on the Parliament’s website. Because it is so easy to create an e-petition, people at times seem to create a petition impulsively without fully considering what is involved.¹²

Standing order 10.02 (4); Western Australia Legislative Council: Standing order 101 (1) (d); 1010 (2) (e) (f). The New Zealand (NZ) Parliament also has a similar requirement: Standing order 367.

⁸ Scottish Parliament: Standing orders 15.5.1; 15.4.3.

⁹ NZ Parliament: Standing orders 367 (1) and (2)

¹⁰ See: Standing order 205 (f) as at 29 March 2006.

¹¹ See: Standing orders as at 13 February 2008.

¹² NZ House of Representatives, *Submission 8*, p. [5].

- 3.13 Mr Wilson also raised the issue of ‘joke petitions’, submitting that there are two viewpoints about hosting these petitions on official e-petitions websites:
- On the one hand, it could raise the profile of the e-petitions, noting the example of an e-petition asking the United States Government to build a Death Star, which created international media attention; OR
 - On the other hand, petitioning Parliament is an important process for people seeking to achieve a serious purpose, and allowing joke petitions may make light of the process; or flood the website, causing genuine petitions to be obscured.¹³
- 3.14 On occasion, the Clerk of the House in New Zealand has sought a ruling from the Speaker on whether a petition is frivolous. At the time of submission, five petitions had been ruled as frivolous by the Speaker.¹⁴
- 3.15 The Chair of the UK House of Commons Petitions Committee (the UK Committee), Ms Helen Jones, stated that the UK Committee had strengthened its standards relating to the language of e-petitions ‘to ensure that people could not bring in petitions which appeared to target a particular community.’¹⁵
- 3.16 The House of Commons outlines its required standards for e-petitions on the UK Government and Parliament Petitions website. These standards include that a petition will be rejected if it:
- is defamatory or libellous, or contains false statements;
 - could cause personal distress or loss. This includes petitions that could intrude into someone’s personal grief or shock without their consent;
 - is nonsense or a joke;
 - contains swearing or other offensive language;
 - is offensive or extreme in its views. That includes petitions that attack, criticise or negatively focus on an individual or a group of people because of characteristics such as their age, disability, ethnic origin, gender identity, medical condition, nationality, race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation.¹⁶

¹³ NZ House of Representatives, *Submission 8*, p. [6].

¹⁴ NZ House of Representatives, *Submission 8*, pp. [6-7].

¹⁵ Ms Helen Jones, Chair, House of Commons Petitions Committee, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 27 November 2018, p. 3.

¹⁶ UK Government and Parliament, *Petitions*, viewed on 28 January 2019, <<https://petition.parliament.uk/help>>

- 3.17 Ms Jones advised that at times, the UK Committee has debated whether a petition should be ruled in or out of order based on the language used. Where a petition is found to be out of order, and where possible, the UK Committee works with petitioners to assist them to amend the language so that a petition could be found to be in order.¹⁷

Committee comment

- 3.18 The Committee has an important role in ensuring that the traditional principles of petitioning are upheld. The Committee, as a conduit to the House, must encourage a person's right to petition the House on matters of concern to them, in their own words. To support this principle, the rules for preparing a petition should not be overly onerous or unfair. A petition should not be rejected because one Member or the whole Committee disagrees with a request, or the values or opinions being expressed in the terms of a petition.
- 3.19 However, the Committee must also ensure that people petitioning the House abide by the same principles of courtesy and respect that govern debate and other parliamentary proceedings in the House. To this end, in its assessment of 'moderate language', the Committee takes into account the context surrounding an issue raised in a petition; the community values attached to a particular request; and the possible negative consequences that might flow from a petition being published on the Committee's website.
- 3.20 The Committee is of the view that the current rule requiring the use of moderate language in petitions should remain, to allow scope for the Committee to assess the language of each petition on a case by case basis, with regard to standards of debate that apply to the House.
- 3.21 Similar to the practice of the UK Committee and the New Zealand Parliament, where possible the Committee assists petitioners to reword their petition in a way that meets language requirements, either before or after it is assessed by the Committee.
- 3.22 The Committee made a number of recommendations in its report into the e-petitioning system, including the need to simplify the information provided on the petitioning webpages and to provide online tutorials for

¹⁷ Ms Jones, House of Commons Petitions Committee, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 27 November 2018, p. 3.

creating and signing petitions.¹⁸ Implementing these recommendations will assist in improving the transparency of the assessment process and will make it easier for people understand the rules for petitioning.

- 3.23 The Committee envisages that the updated information on the House petitioning webpages will include guidance on using ‘moderate language’, so that petitioners are aware of the Committee’s expectations and requirements.
- 3.24 The Committee will continue to monitor the use of ‘moderate language’ in petitions over the coming parliament. If stronger guidelines for language are required, such as in the UK, the Committee can consider further change to the standing orders at that time.

Matters for the House

- 3.25 In assessing a petition, the Committee must consider whether it is a matter on which the House (as part of the Commonwealth Parliament) has the power to act.¹⁹ This means that the subject of a petition must relate to a matter that the Federal Government has responsibility for (i.e. is nationally controlled) rather than the responsibility of a state or territory or local government, or a private or commercial matter. Generally, a petition meets this requirement if it seeks a change in federal legislation, or federal government policy.
- 3.26 The Committee often receives petitions that are outside of the powers of the House, and instead relate to a state/territory or local government issue. Petitioners can find it difficult to determine whether an issue is a ‘matter for the House’, as the responsibility for a certain issue can be divided between several layers of government. Some aspects of an issue may be the responsibility of state governments, whereas other aspects of the same issue may fall under the responsibility of a federal agency.
- 3.27 For example, the Committee received a number of petitions relating to the sale of baby formula during the 45th Parliament. These petitions related to concerns about ongoing supply and access to baby formula on supermarket shelves, and contained various requests for further regulation. Assisting petitioners to navigate this policy area was complex, noting that the Federal Department of Agriculture and Water Resources was the agency responsible

¹⁸ See: House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions, *Making voices heard: Inquiry into the e-petitioning system of the House of Representatives Petitions Committee*, May 2018.

¹⁹ Standing order 204 (a) (ii).

for the regulation of the export of Australian-made dairy products. However, there were a number of formula brands that were not Australian-made, and therefore the issue falls outside the remit of the Department (and the House). Moreover, supermarkets (i.e. private corporations) hold responsibility for working with their suppliers regarding stock levels and enforcing limits on individual purchases.²⁰

- 3.28 On this issue, the Committee considered that petitions making requests regarding the export of Australian-made baby formula were in order, as this was a matter that the House could legislate on. Petitions that sought restrictions on formula stock held in supermarkets were ruled out of order, as they fell outside the remit of the House.

Committee comment

- 3.29 The Committee appreciates that petitioners can find it confusing to draft a valid petition that contains a 'matter for the House'. There are many areas of public policy where responsibilities are shared between the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, and local governments. There are other issues that are matters for private industry and corporations, and cannot be dealt with by government. Where possible, the secretariat engages with petitioners to provide advice on how to meet this requirement.
- 3.30 As mentioned earlier, the Committee is committed to providing clearer information for petitioners to assist them in drafting a petition that meets requirements. Such information should include information on what is (and isn't) a matter for the House. The development of video tutorials as recommended in the *inquiry into the e-petitioning system* will provide one such opportunity to assist petitioners.
- 3.31 The Committee foreshadows including regular updates on its webpages about current happenings in petitions. Such updates could include explanatory information about petition topics that have been prevalent in recent petitions received, and why some requests fall outside of the remit of the House.

²⁰ Hon David Littleproud MP, Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources, *Response to Petition EN0368*, 16 February 2018.

Request to the House

- 3.32 When submitting a petition to Parliament, an individual can choose to petition either the Senate or the House of Representatives. By petitioning the House, a person is requesting the House to act on the matter raised.
- 3.33 There are two elements contained in the standing orders that govern how a person should address their petition:
- A petition must be addressed to the House;
 - A petition must contain a request for action by the House.²¹
- 3.34 To address a petition correctly, a petition cannot be addressed to 'the Parliament', 'the Senate', 'the Government', or an individual Member. The recommended form of words to address a petition is 'To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives'.²²
- 3.35 The request contained in the terms of a petition must also ask the House to take action, rather than the Government, the Parliament, the Senate, or an individual Member. The form of words recommended for the request is, 'We therefore ask the House'.²³ Further, where a request is too vague, or a clear request for action by the House cannot be ascertained from the terms, a petition may also be ruled out of order.
- 3.36 Following the introduction of e-petitioning in the 45th Parliament, the Committee received a significant number of e-petitions that were considered 'out of order' because they did not contain a request to the House. Many of these petitions would otherwise have met requirements, except that they made requests to the 'Government', or the 'Parliament', as examples.
- 3.37 To rectify this issue, a mandatory field was inserted in the e-petitions form, so that all petition requests started with the words, 'We therefore ask the House' (as demonstrated in Figure 3.1). This field cannot be deleted. This insertion has led to a significant reduction in petitions being incorrectly addressed.

²¹ Standing order 204 (a) (i).

²² See: Form of a petition, *House of Representatives Practice*, 7th edn, p. 631.

²³ See: Form of a petition, *House of Representatives Practice*, 7th edn, p. 631.

Figure 3.1 e-petitions mandatory fields

* Mandatory Field

A. Please fill in the details of your petition

Petition Address

To the Hon. Speaker of the House of Representatives and Members of the House of Representatives

Petition Of *

Your petition must make a request to the House of Representatives (not the Parliament, or the Senate, or the Government). Accordingly, the words 'We therefore ask the House to' are required words and cannot be deleted.

Request for Action *

We therefore ask the House to

This image displays the pre-filled text, including the address to the House and request to the House that is displayed when creating a petition.

- 3.38 On occasion, the Committee still receives paper petitions that are addressed incorrectly (either the address or the request). Petitioners are encouraged to provide their draft petition to the secretariat by e-mail prior to collecting signatures, so they have the chance to reword the petition address or request, if necessary.
- 3.39 In 2003, the Canadian House of Commons simplified requirements for petitions. A petition can now be addressed to the House of Commons, the House of Commons in Parliament assembled, the Government of Canada, a Minister of the Crown or a Member of the House of Commons.²⁴

²⁴ House of Commons, Canada, standing order 36 1.1 (a) as referenced in *Submission 4*, p.2.

Committee comment

- 3.40 As noted earlier in this report, the Committee considers that the rules for petitioning the House should be simple and should not exclude people because the requirements are overly onerous.
- 3.41 It is clear that the requirement for a petition to be addressed to the House, or to contain a request to the House, has hindered some individuals from submitting a valid petition. Many people do not understand the distinction between the House, the Parliament, and the Government. Adding to this confusion is the fact that a successful petition will likely be responded to by a Minister, being a representative of the Federal Government, rather than by the House itself.
- 3.42 The House of Representatives and the Senate continue to have separate petitioning processes. The requirements for form and content are different for each Chamber, which no doubt adds to confusion regarding how to address a petition, particularly for members of the public who have little or no exposure to the workings of Parliament.
- 3.43 The Committee has observed that the introduction of mandatory words in the e-petitions form has led to a reduction in e-petitions that are incorrectly addressed. The Committee secretariat has also endeavoured to work with individuals before they submit a petition, to assist them to meet requirements. Where a petition has been ruled 'out of order', the secretariat works with petitioners if they need assistance resubmitting their petition.
- 3.44 The Committee supports the approach taken by the Canadian House of Commons, in accepting petitions that are addressed to the House of Commons, the Government of Canada, a Minister of the Crown, or a Member of the House. Petitions should not be discounted solely because they are addressed incorrectly, particularly when the petitioner's intention is to address their petition or request to the House is clear.
- 3.45 The Committee sees merit in investigating whether the House and Senate petitions processes could be streamlined into one process of 'petitioning the Parliament'. Creating one petitioning process for the Federal Parliament could encourage more engagement with petitioning the Parliament, by removing one of the current roadblocks and areas of confusion for petitioners and member of the public alike.
- 3.46 In the meantime, the Committee is of the view that the House petitioning process could be simplified by encouraging petitioners to complete one online form for both e-petitions and paper petitions. Currently, there are two

separate processes outlined on the House petitions website. People wishing to create an e-petition are directed to an online form. People wishing to create a paper petition are encouraged to prepare their own petition based on a sample provided on the website.

- 3.47 If these pathways were merged, the Committee envisages that a person would complete one online form to create a petition, and then choose at the conclusion of this process whether they wish to print the completed form for submitting as a paper petition, or submit an e-petition through the online portal. This streamlined process would have the advantage of encouraging all petitioners to use one standard form approved by the Committee, giving a higher likelihood of meeting the necessary requirements for form and content.

Recommendation 2

- 3.48 **To reduce the number of out of order petitions, the Committee recommends that petitions be considered as ‘addressed to the House’ if they are either addressed to the House of Representatives, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Federal Government, the Parliament, a federal Minister, or a Member of the House of Representatives.**

Recommendation 3

- 3.49 **The Committee recommends that the process of creating a petition be streamlined so that petitioners complete one online form hosted on the Australian Parliament House website, to create either an e-petition or paper petition.**

Use of attachments and web links

- 3.50 Currently, petitions are not allowed to include attachments of additional information such as letters, affidavits or other documents.²⁵ In the event that an attachment is submitted with a paper petition, it will be removed prior to presentation and returned to the principal petitioner.
- 3.51 During the Committee’s inquiry into e-petitions, Mr John McLean submitted that the principal petitioner should be provided the opportunity to include supplementary information to support their petition.²⁶ This suggestion is

²⁵ Standing order 204 (e).

²⁶ Mr John McLean, *Exhibit 6*, p. 3.

similar to the current practice of some jurisdictions overseas. For example, the Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee (PPC) offers principal petitioners the opportunity to provide background information with their petition. This can be ‘any other information [the petitioner] want[s] to let the Parliament know about to help [Members] to understand why [the petitioner] would like them to consider the issue.’²⁷

- 3.52 Since the introduction of e-petitions, the Committee has received a number of petitions that include Universal Resource Locators (URLs), or other web links. Where these petitions have met the requirements for form and content, the Committee have accepted these petitions and published them online for signature. Paper petitions that include URLs and other web links have also been permitted.
- 3.53 This differs to the practice of the Canadian House of Commons, which will not accept petitions that contain URLs or other links or web-based references.²⁸

Committee comment

- 3.54 The Committee sees the merit in providing petitioners with the opportunity to include additional information in support of their petition, as occurs in the Scottish Parliament. Where a petition is referred for response from a Minister, additional information might assist the Minister in understanding the petitioner’s concerns. As the Scottish Parliament conducts ‘mini-inquiries’ for most petitions received, the provision of background information presumably informs the Committee’s understanding of the subject matter and how it conducts further investigations.
- 3.55 However, permitting additional information to be submitted along with a petition would require careful consideration regarding the parameters that would be placed on such attachments. Such considerations would include how the attachments would be reviewed by the Committee and then dealt with by the House at presentation. If the additional information was then published on the Committee’s website, the Committee would need to assess whether the material contained ‘moderate language’ and otherwise complied with the standing orders. Further, the e-petitioning system would have to be updated to allow for the inclusion of additional information.

²⁷ The Scottish Parliament, *Getting Involved: Petitioning the Scottish Parliament*, 4th edn, May 2018, p. 2.

²⁸ House of Commons Canada, *Submission 4*, p. 3.

- 3.56 Having regard to the above considerations, the Committee is of the view that such an addition to petitioning procedures is not required at this time. Petitioners can summarise the reasons for their request within the 250 words currently allowed in the terms of a petition. In the event that an inquiry into a petition is undertaken by this or a future Committee, further information can be requested of the petitioner, or other stakeholders, as part of this inquiry. Should the petitions process and the role of the Committee evolve further, the provision of additional information could be re-visited.
- 3.57 The Committee currently accepts e-petitions with web links. However, Canadian practice has prompted further consideration of issues that may arise from including web links in a petition that is presented to the House and published on the House petitions list. Firstly, providing web links on an e-petition could be construed as providing a type of ‘attachment’ of additional information.
- 3.58 Secondly, the Committee is concerned that information hosted on web links are not static and can change over time. This poses a number of potential risks where the link is included on the House petitions webpages. For example, the information attached to the link could change over time to include information that falls outside the rules of the House, or the ICT policies of the Australian Parliament.
- 3.59 The e-petitions inquiry included a recommendation that e-petitions have the ability to be shared easily on social media platforms via a unique URL. If petitions are able to be shared easily, this may open opportunities for petitioners to share e-petitions on their own social media pages, where they can also share additional information about their cause. In the Committee’s view, this is a more appropriate way of attaching additional information to a petition. This would lessen the need to attach additional information to a petition. Paper petitioners already have the capacity to provide additional information to people before they sign a petition, although such information cannot be included with the petition they submit to the House.
- 3.60 Standing orders should be updated so that petitioners are not able to provide ‘URLs’ or web links as part of the terms of a petition. This reflects the reality that the Committee cannot and does not review the content of any URL or web link provided in the terms of a petition.

Recommendation 4

- 3.61 The Committee recommends that standing order 204 (e) should be updated so that a petition cannot include any Universal Resource Locators (URLs) or reference to specific web links.**

Duplicate petitions

- 3.62 Currently, there is no requirement that prevents a person from submitting a petition in the same terms on multiple occasions. During the 45th Parliament, the Committee has, on occasion, declined to refer a petition to a Minister for response, where a petition with similar or identical terms has already been responded to in the same Parliament.²⁹
- 3.63 Since the introduction of e-petitioning to the House, some petitioners have enquired about combining an e-petition and a paper petition. Currently, the Committee does not accept combined petitions. Instead, a petitioner can submit a paper petition and an e-petition in the same terms.³⁰ These are taken as separate petitions and the signature counts are not combined.
- 3.64 The Committee has observed that there have been a number of ‘campaign’ style petitions that have been submitted for consideration during the 45th Parliament. These campaigns have involved one group or organisation rallying people from different areas of the country to submit the same petition, signed by the people of their local area. These ‘campaigns’ include the following:
- 89 petitions seeking action on climate change. These petitions were in identical terms, save that each petition was created in an individual electorate. Each petition began with ‘this petition of XXXXX in the electorate of XXXX’.
 - Six petitions from the same principal petitioner in identical terms, relating to the practice of Falun Gong.³¹
- 3.65 74 petitions relating to ‘synthetic lottery operators’, in identical terms but each submitted by individual owners/managers of newsagencies and pharmacies around Australia.

²⁹ See: Standing order 209.

³⁰ For example, Mrs Karen Rees-Pikett submitted a paper petition (PN0380) and an e-petition (EN0709) in the same terms relating to access to supply of Pharmaceutical Benefits in Bonny Hills, New South Wales.

³¹ PN0005, PN0010, PN0050, PN0064, PN0329 and PN0364

Figure 3.2 Sample of climate change campaign petitions

PN0074	Reasons: This petition of concerned people of the electorate of New England, draws to the attention of the House the severe and urgent threat that climate change poses to the health, well-being and security of all people around the world, particularly our poorest and most vulnerable neighbours. We remind the House that Australia's greenhouse emissions are the highest per person among wealthy nations while our emissions reduction targets are among the weakest. Request: We therefore ask the House to do all in its power to protect communities in Australia and our region from the harmful impacts of climate change - such as more severe heat, extreme and unpredictable weather and rising seas - by: <input type="checkbox"/> committing to deeper and more urgent reductions of our greenhouse emissions; <input type="checkbox"/> developing a plan to ensure Australia achieves zero net greenhouse emissions well before 2050, and supporting families and communities affected by the transition towards renewable energy and more sustainable land use; <input type="checkbox"/> providing additional assistance to help our poorest neighbours adapt to the harmful impacts of climate change.	04/8/2017	Ms Maxine Ross	512
PN0075	Reasons: This petition of concerned people of the electorate of Hume, draws to the attention of the House the severe and urgent threat that climate change poses to the health, well-being and security of all people around the world, particularly our poorest and most vulnerable neighbours. We remind the House that Australia's greenhouse emissions are the highest per person among wealthy nations while our emissions reduction targets are among the weakest. Request: We therefore ask the House to do all in its power to protect communities in Australia and our region from the harmful impacts of climate change - such as more severe heat, extreme and unpredictable weather and rising seas - by: committing to deeper and more urgent reductions of our greenhouse emissions; developing a plan to ensure Australia achieves zero net greenhouse emissions well before 2050, and supporting families and communities affected by the transition towards renewable energy and more sustainable land use; providing additional assistance to help our poorest neighbours adapt to the harmful impacts of climate change.	07/8/2017	Ms Jane Irwin	164

This image displays two petitions with similar terms that were presented in the House as part of a campaign on climate change.

Figure 3.3 Sample of synthetic lottery operator campaign petitions

PN0122	Reasons: This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House: Gambling operators are permitting betting on the outcome of lotteries, with these synthetic lottery operators making no contribution to State lotteries taxes. Request: We therefore ask the House to: Amend the Interactive Gambling Act 2001 so as to ban betting on the outcome of lotteries and thereby prohibit the operation of synthetic lotteries in Australia.	10/10/2017	Glenroy Newsagency Glenroy Newsagency	1
PN0158	Reasons: This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House: Gambling operators are permitting betting on the outcome of lotteries, with these synthetic lottery operators making no contribution to State lotteries taxes. Request: We therefore ask the House to: Amend the Interactive Gambling Act 2001 so as to ban betting on the outcome of lotteries and thereby prohibit the operation of synthetic lotteries in Australia.	20/10/2017	Mr Gary Tribe	65
PN0159	Reasons: This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House: Gambling operators are permitting betting on the outcome of lotteries, with these synthetic lottery operators making no contribution to State lotteries taxes. Request: We therefore ask the House to: Amend the Interactive Gambling Act 2001 so as to ban betting on the outcome of lotteries and thereby prohibit the operation of synthetic lotteries in Australia.	20/10/2017	Mr Kristian Beka	97
PN0160	Reasons: This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House: Gambling operators are permitting betting on the outcome of lotteries, with these synthetic lottery operators making no contribution to State lotteries taxes. Request: We therefore ask the House to: Amend the Interactive Gambling Act 2001 so as to ban betting on the outcome of lotteries and thereby prohibit the operation of synthetic lotteries in Australia.	20/10/2017	Mr Wayne Hammett	110

This image displays four petitions with identical terms that were presented in the House as a part of a campaign about synthetic lottery operators.

- 3.66 The New Zealand House of Representatives stated that it does not accept combined petitions, and has received a number of queries about combining petitions.³²
- 3.67 The ACT Legislative Assembly submitted that a recent review of standing orders has recommended changes to the treatment of duplicate petitions.³³ For a petition to be referred to a committee it requires 500 signatures. The review acknowledged that occasionally duplicate petitions can be presented on the same day; however, as they do not meet the threshold individually they do not get referred.³⁴ The recommended changes to standing orders would allow the signatures to be combined when a paper and e-petition in the same terms are presented on the same day.³⁵ This could result in the petitions meeting the threshold requirements for referral.
- 3.68 The Scottish Parliament does not allow a petition to be submitted in the same terms or substantially similar terms to a petition brought during the same session of the Parliament and which was closed less than a year earlier.³⁶
- 3.69 Likewise, the New Zealand Parliament does not allow petitions on the same matter as an earlier petition that was dealt with by the House during the same Parliamentary term. However, it will consider the petition if substantial and material new evidence is available that was not available when the earlier petition was considered.³⁷ Moreover, the online petition form includes a stage that searches for similar petitions. If pre-existing petitions match, the page encourages the petitioner to 'add their support' to open petitions.³⁸
- 3.70 The UK House of Commons does not accept petitions on similar issues and provides advice to petitioners upon rejection of such a petition, as demonstrated below.

³² NZ House of Representatives, *Submission 8*, p. [7].

³³ ACT Legislative Assembly, *Submission 11*, p. 2.

³⁴ ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure, *Review of the Standing Orders and Continuing Resolutions of the Legislative Assembly, Report 8, Volume 1*, October 2018, p. 18

³⁵ ACT Legislative Assembly, *Submission 11*, p. 2.

³⁶ Scottish Parliament: Standing order 15.5.1.

³⁷ NZ Parliament: Standing order 371.

³⁸ NZ Parliament, 'Start a Petition: Search for similar petitions,' <www.parliament.nz/en/petitions/create> viewed 21 January 2019.

Figure 3.4 Advice from UK Parliament regarding duplicate petitions

This image displays the advice that is provided to petitioners when a petition to the UK House of Commons is rejected for being in similar terms to a previous petition.

Committee comment

- 3.71 The Committee notes that other parliaments have requirements that prevent petitioners being able to submit more than one petition in identical or similar terms in the same parliamentary session.
- 3.72 The Committee sees merit in such an approach. However, if such a rule was implemented in the House, the 'campaign' petitions that featured prominently in the 45th Parliament would not have been allowed.
- 3.73 The Committee sees value in continuing to accept petition 'campaigns' in the House. Without assessing the merit of the requests contained in these petitions, the Committee can see the benefits of such campaigns in assisting local communities to engage with their local Member, and assisting communities and groups to voice their concerns directly to the Parliament. The petitions have led to greater public engagement with petitioning, including encouraging Members outside of the Committee to present petitions to the House.
- 3.74 The Committee notes the proposed changes to ACT Legislative Assembly standing orders to combine signature counts of petitions presented in the same terms on the same day. As the Assembly requires petitions to meet thresholds prior to referral, the proposed changes will assist this process. As

the Committee does not currently require petitions to meet particular thresholds, the Committee does not see value in implementing similar changes. However, this could be revisited in the future if thresholds are implemented.

- 3.75 The Committee considers that maintaining the discretion to refer (or not to refer) a petition for response is an effective way of ensuring that the petitions process is not used improperly, and that Ministers are (where possible) not required to respond to numerous petitions in identical terms.

Citizenship and residency requirements

- 3.76 There is currently no requirement for a person creating or signing a petition to be an Australian citizen or resident.
- 3.77 Both paper and e-petitions require the full name, address and 'signature' of a principal petitioner. However, there is no requirement that the principal petitioner provide an address in Australia, or that the principal petitioner otherwise make a declaration regarding their residency or citizenship.³⁹
- 3.78 Some petitioners lodge petitions referring to the signatories as residents of a particular region, town or electorate. However, signatories to a paper petition are not required to provide their residential address.⁴⁰ A person signing an e-petition is required to provide their full name and e-mail address, not a residential address.
- 3.79 Other parliaments in Australia and overseas require that a person creating or signing a petition must be a resident/citizen of that jurisdiction. For example, the UK House of Commons requires that a petitioner must be a British citizen or a UK resident.⁴¹
- 3.80 Similarly, the Canadian House of Commons requires that both principal petitioners and signatories are either a Canadian citizen or a resident of Canada. In 2003, amendments to the Canadian standing orders allowed for persons with no fixed address to sign a petition.⁴² As demonstrated below, signatories are prompted to provide the country and province that they currently reside in. A box then prompts them to declare that they are a Canadian citizen or resident of Canada.

³⁹ Standing order 205.

⁴⁰ Standing order 205.

⁴¹ House of Commons, UK, *Submission 7*, p. 4.

⁴² House of Commons Canada, *Submission 4*, p. 1.

Figure 3.5 **Signing a petition to the House of Commons Canada**

If you wish to sign this petition, please provide the required information in the fields below. Your personal information will not be made public.

FIRST NAME *

LAST NAME *

EMAIL *

PHONE *

Address

Canada *

Ontario *

POSTAL CODE *

☐ I am a Canadian citizen or a resident of Canada. *

☐ I acknowledge, understand and accept the [Terms of Use](#). I consent to the use of my personal information for the purposes outlined in these Terms of Use. *

☐ I wish to receive email updates on this petition (optional).

Type the characters you see in the picture below: *

VHYVSC

SIGN

[Disclaimer regarding e-petitions](#)

This image displays the fields that a user must fill in when signing a petition to the House of Commons Canada. The image also includes a box that the user must tick to declare that they are a Canadian citizen or resident of Canada.

3.81 The Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly requires that when lodging an e-petition, a petitioner declares:

By electing to join an e-Petition, the petitioner acknowledges that they meet the conditions detailed below.

- 1 The petitioner is a resident/citizen of the Australian Capital Territory.
- 2 The petitioner has not already joined the e-Petition
- 3 The petitioner must provide their correct name, address (including postcode) and email address.
- 4 If a petitioner is unable to join an e-Petition due to incapacity from sickness, they are able to have another join on their behalf.⁴³

3.82 The ACT Legislative Assembly also requires that a petition can only contain the signatures of residents or citizens of the ACT.⁴⁴

3.83 On the other hand, the New Zealand Parliament does not require that a petitioner be a New Zealand citizen.⁴⁵

Committee comment

3.84 The Committee notes that the introductory text of a petition to the House often includes the words, 'this petition of certain citizens of Australia'. The Committee is of the view that both principal petitioners and people signing petitions to the House should be either a resident of Australia, or an Australian citizen.

3.85 The standing orders should be updated to require that principal petitioners and people signing petitions are either residents or citizens of Australia. This requirement should be built into the online platform for creating a petition. The Committee favours a model similar to the ACT Legislative Assembly or the Canadian House of Commons, whereby petitioners must make a declaration or agree to certain terms and conditions, confirming they are a resident or citizen of the relevant jurisdiction.

⁴³ ACT Legislative Assembly, 'e-petitions conditions of use', <<https://epetitions.act.gov.au/Conditions.aspx>> viewed 28 January 2019.

⁴⁴ ACT Legislative Assembly, 'e-petitions information and guidelines', <<https://epetitions.act.gov.au/Forms/E-Petitions%20Information%20and%20Guidelines.pdf>> viewed 28 January 2019.

⁴⁵ NZ Parliament, 'Guide to petitions', <<https://www.parliament.nz/en/get-involved/have-your-say/guide-for-petitions/>> viewed 28 January 2019.

- 3.86 Paper petitions currently require that a principal petitioner must provide an address on the front page of their petition. This is used for contact purposes, rather than to verify where a person lives. The committee notes that many petitioners prefer to be contacted by e-mail. Further, requiring that an address to be provided on paper petitions creates a difference to the process of creating an e-petition. If the processes are to be streamlined and people are encouraged to use the online form, the requirement to provide an address should be removed from standing orders. Some additional consideration may need to be given to how to manage petitioners who do not wish to complete an online form.

Recommendation 5

- 3.87 **The Committee recommends that standing orders be amended to require that a person creating or signing a petition must either be a resident or citizen of Australia.**

Threshold of signatures required

- 3.88 There is no requirement for a petition to obtain a certain number of signatures to be valid. Further, there is no requirement that a petition must reach a certain number of signatures before the Committee will consider referring a petition for response by a Minister. The issue of meeting a certain threshold of signatures before taking a certain action on a petition is discussed in chapter 4.
- 3.89 The table below shows the range of signature thresholds met in relation to petitions approved during the 45th Parliament.

Table 3.1 Signatures - all petitions presented*

No. of signatures	No. of paper petitions	No. of electronic petitions	Total
1 only	16	10	26
2-9	17	101	118
10-99	92	188	280
100-999	122	77	199
1,000-4,999	34	30	64
5,000-9,999	8	4	12
10,000-39,999	11	6	17
40,000+	1	2	3
Total	301	418	719

Source: Standing Committee on Petitions *includes petitions approved and awaiting presentation as at 22 January 2019

- 3.90 Some jurisdictions in other state and territory parliaments do not require a minimum number of signatures to be obtained before a petition will be considered. However, they do require that a Member sponsor the petition.⁴⁶
- 3.91 The Scottish Parliament does not require a minimum number of signatures for consideration. However, petitioners must provide evidence that they have already taken some action to raise the issue. This can include contacting one of their Members or the Scottish Government directly.⁴⁷
- 3.92 In contrast, the UK House of Commons requires an e-petition to reach a minimum of six signatures (the principal petitioner and five supporters) before it can be assessed by the UK Committee. If it is found to meet the requirements it will then be opened for wider signature.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ For example the: ACT Legislative Assembly, Legislative Council of Western Australia, Legislative Council of Victoria, and the NZ House of Representatives.

⁴⁷ The Scottish Parliament, *Getting Involved: Petitioning the Scottish Parliament*, 4th edn, May 2018, p. 2.

⁴⁸ House of Commons United Kingdom, *Exhibit 14*, p. [2].

- 3.93 The Canadian House of Commons have a number of steps that a petition must complete prior to presentation by the Clerk of petitions. For e-petitions these are:
- 1 a petitioner must identify at least five potential supporters, but no more than 10, who agree with the petition
 - 2 have a Member accept to sponsor the petition
 - 3 the Clerk will examine the petition for form and content
 - 4 the petition will be translated and published on the e-petition website for signature for 120 days
 - 5 reach 500 signatures from citizens or residents of Canada
 - 6 certified by the Clerk of Petitions for presentation in the House.⁴⁹
- 3.94 The process for paper petitions is:
- 1 collect a minimum of 25 valid signatures with addresses
 - 2 have a Member accept to sponsor the petition
 - 3 the Member sends the petition to the Clerk for review and certification.⁵⁰

Committee Comment

- 3.95 The Committee recognises that in some ways, the requirement to allow petitions that acquire only one signature (that of the principal petitioner) means that some petitions are more like a letter to the House, rather than a petition.
- 3.96 As at 22 January 2019, 26 petitions have been or are due to be presented to the House in the 45th Parliament, where only one signature has been obtained. This equates to about four per cent of all petitions received during the Parliament.
- 3.97 Noting the relatively small number of petitions received with only one signature, the Committee must balance the potential drawbacks to allowing petitions with only one signature, with the need to ensure that petitioning the Parliament remains a fundamental right for all Australians. In this way,

⁴⁹ House of Commons Canada, *Exhibit 12*, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁰ House of Commons Canada, 'Paper Petitions – Guide for the Public,' January 2019, <<https://petitions.ourcommons.ca/en/Home/AboutContent?guide=PIPaperGuide>>, viewed 25 January 2019.

individuals should retain the opportunity to place their concerns before the Parliament, regardless of how many people support their cause.

- 3.98 With a view to continuing to encourage petitioning in the House, the Committee does not support introducing a requirement that a person obtain a set number of signatures before their petition may be considered by the Committee.
- 3.99 In considering the future role of petitioning in the House, the Committee has examined the experience of other parliaments where a certain threshold of signatures be met to trigger a particular cause of action on a petition. These actions and the threshold attached will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 4.

Out of order petitions

- 3.100 As at 22 January 2019, 351 petitions out of 1178 petitions received during the 45th Parliament have been considered out of order. This equates to almost 30 per cent of petitions received. For a breakdown of out of order petitions by type, refer to Table 3.2 and Appendix F.
- 3.101 In contrast, of the 351 petitions received during the 44th Parliament, 96 were considered out of order. This equates to 27 per cent of all petitions received. It should be noted that the number of petitions received in the 45th Parliament includes e-petitions that were submitted, but not verified within 24 hours, and petitions that were withdrawn by principal petitioners prior to consideration.⁵¹

Table 3.2 Out of order petitions - 45th Parliament as at 22 January 2019

	Paper	Electronic	Total
Petitions received*	387	791	1178
Out of order	86 (22.2%)	265 (33.5%)	351 (29.8%)

**this includes petitions that were not verified within 24 hours as well as ones that were withdrawn by the principal petitioner prior to Committee consideration.*

Source: Standing Committee on Petitions

⁵¹ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions, *The work of the Petitions Committee: 2013-2016*, May 2016 p. 26.

- 3.102 In the UK, Professor Leston-Bandeira submitted that 20,781 petitions were rejected in the 2015-17 UK Parliament (or approximately 65 per cent of petitions submitted).⁵² In comparison, in 2017 the EU Committee on Petitions did not accept 495 (39 per cent) of the 1,271 petitions received.⁵³
- 3.103 As noted earlier in this chapter, the introduction of e-petitioning in the House has led to an increase in the number of petitions received. This increase is likely to be a significant factor in the corresponding increase in out of order petitions. However, noting the number of out of order paper petitions, it is not the sole reason.
- 3.104 To reduce the likelihood of out of order petitions, the House petitions webpages provide information on the requirements for a valid petition. As noted earlier, petitioners are encouraged to contact the secretariat for advice on the requirements for petitions. There is however no formal process requiring petitioners to seek this advice prior to submitting a petition. In general, advice does not extend to spelling, grammar or accuracy of information provided.
- 3.105 Both the Scottish Public Petitions Committee and the Legislative Council of Victoria submitted that they have mechanisms in place to provide petitioners with advice on how to petition.
- 3.106 The Legislative Council of Victoria told the Committee that any Victorian resident can submit an e-petition for review by the Table Office on any issue. The Table Office staff members check requests for 'conformity with Standing Orders and edit for content, syntax, grammar and flow'.⁵⁴
- 3.107 The Scottish Parliament submitted:
- Initially, a high percentage of petitions submitted do not meet the requirements ... However, where possible, the clerks will work with a petitioner to make a petition admissible or will signpost the petitioner to another route to try and resolve the issue.⁵⁵
- 3.108 In the New Zealand House of Representatives, each e-petition lodged is checked by the Office of the Clerk to make sure it follows the rules of

⁵² Professor Cristina Leston-Bandeira, *Submission 14*, p. 2.

⁵³ European Union Committee on Petitions, *Report on the deliberations of the Committee on Petitions during the year 2017*, 27 November 2018, p. 3.; as referenced in European Parliament, *Submission 3*, p.1.

⁵⁴ Legislative Council of Victoria, *Submission 6*, p. [3].

⁵⁵ Scottish Parliament, Public Petitions Committee, *Submission 13*, p. [4].

Parliament. A staff member contacts the petitioner if any changes are suggested, prior to the petition being published.⁵⁶ Reflecting on this process, the Clerk of the House, Mr David Wilson, submitted that a lack of understanding of the petitions process has resulted in a large workload on staff:

Staff have had to engage quite closely with petitioners, seeking clarification on various points or authentication of various asserted facts. At times, staff have undertaken their own research to assess the accuracy of elements of the petition or to determine the most appropriate way to frame a petition. Petitions frequently have to be rewritten completely, with staff often debating the nuances of different phrasing to find wording that reflects the petitioner's intent while also satisfying the House's requirements.⁵⁷

3.109 Mr Wilson stated that the time it took to moderate a petition affected the timeliness of the petition's presentation. It was noted that since the introduction of e-petitioning, six petitions had been waiting for over a month for further information to be provided from the petitioner prior to moderation, and 17 petitions had been waiting for over a month for the petitioner to approve the changes made by staff.⁵⁸

3.110 Mr Wilson reflected on the experience:

We have not yet determined how to deal with petitions where the petitioner has failed to take the necessary action to progress the petition. It may be that imposing a time limit for responding to message from staff ... could be desirable, to introduce some urgency for petitioners to take action with their petition ...⁵⁹

⁵⁶ NZ Parliament, 'Guide to Petitions', <<https://www.parliament.nz/en/get-involved/have-your-say/guide-for-petitions/>> viewed 28 January 2019.

⁵⁷ NZ House of Representatives, *Submission 8*, p. [5].

⁵⁸ NZ House of Representatives, *Submission 8*, p. [6].

⁵⁹ NZ House of Representatives, *Submission 8*, p. [6].

Committee Comment:

- 3.111 Over the 45th Parliament and since the introduction of e-petitioning, the number of petitions received by the Committee has significantly increased. Simultaneously, the number of out of order petitions has risen.
- 3.112 The Committee is encouraged by the increased interest in petitioning. However, the number of out of order petitions it has received is a cause for concern. Any out of order petition received represents disappointment and frustration for the principal petitioner and prevents them from having their concerns voiced to the House.
- 3.113 Currently, petitioners are encouraged to contact the secretariat for advice on drafting their petition. The secretariat is able to provide feedback on draft terms in relation to the standing orders. In practice, only a small number of petitioners contact the secretariat prior to submitting their petitions to the Committee. Moreover, advice has not extended to editing for spelling or grammar.
- 3.114 The Committee considers that more work is required to educate petitioners and provide clear simple information to reduce the number of out of order petitions. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Committee is dedicated to providing clearer information and is currently working to improve this through redevelopment of the petitions webpages and the creation of video tutorials.
- 3.115 Once these changes are made public, the Committee will monitor the number of out of order petitions that are received. If the new information does not lead to significant reductions in out of order petitions, the Committee will consider whether a more formal moderation stage prior to committee consideration is required. This could be modelled on the New Zealand moderation process.

4. Action on petitions

Current practice

- 4.1 Currently, a petition requires one signature (that of the principal petitioner) to be valid.¹ If a petition with one or more valid signatures meets the rules for form and content, it is then presented to the House.² Following presentation, the Committee may refer a copy of the petition to the relevant Minister with a request for response.³ The only other action that may be taken in relation to a petition is to refer it to another Committee.⁴ To date, no petitions have ever been referred to other Committees for consideration.⁵
- 4.2 As at 22 January 2019, 694 petitions have been presented to the House and 686 have been referred to a Minister (or Ministers) for response. The relevant Minister is 'expected' to respond to a referred petition within 90 days of presentation by lodging a written response with the Committee.⁶ As at 22 January 2019, 102 responses were outstanding, equating to approximately 14 per cent.

¹ Standing order 205 (a).

² Standing order 206.

³ Standing orders 204 and 205.

⁴ Standing order 208.

⁵ *House of Representatives Practice*, 7th edition, p. 638.

⁶ Standing order 209.

Figure 4.1 Procedural workflow of a petition

This image demonstrates the process for all petitions that are approved by the Petitions Committee.

- 4.3 The practice of the House in responding to petitions differs from the practice of other petitions committees and parliaments around the world. For example, some jurisdictions allow for debates on petitions, or regularly refer petitions to the relevant subject-matter committee for review. Unlike this Committee, some committees regularly undertake investigations or inquiries into the substantive issues raised in a petition. Submissions favouring these alternative models are discussed below.

Alternative models for consideration

4.4 Submissions from individuals, organisations and other parliaments noted some procedural differences between the House petitioning system and other petitions systems in Australia and overseas. Features of alternative approaches outlined during the inquiry include:

- the ability to debate a petition;
- holding an inquiry into the subject matter of a petition; and
- the process of referring a petition to a Minister for response.

Debate on petitions

4.5 The UK Committee commenced on 20 July 2015 to coincide with the introduction of an e-petitions system. This committee has a range of different powers from the House Committee. This includes the ability to list an e-petition for debate in Westminster Hall if it reaches over 100,000 signatures.⁷

4.6 The UK Committee advised that it takes a number of factors into account, in determining whether to list a matter for debate. These include:

- if the e-petition has already been debated in the House;
- if this issue is likely to come before the House through other means;
- if the issue has not received significant attention in the House;
- if there is an appetite among other Members for debate on the issue.⁸

4.7 The UK Committee occasionally puts forward petitions for debate despite the petition receiving less than 100,000 signatures.⁹ The Chair of the UK Committee, Ms Helen Jones, explained that ‘we thought that there were some issues which would be important but perhaps only important to a small group of people.’¹⁰

4.8 Examples of petitions that did not meet the 100,000 signature threshold, but were still debated, include a petition requesting mandatory training in

⁷ UK House of Commons, *Submission 7*, p. [4].

⁸ UK House of Commons, *Exhibit 14*, p. 3.

⁹ UK House of Commons, *Submission 7*, p. [7].

¹⁰ Ms Helen Jones, Chair, House of Commons Petitions Committee, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra 27 November, 2018, p. 1.

autism for health staff and two petitions calling for public holidays on major religious occasions.¹¹

- 4.9 Professor Cristina Leston-Bandeira told the Committee that despite a high volume of petitions being submitted and accepted by the UK Committee, only a small percentage have met the threshold required for a government response (10,000 signatures), or the number of signatures required to be considered for debate (100,000 signatures).¹² The Clerk of the UK House of Commons submitted that since the 2017 General Election 32,069 petitions have been created. Of these, 13,974 reached the required six signatures. In this time, e-petitions have led to 204 government responses and 34 debates.¹³
- 4.10 Professor George Williams AO, Mr Sam Lee and Mr Daniel Reynolds considered that the petitions procedures introduced in the UK have had a striking impact on public and parliamentary engagement with petitioning and is a model worth emulating.¹⁴ It was considered that recent petitions have
- ... led to substantive and vibrant debate on policy issues ... one only needs to watch one of these debates for a few minutes to be convinced of their potential to improve substantive engagement with the issues that matter to people in Australia.¹⁵
- 4.11 Drawing from interviews with petitioners in the UK, Professor Leston-Bandeira submitted that '... obtaining a debate is seen as the highlight of the petitioning process.'¹⁶ However, it was noted that some petitioners expressed disappointment with the debates, with some people believing their petition had not been accurately portrayed during the debate. In Professor Leston-Bandeira's view, the rule allowing any MP to participate in the debates could lead to debates becoming partisan or focused on the arguments against the petition.¹⁷
- 4.12 Professor Leston-Bandeira considered that when a petition is debated, attention must be given to acknowledging the petitioner (and

¹¹ UK house of Commons, *Submission 7*, p. [7].

¹² Professor Cristina Leston-Bandeira, *Submission 14*, p. 2.

¹³ All figures as of 6 November 2018 as per: UK House of Commons, *Submission 7*, p. [5].

¹⁴ Professor George Williams AO, Mr Sam Lee and Mr Daniel Reynolds, *Submission 5*, pp. 3-4.

¹⁵ Professor Williams AO, Mr Lee and Mr Reynolds, *Submission 5*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁶ Professor Leston-Bandeira, *Submission 14*, p. 5.

¹⁷ Professor Leston-Bandeira, *Submission 14*, p. 5.

signatories). It was submitted that within the UK model, there were a number of ways to acknowledge the petitioner and signatories, including:

- having an MP from the Petitions Committee initiate and close every debate on e-petitions; and
- automatically inviting petitioners to attend their petition's debate.

4.13 The Clerk of the Australian House of Representatives, Mr David Elder, observed that the purpose of the UK debates was to consider the issues that had been raised in the petition, rather than to amend the law or enable a vote on the topic.¹⁸ The Clerk was of the view that considering the possibility of debate on petitions in the House could be a 'natural evolution of the process by which the House deals with the petitioning process.'¹⁹ It was queried whether it was practicable (in the context of the House) to impose a threshold number of signatures before debate was facilitated, or whether other criteria could be developed to trigger the option for debate. If debate on petitions was to be considered, the Clerk outlined the following options:

- Consideration of debate could follow a recommendation from the Petitions Committee to the Selection Committee (based on the criteria developed by the Petitions Committee);
- The Selection Committee could allocate time during a forthcoming period of Committee and Delegation and Private Members' Business on a Monday to debate the issues raised in a particular petition.
- Arrangements for debate on petitions should involve an indication from the Selection Committee that it had consulted Members, or the Whips, and that a minimum number of Members (for example, six) would be interested in participating if such a debate were scheduled by the Selection Committee.
- Initially debates could be scheduled in the Federation Chamber until the new procedures were evaluated.²⁰

¹⁸ House of Representatives, *Submission 9*, p. 3.

¹⁹ House of Representatives, *Submission 9*, p. 3.

²⁰ House of Representatives, *Submission 9*, p. 4.

Committee comment

- 4.14 The Committee supports the introduction of debate in the House as the next logical step for petitioning and notes that this suggestion requires no changes to the standing orders. A Member can lodge a notice of motion to debate a petition during private Members' business time, although the Selection Committee must select the motion for the debate to occur.
- 4.15 Consideration should also be given for a dedicated period of time for the purpose of debating petitions. Changes to the standing orders would be required for this option and the Committee would encourage the input of the Procedure Committee, Leader of the House and whips.
- 4.16 The Committee believes that a petition with a large amount of support deserves more than just to be presented and referred for written response. Those petitions with at least 20,000 signatures should be considered for a debate in the Federation Chamber. The Committee could use criteria similar to the UK in its consideration of whether to list a petition for debate. This would mirror the process in the UK House of Commons, where petitions with more than 100,000 signatures are considered for debate in Westminster Hall.²¹ If implemented, the threshold number of signatures should be reviewed by the Committee in the 46th Parliament.
- 4.17 Details of the petition(s) to be debated should be listed on the Notice Paper well in advance of the debate, so that Members and the general public have an opportunity to attend the debate and to inform themselves of issues relevant to the petition.
- 4.18 It is uncommon for Ministers to speak during debates on private Members' motions, however the Committee would encourage Ministers to attend, if not participate in any debates. It could be argued that such contributions could be as welcomed, if not more, than a written response. If this proves to be the case, the Committee would support a change to standing orders to recognise a Minister's verbal responses for the purposes of standing order 209.

Recommendation 6

- 4.19 The Committee recommends that Members be encouraged to give notice for debates on petitions during private Members' business time.**

²¹ UK house of Commons, *Submission 7*, p. [6].

Recommendation 7

4.20 The Committee recommends that:

- petitions with at least 20,000 signatures be considered for debate during a dedicated period for petitions debates in the Federation Chamber;
- The Procedure Committee consider the necessary changes to the standing orders to enable such debates; and
- Should this measure be implemented, the Petitions Committee review the 20,000 signature threshold during the 46th Parliament.

Recommendation 8

4.21 The Committee recommends that standing order 209 be amended to recognise any verbal responses to a petition given during a debate on that petition.

Inquiries into petitions

- 4.22 The Committee received evidence that other petitions committees take a more substantive role in inquiring into the matters raised in a petition, or referring petitions to other committees for further investigation following presentation. Examples were drawn from the UK and Scottish Parliaments in particular, where the relevant petitions committees regularly responded to petitions by either writing to relevant stakeholders for their views; undertaking an inquiry into the subject matter of a petition; or referring a petition to another relevant committee for investigation.
- 4.23 As outlined in chapter 2, the House Committee may ‘inquire into and report to the House on any matter relating to petitions and the petitions system’.²² Further, upon presenting a petition to the House, a Member may move a motion on notice that a petition be referred to a particular committee.²³
- 4.24 As canvased in chapter 2, Professor Williams, Mr Lee and Mr Reynolds were of the view that the House Committee had taken a narrow interpretation of its broad power to inquire into petitions or any matter relating to petitions.

²² Standing order 220.

²³ Standing order 208 (c).

They contrasted the role of the House Committee with the role of the UK Committee and Scotland's Public Petitions Committee (PPC). It was noted that both the UK Committee and the PPC have broad and substantive powers to take actions on petitions, including initiating inquiries.²⁴ Professor Williams, Mr Lee and Mr Reynolds considered that these substantive powers were more responsive to petitioner concerns and improved public engagement with the Parliament.²⁵ These views were supported by the Law Society of New South Wales, which suggested expanding the remit of the House Committee so that it reflects that of its Scottish and/or UK counterparts.²⁶ Similarly, Queensland Advocacy Incorporated suggested introducing a requirement for petitions to be referred to relevant committees for inquiry.²⁷

- 4.25 The Scottish Parliament outlined its powers of inquiry during the Committee's review of the e-petitioning system. They advised that the Public Petitions Committee had broad powers to decide what action should be taken on admissible petitions. Such actions could include:
- writing to relevant stakeholders for their views;
 - undertaking a formal inquiry;
 - holding a plenary debate;
 - referring the petition to Scottish Ministers, another committee of the Parliament or any other person or body.²⁸
- 4.26 In its submission to the current inquiry, the Scottish Parliament stated that each petition is treated as a mini-inquiry and that the Committee follows where the evidence leads. The PPC currently has 50 petitions under active consideration. In addition, the PPC conducts approximately three formal inquiries in a year.²⁹
- 4.27 The Legislative Council of Western Australia, through its equivalent committee, the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs, took a similar approach to Scotland. That is, 'the nature and extent of inquiries by the Committee relating to each petition will vary depending on

²⁴ Professor Williams AO, Mr Lee and Mr Reynolds, *Submission 5*, pp. 6-7.

²⁵ Professor Williams AO, Mr Lee and Mr Reynolds, *Submission 5*, pp. 6-7.

²⁶ The Law Society of New South Wales, *Submission 12*, p. 2.

²⁷ Queensland Advocacy Incorporated, *Submission 2*, p. 6.

²⁸ Scottish Parliament, *Exhibit 10*, p. 3.

²⁹ Scottish Parliament, Public Petitions Committee, *Submission 13*, p. 1.

the nature of the issues raised.’ It was submitted that in most cases, the Committee would request a submission from the principal petitioner and tabling Member, which would enable the Committee to better understand the issues involved and any actions already undertaken to try and resolve the matter. A response would then usually be requested from the relevant Minister, and any other relevant organisations (such as local governments).³⁰

- 4.28 The Clerk of the WA Legislative Council, Nigel Pratt, advised that in many instances, the Minister’s response to a petition would lead to the Committee seeking further information to clarify the issues to its satisfaction. Alternatively, the Committee might resolve to conduct a more extensive inquiry into the matter and report its findings and recommendations to the House.³¹
- 4.29 The UK Committee periodically undertakes inquiries into petitions when the matter is not being considered elsewhere in Parliament. The UK Committee considered that in contrast to inquiries held by other select committees, it placed a greater emphasis on public participation and on new and innovative ways of taking evidence. Such innovations included holding roundtable discussions, web threads, informal hearings and consultation events.³²
- 4.30 The Committee heard that a number of petitions committees in other jurisdictions had the power to refer petitions to other committees for inquiry. For example, the PPC referred petitions to specific subject matter committees where another committee was already inquiring into the matter raised in the petition.³³ Between May 2017 and May 2018, the PPC had referred five petitions to other committees.³⁴

³⁰ Legislative Council of Western Australia, *Submission 1*, p. 2.

³¹ Legislative Council of Western Australia, *Submission 1*, p. 2.

³² UK House of Commons, *Submission 7*, p. [11].

³³ Scottish Parliament, Public Petitions Committee, *Submission 13*, p. 2.

³⁴ Scottish Parliament, Public Petitions Committee, *Submission 13*, p. 1.

4.31 The ACT Legislative Assembly automatically refers petitions with at least 500 signatures to a relevant Assembly committee for consideration. The Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, Tom Duncan, advised that no committee had so far conducted an inquiry on the basis of a petition referred to it. However, the Clerk submitted:

- In the last five years, 92 petitions have been presented to the Assembly and 25 have been referred to committees (including a paper and e-petition with the same subject matter).
- Standing Order 246A provides, amongst other things, that a committee may resolve to make a statement to the Assembly about a particular inquiry being undertaken by the Committee. In the last five years, 17 such statements have been made in relation to petitions.³⁵

4.32 While the New Zealand Parliament does not have a petitions committee, each subject select committee has the ability to consider petitions. The Clerk, Mr David Wilson, submitted that provided the issue was within a committee's subject area, a subject select committee could use a petition as a prompt to receive a briefing or establish an inquiry into that issue.³⁶

4.33 When considering a petition, there is an established approach that is usually followed in New Zealand:

- 1 The lead petitioner is invited to provide a written submission;
- 2 Any relevant government departments are invited to provide submissions;
- 3 The committee decides on the basis of these written submissions whether to hear oral evidence from the parties;
- 4 Having considered [t]he evidence, the committee deliberates on a draft report; and
- 5 The Committee then reports to the House on the petition.³⁷

4.34 Mr Wilson noted that allocating petitions to subject select committees increased the likelihood of the committee having an existing knowledge of the matters raised in a petition, or an awareness of the broader context that the matter sat within. This had the ability to 'improve the outcomes for the affected population in a way that a committee considering only petitions may not be able to do'.³⁸

³⁵ ACT Legislative Assembly, *Submission 11*, p. 2.

³⁶ New Zealand (NZ) House of Representatives, *Submission 8*, p. [2].

³⁷ NZ House of Representatives, *Submission 8*, p. [3].

³⁸ NZ House of Representatives, *Submission 8*, p. [2].

- 4.35 However, a potential disadvantage to this practice was that the relevant committee's workload might lead to petitions being treated as low-priority, resulting in significant delays in petition consideration.³⁹

Committee comment

- 4.36 As outlined in chapter 2, the Committee has a broad power to inquire into any matter relating to petitions or the petitions system. As discussed in chapter 2, this power has been used by past committees to hold roundtables and hearings with petitioners and other relevant stakeholders, including government officials, regarding the subject matter of a petition. However, the Committee has been careful not to engage with the substantive request raised in a petition during these hearings. It has acted to facilitate discussion between the relevant parties about the petition topic, rather than attempt to solve the issues raised, undertake any investigations or make recommendations in response to the petition request.
- 4.37 This approach differs substantially from the approach of other petitions committees in parliaments around the world. The UK Committee and the PPC in particular have used their powers to engage in detailed inquiries about the substantive matters raised in a petition, similar to the approach of other standing and select committees.
- 4.38 The Committee notes that the standing orders currently allow for the Committee to initiate any inquiry into matters relating to an individual petition. Therefore, no procedural changes would be required if the Committee decided to take a more investigative role by inquiring into the subject matters raised in individual petitions.
- 4.39 It is also open to a Member of the House to move a motion, on notice, that a petition be referred to a particular committee, following its presentation. Although standing order 208 (c) has not been used, notice for such a motion could be given by the Chair following the presentation of a petitions to the House. As the standing orders currently stand, there is no provision for private Members' motions to be voted on. Leave of the House would need to be granted, or standing orders suspended, for this motion to be moved and voted on during Government business time.
- 4.40 Alternatively, Ministers may wish to use the request for a response to a petition as the basis of a referral of the matter to a House of Representatives standing committee for inquiry and report.⁴⁰

³⁹ NZ House of Representatives, Submission 8, p. [2].

- 4.41 It is a matter for the Committee of the 46th Parliament to determine how these current procedures might be used more effectively, to further raise the profile of petitions in the House, and meet the expectations of Parliamentarians, petitioners and the public. The Committee sees value in reinvigorating the use of its power to inquire into petitions during the 46th Parliament, now that the e-petitioning system has been firmly established in House procedures and practice. As observed by the Clerk of the House, the use of videoconferencing facilities might better enable future committees to facilitate more regular hearings based from Parliament House.
- 4.42 Further, the Committee encourages consideration of more referrals of petitions to relevant subject matter committees, where such referral would allow for an investigation of a matter that might not otherwise be investigated by the Parliament, or where the petition in question relates to an ongoing inquiry by the relevant committee.

Ministerial referrals

- 4.43 Currently, the Committee may decide to refer a petition to the Minister responsible for the administration of the matter raised in a petition.⁴¹ Once referred, there is an expectation that the Minister will provide a written response to the Committee within 90 days.⁴² Once received, a response is tabled, recorded in Hansard and published on the Committee's web site.⁴³
- 4.44 The referral mechanism sets the House petitioning process (and other like parliamentary processes) apart from petitioning platforms such as Change.org, where a formal response is not required. Professor Ariadne Vromen, Professor Darren Halpin and Mr Michael Vaughan submitted that requiring a formal response was an 'important mechanism to ensure that citizen participation is not met with unresponsiveness, which can lead to disengagement or alienation.'⁴⁴
- 4.45 There is no requirement that a petition must reach a certain level of support (i.e. a minimum number of signatures) before the Committee will consider referring a petition to the relevant Minister for response.

⁴⁰ Standing order 215 (b).

⁴¹ Standing order 209 (a).

⁴² Standing order 209 (b).

⁴³ Standing order 209 (c).

⁴⁴ Professor Ariadne Vromen, Professor Darren Halpin and Mr Michael Vaughan, Submission 10, p. [4].

- 4.46 Professor Williams, Mr Lee and Mr Reynolds submitted that the current House procedure for referring a petition to a Minister could be strengthened by introducing a minimum signature threshold that would guarantee a Ministerial response. They expressed concern that current practice could leave petitions with high signature counts unanswered, as there was no requirement that a Minister had to respond to a petition, following referral.⁴⁵
- 4.47 Some jurisdictions in other state and territory parliaments required that a minimum number of signatures be obtained before they are referred to the relevant Minister. For example, in the UK any petition receiving 10,000 signatures is guaranteed a Ministerial response.⁴⁶
- 4.48 In contrast, some jurisdictions do not have signature thresholds but make government responses to petitions mandatory. For example, the Canadian House of Commons requires that every petition must be responded to within 45 days.⁴⁷ In 2004, procedures were updated to require that any failure by the government to respond to a petition within 45 days of its presentation would result in the petition being referred to the appropriate standing committee. This has led to a decrease in the number of unanswered petitions.⁴⁸
- 4.49 Professor Leston-Bandeira submitted that the UK Committee ‘often writes to government departments to follow up specific matters, such as poor government response to a specific e-petition.’⁴⁹
- 4.50 The New Zealand House of Representatives does not have a signature threshold for taking certain actions on petitions. Mr David Wilson, Clerk of the House, stated
- ... it ensures that all matters of concern are considered by the House, and that people are not disadvantaged simply because their issue is one of little wider interest or because they lack the resources or the ability to arrange a large campaign to collect signatures.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Professor Williams AO, Mr Lee, and Mr Reynolds, *Submission 5*, p. 5.; See also: Standing order 209.

⁴⁶ UK House of Commons, *Submission 7*, p. [4].

⁴⁷ House of Commons Canada, *Submission 4*, p. 4.

⁴⁸ House of Commons Canada, *Submission 4*, p. 1.

⁴⁹ Professor Leston-Bandeira, *Submission 14*, p. 3.

⁵⁰ NZ House of Representatives, *Submission 8*, pp. [8-9].

- 4.51 Mr Wilson considered, however, that were a petition meets a certain number of signatures it might be desirable to trigger an additional process such as a debate in the House, as has been the approach taken in the UK.⁵¹

Committee comment

- 4.52 As mentioned at the start of this chapter, at 22 January 2019, 686 petitions had been referred to a Minister (or Ministers) for response during the 45th Parliament. Of these, 102 responses to petitions remained outstanding on the same date. In the time that has followed, further responses have been received. The Committee is enthused by the response rate during this Parliament and intends to take steps to ensure that this high response rate continues.
- 4.53 In considering the House procedures for referral and response, the Committee notes that there are factors that may contribute to a petition response being delayed. Occasionally, a petition does not fit neatly into a single Minister's area of responsibility and so some discussions ensue between government departments to find the most appropriate Minister to respond. Some petitions have required re-referrals to alternate portfolios before a response can be actioned. Ministry changes can also lead to a delay in responses to petitions. Finally, the pattern of parliamentary sittings can delay the process of a petition as it proceeds from presentation, to referral, to the Committee receiving a response, to the response being presented to the House.
- 4.54 In the past, the Committee has taken an informal approach to following up on outstanding responses to petitions. This approach has generally involved directing the secretariat to contact the office of Ministers to query the status of outstanding responses. More recently, the Committee implemented a more formal process of writing to individual Ministers through the Chair. The Committee has observed that this approach has had a positive impact on the number of responses received.
- 4.55 The Committee intends to further embed the follow-up of responses to petitions into the ordinary business of the Committee at its private meetings. It is envisaged that this would include managing a running tally of outstanding responses (i.e. over 90 days); writing to Ministers to follow-up responses after the 90 days has been exceeded; and keeping petitioners up-to-date with the status of their petition.

⁵¹ NZ House of Representatives, *Submission 8*, p. [9].

- 4.56 The current rules do not require a minimum number of signatures be obtained before the Committee may refer a petition to a relevant Minister for response. This ensures that all petitions approved by the Committee have the opportunity to be referred for a response, regardless of how much support the issue can muster. The Committee agrees with the view of the New Zealand Clerk of the House of Representatives, that some issues are not widely known, or may be significant to a relatively small group of individuals. These factors should not prevent such a matter being raised directly with the House (and to a Minister) in the form of a petition.
- 4.57 The Committee is of the view that the current wording of standing order 209, that the Committee ‘may’ refer a petition for response, provides the Committee with the necessary discretion to decline to refer a petition for response, when appropriate. As mentioned in chapter 3, this discretion is usually exercised to avoid multiple referrals of duplicate petitions.
- 4.58 It is envisaged that the Committee of the 46th Parliament could again review the effectiveness of responses to petitions towards the end of the Parliament to determine whether any further steps should be taken in relation to responses to petitions.

Public engagement

- 4.59 In the *Inquiry into the e-petitioning system*, the Committee learned how other countries have transformed their petitioning processes to increase public engagement with petitioning and the work of the parliament more broadly.
- 4.60 This inquiry provides further opportunity for the Committee to reflect on how the public currently engages with petitioning in the House. By considering the experiences of other jurisdictions, the Committee can identify areas where the House might better engage with the public and promote better awareness and understanding of the petitioning process.
- 4.61 This is particularly relevant in the context of the growing interest in online petitions, submitted through both parliamentary and non-parliamentary platforms. As more people engage with online petitioning it is important that petitioners are informed of the differences between petitioning to the House and petitioning to other platforms such as Change.org.
- 4.62 The Committee heard that online petitioning is changing the demographics of petitioners. Professor Vromen, Professor Halpin and Mr Vaughan submitted that traditionally underrepresented groups, such as women or

people from low socio-economic backgrounds, may be more likely to use online petitions.⁵²

- 4.63 Currently, engagement with the public about petitioning focuses on assisting people to create and sign petitions and educating them about what to expect once their petition is submitted to the House. Information is provided through the petitions webpages and the Committee secretariat provides advice directly to petitioners and Members' offices as requested. Once a petition has been submitted, the Committee keeps in regular contact with the principal petitioner, providing updates via email as the petition reaches important steps. Queensland Advocacy Incorporated submitted that more information should be provided to individuals who sign a petition.⁵³
- 4.64 The general public are informed about the presentation of petitions and Ministerial responses when the Chair reports to the House on sitting Mondays. Once presented, the details of each petition are published in Hansard. During the presentation the Chair also presents a written report outlining all of the petitions being presented and responses to petitions that have been received. This report is published on the Committee's webpage. The Chair also makes a short statement, which provides information about the broader petitioning process to the public and Members of the House. As previously discussed, past committees have held roundtables about individual petitions matters, allowing some petitioners to voice their concerns and receive feedback from relevant government representatives. These roundtables have been reported to the House during the Chair's statement.
- 4.65 To raise awareness of the petitions system and provide training to members of the public and civil society groups, the UK Committee has commissioned and supported various outreach work. For example, the UK Committee recently ran a workshop with a disability rights group on how to petition Parliament.⁵⁴ The UK Committee has also published versions of Special Reports that include information on how to provide feedback to the Committee for people with difficulty reading.⁵⁵

⁵² Professor Vromen, Professor Halpin and Mr Vaughan, *Submission 10*, p. [3].

⁵³ Queensland Advocacy Incorporated, *Submission 2*, p. 7.

⁵⁴ UK House of Commons, *Submission 7*, p. [11].

⁵⁵ For example: UK House of Commons Petitions Committee, *1st Special Report – Online abuse and the experience of disabled people: draft recommendations for consultation (easy read version)*, 17 July 2018.

- 4.66 Petitions can be used as a tool by teachers to educate school aged children. During the 45th Parliament, the Committee has received a number of petitions created and/or signed by children under the age of 18. The Committee learned that some students lodged petitions as part of classroom activities about federal parliament.⁵⁶ In the past, the Committee has spoken to some of these students via video conference and during roundtables to find out more about their experiences with petitioning.⁵⁷
- 4.67 The Clerk of the New Zealand House of Representatives observed that since the introduction of e-petitions there have been waves of petitions from several students from the same school. The Clerk noted that some of these petitions were created as part of the students studies in which they had to undertake an action of social engagement.⁵⁸
- 4.68 As the role of the Committee evolves, opportunities such as inquiring into or debating petitions could increase engagement for both the public and Parliamentarians.
- 4.69 Evidence from other jurisdictions indicated that petitioning processes that extend beyond receiving and processing petitions allowed for greater public engagement. Reflecting on its own system, the Scottish Parliament submitted that the most successful aspect of their system is the opportunity for petitioners to provide evidence to the PPC. The PPC endeavours to invite at least 50 per cent of petitioners to give oral evidence and always provides petitioners with the right to reply to any submission that the Committee received relating to the petition.⁵⁹
- 4.70 Similarly, the Chair of the UK Committee stated that their success comes from the involvement with the public and its willingness to experiment with a wide range of activities to engage petitioners. Activities include surveys, online forums, Facebook discussion threads, Twitter dedicated hashtags, roundtable discussions, and informal evidence sessions with members of the

⁵⁶ Mrs Deborah Irons, Year 5/6 teacher, St Anthony's Catholic Primary School Marsfield, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 6 December 2017 – see *Inquiry into the e-petitioning system*.

⁵⁷ For example: St Anthony's Catholic Primary School Marsfield, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 6 December 2017 – see *Inquiry into the e-petitioning system*; Wednesday, 29 April 2015: roundtable exercise, Hornsby Girls High, Hornsby, NSW – see House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions, *The work of the Petitions Committee: 2013-2016*, May 2016, Appendix B, p. 34.

⁵⁸ NZ House of Representatives, *Submission 8*, p. [5].

⁵⁹ Scottish Parliament, Public Petitions Committee, *Submission 13*, p. [3].

public.⁶⁰ During its inquiry into online abuse and the experiences of disabled people, the UK Committee consulted with people with disabilities and other members of the public on a set of draft recommendations, prior to deciding on recommendations for a final report. This was the first time a House of Commons Select Committee consulted on its draft recommendations prior to producing a final report.⁶¹

- 4.71 Interviews with petitioners in the UK and analysis of live reactions on Twitter showed that petitioners appreciate the regular contact kept by the Committee. Professor Leston-Bandeira submitted that regardless of whether the issue was actually resolved, petitioners were satisfied with the petitioning system when they felt the issues raised by their petition have been addressed in Parliament.⁶²
- 4.72 Professor Leston-Bandeira also noted that the UK Committee provides signatories with updates every time a petition they signed achieves a specific step. The Professor noted that in interviews, petitioners were complimentary of the Committees regular communication with them.⁶³
- 4.73 The UK Chair reflected that experimenting with different forms of public engagement and introducing debates on petitions is
 ... starting to change the way that the public deal with parliament. It has hugely improved the interaction between the public and parliament.⁶⁴
- 4.74 The Chair of the UK Committee submitted that their work has led to an increase in public engagement with the broader work of the parliament. For example, where possible they inform petitioners of select committee inquiries that are relevant to petitions they have signed. This has resulted in some inquiries receiving greater numbers of personal stories from people with direct experience relating to the topic of the inquiry.⁶⁵ More broadly, the Chair stated that since the establishment of the Committee in July 2015 there has been an increase of almost 300 per cent in people reading Hansard

⁶⁰ For example: UK House of Commons, *Submission 7*, p. [5]; and Professor Leston-Bandeira, *Submission 14*, p. 5.

⁶¹ UK House of Commons, *Submission 7*, p. [12].

⁶² Professor Leston-Bandeira, *Submission 14*, p. 1.

⁶³ Professor Leston-Bandeira, *Submission 14*, p. 3.

⁶⁴ Ms Jones, House of Commons Petitions Committee, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 27 November 2018, p. 4.

⁶⁵ UK House of Commons, *Submission 7*, p. [6].

online and a 900 per cent increase in the viewing of Westminster Hall debates.⁶⁶

Committee comment

- 4.75 With the significant increase of petitions received by the Committee during the 45th parliament, it is clear that the public remain interested in petitioning as a means to raise issues directly with the House. However, the Committee's review of the e-petitioning system highlighted that petitioners desire simple instructions and explanation for using the e-petitions system and wider petitions processes.⁶⁷ This combined with the significant rate of out of order petitions received by the Committee suggests that more can be done to educate both the public and Members about petitioning the House.
- 4.76 The Committee notes that recommendations from the e-petitions inquiry, including the redevelopment of webpages and the creation of video tutorials, are expected to improve the general public and Members' understanding of petitioning. As these are implemented, the Committee will monitor how these initiatives impact on engagement and understanding of petitioning.
- 4.77 The Committee notes that currently, principal petitioners are provided with up to date information as a petition progresses. The Committee sees value in considering ways that signatories can also be informed of a petition's progress. This may include an option to 'track' a petition online.
- 4.78 Noting the success of innovations introduced in the UK in recent years, the Committee encourages future committees to consider more innovative methods of facilitating public discussions about petitions, such as through social media channels and by engaging more informally with the public.
- 4.79 The number of school-aged students that are engaging in the petitioning process is very encouraging. The Committee has found roundtables and videoconferences conducted with school groups in the past to be particularly valuable. The Committee acknowledges that this engagement is often encouraged by teachers who have incorporated petitioning into classroom activities on federal parliament and social engagement. The

⁶⁶ Ms Jones, House of Commons Petitions Committee, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 27 November 2018, p. 4.

⁶⁷ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions, *Making voices heard: Inquiry into the e-petitioning system of the House of Representatives Petitions Committee*, May 2018, p. 24.

Committee sees merit in exploring how it could do more to support classroom learning about petitioning.

- 4.80 One option to support further classroom learning about petitioning would be to develop educative materials and activities on petitioning for school groups in conjunction with the Parliamentary Education Office. This could be piloted in a select number of schools. If the pilot program is successful, the Committee could consider developing similar packages for other community groups.
- 4.81 If the role of the Committee evolves in the future, opportunities for further engagement may arise. For example, inquiring into or debating petitions could increase engagement for both the public and parliamentarians.

Recommendation 9

- 4.82 The Committee recommends exploring the opportunity for the Department of the House of Representatives, in collaboration with the Parliamentary Education Office, to develop educational resources about petitioning in the House, to be targeted at school-aged children.**

A. List of Submissions

- 1 Legislative Council of Western Australia
- 2 Queensland Advocacy Incorporated
- 3 European Parliament
- 4 House of Commons, Canada
- 5 Professor George Williams AO, Mr Sam Lee and Mr Daniel Reynolds
- 6 Legislative Council of Victoria
- 7 House of Commons, UK
- 8 New Zealand House of Representatives
- 9 Australian House of Representatives
- 10 Professor Ariadne Vromen, Professor Darren Halpin and Mr Michael Vaughan
- 11 ACT Legislative Assembly
- 12 The Law Society of New South Wales
- 13 Scottish Parliament, Public Petitions Committee
- 14 Professor Cristina Leston-Bandeira

B. Exhibits

- 1 *Summary: Work of the UK Petitions Committee, Professor Cristina Leston-Bandeira, (Submission 14)*
- 2 *Submission 1 to the inquiry into the e-petitions system, Name Withheld*
- 3 *Submission 2 to the inquiry into the e-petitions system, Mr Daniel Griffin*
- 4 *Submission 3 to the inquiry into the e-petitions system, Ms Jenny Gibbs*
- 5 *Submission 4 to the inquiry into the e-petitions system, Mr Philip Clark*
- 6 *Submission 5 to the inquiry into the e-petitions system, Mr John McLean*
- 7 *Submission 6 to the inquiry into the e-petitions system, Name Withheld*
- 8 *Submission 7 to the inquiry into the e-petitions system, Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA)*
- 9 *Supplementary submission 7.1 to the inquiry into the e-petitions system, Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA)*
- 10 *Submission 8 to the inquiry into the e-petitions system, The Scottish Parliament*
- 11 *Submission 9 to the inquiry into the e-petitions system, Name Withheld*
- 12 *Submission 10 to the inquiry into the e-petitions system, House of Commons, Canada*
- 13 *Submission 11 to the inquiry into the e-petitions system, House of Representatives, New Zealand Parliament*
- 14 *Submission 12 to the inquiry into the e-petitions system, House of Commons, United Kingdom*
- 15 *Submission 13 to the inquiry into the e-petitions system, Secretariat of the Committee on Petitions of the European Parliament*

- 16** *Submission 14 to the inquiry into the e-petitions system, New South Wales Legislative Council*
- 17** *Submission 15 to the inquiry into the e-petitions system, Confidential*
- 18** *Submission 16 to the inquiry into the e-petitions system, House of Assembly - Parliament of Tasmania*
- 19** *Supplementary submission 16.1 to the inquiry into the e-petitions system, House of Assembly - Parliament of Tasmania*
- 20** *Submission 17 to the inquiry into the e-petitions system, ACT Legislative Assembly*
- 21** *Submission 18 to the inquiry into the e-petitions system, Mr Wayne Hodges*

C. List of witnesses and public hearings

Tuesday, 27 November 2018

Committee Room 1R3

Parliament House

Canberra

Petitions Committee, House of Commons, United Kingdom

- Ms Helen Jones, Chair

D. Member presentations

Table D.1 Member presentations - paper petitions

Petition number	Presented by	Topic	Date
PN0007	Hon M. Coultan MP	Access to cancer treatment in Western New South Wales	10/11/2016
PN0015	Ms C. McGowan MP	Development of a 'Great River Road' in the Upper Murray	19/10/2016
PN0023	Mr R. Wilson MP	Funding to improve mobile black spots	9/11/2016
PN0027	Hon D. Tehan MP	Funding for Victorian roads	21/11/2016
PN0029	Dr A. Aly MP	NBN in the electorate of Cowan	21/11/2016
PN0031	Mr A. Bandt MP	Refugee and asylum seeker policy	10/11/2016
PN0033	Ms J. Keay MP	Funding to improve mobile black spots in Heybridge, Preservation Bay and Sulphur Creek	7/2/2017
PN0034	Mr G. Christensen MP	Halal certification	29/11/2016
PN0037	Hon Dr A. Leigh MP	Permanent residency for the Ingram family	28/11/2016

PN0038	Mr R. Broadbent MP	MRI Medicare licensing in the West Gippsland District	8/2/2017
PN0041	Hon A. Hawke MP	Child labour in the cocoa industry	1/12/2016
PN0042	Mr M. Keogh MP	Funding to improve mobile black spots in Haynes, Hilbert and surrounding suburbs	1/12/2016
PN0061	Ms J. Keay MP	Road safety of the Bass Highway from Marrawah to Burnie, Tasmania	14/6/2017
PN0071	Mr B. Mitchell MP	Preventative health services in the Meander Valley	15/8/2017
PN0079	Mr N. Champion MP	Climate change	23/10/2017
PN0080	Hon T. Burke MP	Maritime boundary between Australia and Timor-Leste	27/3/2018
PN0081	Mr A. Wallace MP	Climate change	14/9/2017
PN0084	Mr A. Bandt MP	Climate change	7/9/2017
PN0093	Mr T. Zimmerman MP	Climate change	27/2/2018
PN0096	Mr R. Ramsey MP	Climate change	24/10/2017
PN0099	Hon Dr M. Kelly MP	Climate change	14/2/2018
PN0107	Dr J. Chalmers MP	Treatment of Rohingya people	23/10/2017
PN0113	Ms S. Claydon MP	Climate change	13/2/2018
PN0131	Mr T. Wilson MP	Environmental damage in Vietnam and foreign aid commitments	19/10/2017
PN0178	Dr A. Aly MP	Climate change	7/12/2017

PN0212	Ms T. Butler MP	The proposed sale of the former Bulimba Barracks	7/12/2017
PN0227	Ms T. Butler MP	The proposed sale of the former Bulimba Barracks	7/12/2017
PN0287	Hon W. Snowdon	Access to health and well-being packages for PFAS in Katherine	14/2/2018
PN0304	Mr M. Keogh MP	Synthetic lottery operators	26/3/2018
PN0305	Mr M. Keogh MP	Synthetic lottery operators	26/3/2018
PN0306	Mr M. Keogh MP	Synthetic lottery operators	26/3/2018
PN0324	Mr M. Keogh MP	Synthetic lottery operators	26/3/2018
PN0332	Hon L. Hartsuyker MP	Asylum seeker policy	21/8/2018
PN0343	Hon Dr M. Kelly MP	Constitutional recognition	16/8/2018
PN0370	Mr T. Zappia MP	Freedom of religion	15/8/2018
PN0371	Mr G. Perret MP	Recognition of the state of Palestine	12/9/2018
PN0374	Mr R. Wilson MP	The sheep industry in Western Australia	20/9/2018
PN0380	Hon Dr D. Gillespie MP	Access to the supply of Pharmaceutical Benefits in Bonny Hills, New South Wales	23/10/2018
PN0382	Mr R. Mitchell MP	Aged care facilities in Doreen/Mernda, Victoria	24/10/2018
PN0389	Mr A. Bandt MP	Chronic fatigue and the National Disability Insurance Scheme	5/12/2018

Source: Standing Committee on Petitions

Table D.2 Member presentations – e-petitions

Petition number	Presented by	Topic	Date
EN001	Dr A. Aly MP	NBN in the electorate of Cowan	21/11/2016
EN0232	Hon T. Burke MP	Maritime Boundary between Australia and Timor-Leste	28/3/2018
EN0323	Hon S. Morrison MP	Installation of mobile phone base stations	19/10/2017
EN0377	Mr A. Bandt MP	Development of industry-wide labelling of all fashion items sold in Australia	26/6/2018
EN0395	Hon K. Andrews MP	Safe Schools Program	4/12/2017
EN0462	Hon A. Byrne MP	Approval of nusinersen (Spinraza) for PBS listing for all patients with Spinal Muscular Atrophy	28/3/2018
EN0544	Mr L. O'Brien MP	Construction of Section D of the Cooroy to Curra Bruce Highway upgrade	29/5/2018
EN0591	Hon R. Marles MP	Introduction of Opt-out Policy for Organ Donation	26/6/2018
EN0659	Mr T. Zappia MP	Treatment of Uyghurs	17/9/2018
EN0709	Hon Dr D. Gillespie MP	Access to the supply of Pharmaceutical Benefits in Bonny Hills, New South Wales	23/10/2018

Source: Standing Committee on Petitions

E. Campaign petitions

Table E.1 Campaign petitions seeking action on climate change

Petition number	Principal petitioner	Electorate	Signature count
PN0074	Ms Maxine Ross	New England	512
PN0075	Ms Jane Irwin	Hume	164
PN0079	Gillian Caunce	Wakefield	903
PN0081	Mr Robert Cullen	Fisher	1,051
PN0083	Mr David French	Groom	663
PN0084	Ms Elizabeth Young	Melbourne	165
PN0085	Theresa Maria Ormerod	Barton	256
PN0089	Mr Denis Quinn	Gilmore	1,650
PN0093	Mr Anthony Borger	North Sydney	1,483
PN0094	Ms Jo-Anne Huntington	Sydney	1,482
PN0095	Ms Kathryn Murray	Indi	878
PN0096	Ms Fiona Plunkett	Grey	2,153
PN0097	Ms Jean Corbett	Goldstein	75
PN0099	Ms Carol Bartlett	Eden Monaro	1,654
PN0101	Mr John McRae	Franklin	132
PN0102	Ms Philippa Rowland	Mayo	774

PN0110	Lesley Harbick	Farrer	110
PN0111	Mr Jeff Randles	Deakin	288
PN0112	Ms Deborah Ware	Dunkley	194
PN0113	Mr John Hayes	Newcastle	136
PN0116	Mr Michael Grimes	Bendigo	895
PN0120	Ms Mary Tinney	Lilley	132
PN0121	Ms Zara Vaccari	Wills	119
PN0123	Ms Anna Conyers	Riverina	20
PN0124	Ms Renee Hills	Ryan	225
PN0125	Mr Geoffrey Stone	Aston	78
PN0126	Ms Helen Deering	Brand	40
PN0127	Ms Helen Deering	Dickson	27
PN0129	Ms Helen Deering	Lindsay	45
PN0130	Ms Helen Deering	Lyne	17
PN0132	Ms Helen Deering	Mitchell	35
PN0133	Ms Helen Deering	Corio	21
PN0134	Ms Helen Deering	Bruce	14
PN0135	Ms Helen Deering	McMillan	22
PN0136	Ms Helen Deering	Wannon	13
PN0137	Ms Helen Deering	Gellibrand	9
PN0138	Ms Helen Deering	Calwell	7
PN0139	Ms Helen Deering	Cowper	37
PN0140	Ms Helen Deering	Calare	19
PN0141	Ms Helen Deering	Banks	40
PN0142	Ms Helen Deering	Oxley	32
PN0143	Ms Helen Deering	Herbert	7
PN0144	Ms Helen Deering	Braddon	15
PN0145	Ms Helen Deering	O'Connor	10

PN0146	Ms Helen Deering	Batman	40
PN0147	Ms Helen Deering	Lyons	43
PN0148	Zhi Yan	Corangamite	57
PN0149	Ms Zhi Yan	Fremantle	29
PN0152	Mr Andrew Digan	Fenner	757
PN0156	Mr Benjamin Clarke	Boothby	206
PN0161	Ms Zhi Yan	Menzies	101
PN0162	Ms Zhi Yan	Fairfax	2
PN0163	Ms Zhi Yan	Flinders	4
PN0164	Ms Zhi Yan	Chisholm	41
PN0165	Ms Zhi Yan	Higgins	3
PN0166	Ms Zhi Yan	Dobell	2
PN0167	Ms Zhi Yan	McEwen	5
PN0168	Ms Lindy Frazer	Robertson	17
PN0169	Ms Zhi Yan	Richmond	5
PN0170	Ms Zhi Yan	Petrie	5
PN0171	Mrs Zhi Yan	Greenway	4
PN0172	Ms Zhi Yan	Moreton	3
PN0173	Ms Zhi Yan	Scullin	4
PN0175	Ms Zhi Yan	Kingsford-Smith	704
PN0176	Mr Michael Boyley	Riverina	12
PN0177	Ms Ruth Bakogianis	Murray	1,221
PN0178	Mr Greg Letch	Cowan	654
PN0179	Mr Alan Clayton	LaTrobe	483
PN0202	Mr John Panteladis	Hindmarsh	173
PN0205	Ms Cathie Clarke	Jagajaga	203
PN0206	Ms Helen Beazley	Griffith	152
PN0207	Mr Gregory Kerr	Casey	86

PN0229	Mr David Flakelar	Bradfield	552
PN0237	Ms Jessica Smith	Wentworth	68
PN0248	Ms Gillian Reffell	Grayndler	560
PN0251	Mr Paul Turley	Sturt	302
PN0252	Ms Nicole Dobrohotoff	Isaacs	277
PN0255	Ms Helen Deering	Pearce	22
PN0256	Ms Helen Deering	Stirling	35
PN0257	Ms Helen Deering	Durack	85
PN0258	Ms Helen Deering	Hughes	177
PN0259	Ms Helen Deering	Cook	429
PN0260	Ms Helen Deering	Page	234
PN0261	Ms Ellen Geraghty	Calare	103
PN0262	Mr Mark Taylor	Brisbane	17
PN0263	Ms Tessa Maxwell	Cunningham	362
PN0268	Ms Mary McAuliffe	Herbert	53
PN0275	Ms Bronwen James	Ballarat	257
PN0277	Ms Sally-Anne Hurley	Macarthur	372
PN0283	Ms Terry Susmilch	Denison	296

Source: House Standing Committee on Petitions

Table E.2 Campaign petitions regarding Falun Gong

Petition number	Principal petitioner	Signature count
PN0005	Mr Michael Pearson-Smith	11,591
PN010	Mr Michael Pearson-Smith	7,415
PN0050	Mr Michael Pearson-Smith	10,767
PN0064	Mr Michael Pearson-Smith	9,858
PN0329	Mr Michael Pearson-Smith	10,008
PN0364	Mr Michael Pearson-Smith	12,436

Source: House Standing Committee on Petitions

Table E.3 Campaign petitions regarding ‘synthetic lottery operators’

Petition number	Principal petitioner	Signature count
PN0158	Mr Gary Tribe	65
PN0159	Mr Kristian Beka	97
PN0160	Mr Wayne Hammett	110
PN0180	Mr Brian Cady	260
PN0181	Ms Alana Smith	169
PN0182	Mr William Roberts	172
PN0183	Mr R Conway	306
PN0184	Mrs Billie Sweet	156
PN0185	Mr Glenn Monaghan	3,190
PN0186	Mr Peter Mahairas	41
PN0187	Mr David Moss	483
PN0188	Mr Graeme Young	95
PN0189	Mr Morris Coates	411
PN0195	Ms Sue Stephens	88
PN0196	Mr Michael and Carmel Parkinson	55

PN0197	Mr Ray Dabbs	98
PN0198	Mr Terry Clohesy	117
PN0199	Mr David Keys	301
PN0203	Ms Narelle Scott	173
PN0208	Ms Angela Temple	189
PN0209	Mr Jim Gow	274
PN0211	Mr Fred Como	60
PN0215	Ms Kay Willey	353
PN0216	Mr Pengcheng Zhang	192
PN0217	Mr Jack Jia	129
PN0218	Ms Evonne Eng	91
PN0219	Mr Ray Hui	33
PN0220	Mr Anthony Masotto	39
PN0221	Mr Peter Marschall	735
PN0222	Mr Ross Lumley	391
PN0223	Ms Kate Snell	40
PN0224	Mr Masoud Tamizkar	58
PN0225	Ms Maria Cuda	170
PN0226	Mr Wayne Martinovich	751
PN0230	Ms Glenda McCarthy	33
PN0231	Ms Noela McCann	92
PN0232	Ms Louise Brown	102
PN0233	Ms Verica Beliga	150
PN0234	Ms Sandra Burgess	168
PN0235	Ms Jan Connolly	42
PN0236	Ms Alyesha Heaton	135
PN0238	Mr John Pugsley	440
PN0240	Mr Rodney Price	16

PN0241	Ms Elizabeth Callow	31
PN0242	Ms Robina-Lea Hutchinson	496
PN0244	Mr Jayantilal Magan	56
PN0245	Mr Ned Vulin	181
PN0246	Mr Mark Hawkins	120
PN0247	Mr John Wylie	280
PN0254	Ms Tracey Richmond	150
PN0264	Mr Gary Tan	16
PN0265	Ms Fay Budd	13
PN0266	Mr Awat Isaac	207
PN0267	Ms Sandra Harris	208
PN0269	Ms Shandelle Griggs	186
PN0270	Ms Christine Slade	234
PN0272	Ms Gabrielle Miller	118
PN0273	Ms Michelle Higgs	316
PN0279	Mr Ron Mullheron	676
PN0284	Ms Dorothea Shanahan	220
PN0285	Ms Sharon Rechenberg	301
PN0286	Ms Kaye Walton	150
PN0289	Mr Robert Marxson	90
PN0290	Mr Jarrod McMaugh	77
PN0291	Mr John Anderson	37
PN0292	Ms Rebecca McGrath	243
PN0294	Ms Katie Conolly	58
PN0299	Ms Dianne Anderson	94
PN0302	Mr David Dale-Thompson	472
PN0303	Mr Paul Cheng	134
PN0304	Mr Andrae Moore	135

PN0305	Ms Marie Alexander	76
PN0306	Ms Ruth Fortune	63
PN0324	Mr Vimal Murji Vekariya, Forest Lakes Newsagency	225

Source: House Standing Committee on Petitions

F. Petitions Statistics - 45th Parliament

Table F.1 Petitions statistics - 45th Parliament as at 22 January 2019*

	Paper	Electronic	Total
Presented	299 (77.3%)	395 (49.9%)	694 (58.9%)
▪ By Chair	259	385	644
▪ By Member	40	10	50
Awaiting Presentation	2 (0.5%)	24 (3%)	26 (2.2%)
Out of Order	86 (22.2%)	265 (33.5%)	351 (29.8%)
Not verified within 24 hours	-	100 (12.6%)	100 (8.5%)
Withdrawn	0	8 (1%)	7 (0.6%)
Total submitted	387	791	1178

Source: Standing Committee on Petitions *at the time an additional 23 e-petitions were collecting signature

Table F.2 Signatures - all petitions presented*

	Paper	Electronic	Total
1 only	16	10	26
2-9	17	101	118
10-99	92	188	280
100-999	122	77	199
1,000-4,999	34	30	64
5,000-9,999	8	4	12
10,000-39,999	11	6	17
40,000+	1	2	3
Total	301	418	719

Source: Standing Committee on Petitions *includes petitions approved and awaiting presentation as at 22 January 2019

Table F.3 Signatures - Presented by Member*

	Paper	Electronic*	Total
1 only	2	0	2
2-9	0	0	0
10-99	9	0	9
100-999	14	6	20
1,000-4,999	12	1	13
5,000-9,999	1	0	1
10,000-39,999	2	2	4
40,000+	1	1	2
Total	41	10	51

Source: Standing Committee on Petitions *includes petitions approved and awaiting presentation as at 22 January 2019

Table F.4 Responses not received (presented by Members in brackets)

	Paper	Electronic	Total
1 only	1—6.25%	1—10%	2—7.7%
2-9	0	15—14.9%	15—12.7%
10-99	2—2.2%	35—18.6%	37—13.2%
100-999	11 (2)—9% (14.3%)	17 (1)—22.1% (16.7%)	28 (3)—14% (15%)
1,000-4,999	3 (1)—8.9% (8.3%)	7—23.3%	10 (1)— 15.6% (7.7%)
5,000-9,999	3—37.5%	1—25%	4—33.3%
10,000-39,999	4—36.4%	1—16.7%	5—29.4%
40,000+	0	1—50%	1—33.3%
Total	24—8%	78—18.7%	102—14.2%

Source: Standing Committee on Petitions as at 22 January 2019

G. 45th Parliament relevant standing orders

Preparing a petition

204 Rules for the form and content of petitions

- a. A petition must:
 - i. be addressed to the House of Representatives;
 - ii. refer to a matter on which the House has the power to act;
 - iii. state the reasons for petitioning the House; and
 - iv. contain a request for action by the House.
- b. The terms of the petition must not contain any alterations and must not exceed 250 words. The terms must be placed at the top of the first page of the petition and the request of the petition must be at the top of every other page. The terms of an e-petition must be available through the House website.
- c. The terms of the petition must not be illegal or promote illegal acts. The language used must be moderate.
- d. An e-petition must be in English. A paper petition must be in English or be accompanied by a translation certified to be correct. The person certifying the translation must place his or her name and address on the translation.
- e. No letters, affidavits or other documents should be attached to the petition. Any such attachments will be removed before presentation to the House.

- f. A petition from a corporation must be made under its common seal. Otherwise it will be received as the petition of the individuals who signed it.

205 Rules for signatures—paper petitions

- a. Every petition must contain the signature and full name and address of a principal petitioner on the first page of the petition.
- b. All the signatures on a paper petition must meet the following requirements:
 - i. Each signature must be made by the person signing in his or her own handwriting. Only a petitioner incapable of signing may ask another person to sign on his or her behalf.
 - ii. Signatures must not be copied, pasted or transferred on to the petition or placed on a blank page on the reverse of a sheet containing the terms of the petition.
- c. A Member must not be a principal petitioner or signatory to a paper petition.

205A Rules for e-petitions

- a. A principal petitioner for an e-petition must provide the petitioner's full name and address.
- b. The posted period for an e-petition is to be four weeks from the date of publication on the House website.
- c. Once published on the House website the terms of an e-petition cannot be altered.
- d. Once the posted period for an e-petition has elapsed, the petition shall be presented to the House in accordance with standing order 207.
- e. Names must not be copied, pasted or transferred on to an e-petition.
- f. A Member must not be a principal petitioner or signatory to an e-petition.

Presentation of petitions

206 Submitting a petition for presentation

- a. Petitions may be submitted:
 - i. on paper, directly to the Standing Committee on Petitions or via a Member; or
 - ii. electronically, through the House website.

- b. The Standing Committee on Petitions must check that each petition submitted for presentation complies with the standing orders, and if the petition complies it shall be approved for presentation to the House.

207 Presenting a petition

A petition may be presented in one of two ways:

- a. The Chair of the Standing Committee on Petitions shall present petitions and/or reports of that committee, and the Chair and one other Member of the Committee may make statements concerning petitions and/or such reports presented, in accordance with *standing order 34 (order of business)*. The time provided may extend for no more than 10 minutes.
- b. A Member may present a petition during:
 - i. the period of Members' statements in the House or in the Federation Chamber, in accordance with standing order 43;
 - ii. the period of Members' constituency statements in the Federation Chamber, in accordance with standing order 193;
 - iii. adjournment debate in the House in accordance with standing order 31, and in the Federation Chamber in accordance with standing order 191; and
 - iv. grievance debate in accordance with standing order 192B.

Action on petitions

208 Action by the House

- a. Discussion on the subject matter of a petition shall only be allowed at the time of presentation as provided for under standing order 207(b).
- b. Each petition presented shall be received by the House, unless a motion that it not be received is moved immediately and agreed to.
- c. The only other motion relating to a petition that may be moved is a motion on notice that the petition be referred to a particular committee.
- d. The terms of petitions shall be printed in Hansard.
- e. The Standing Committee on Petitions shall respond to petitions on behalf of the House and report to the House.

209 Petition may be referred to a Minister for response

- a. After a petition is presented to the House, the Standing Committee on Petitions may refer a copy of the petition to the Minister responsible for the administration of the matter raised in the petition.

- b. The Minister shall be expected to respond to a referred petition within 90 days of presentation by lodging a written response with the Committee.
- c. The Chair of the Petitions Committee shall announce any ministerial responses to petitions. After the announcement, ministerial responses shall be printed in Hansard and published on the House's website.

220 Standing Committee on Petitions

- a. A Standing Committee on Petitions shall be appointed to receive and process petitions, and to inquire into and report to the House on any matter relating to petitions and the petitions system.
- b. The committee shall consist of eight members: five government and three non-government members.