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The President, The Senate
The Speaker, The House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Australia Day 26 January 2018

Dear Sirs

Civil Liberties Australia believes that the entire committee structure of federal parliament needs a thorough review and overhaul. At the very least, it needs a complete “academic” analysis and recommendations as to its relative past, current and better future efficiency and effectiveness. We propose that you, on behalf of Parliament, engage the Productivity Commission and give them a year to produce a full report by mid-2019.

Among issues arising over the past few decades that need addressing are these:

- Expansion in the number and type of committees;
- Consequently, the inordinate demands now on MPs to do committee work, so that it is frequently impossible for MPs to attend all committees they are on;
- Varying lengths of time given to different committees to do equivalent work; and
- The increasing tendency for committees to encourage specialist submissions from government departments and agencies, and to give preference to such entities in appearing in person before committees* and in providing subsidiary submissions following hearings.

Close attention by whomever is commissioned should also be paid to:

- time for the public/NGOs to make submissions (particularly around Christmas-New Year, when MPs go on their holidays and are totally inconsiderate of the people and organisations they ask to work up submissions by late-Jan, early-Feb);
- extreme workload on staff of the committees, which appears to have increased exponentially without a commensurate expansion in staff resources; and
- whether the apparent total disregard the government of the day frequently shows for committee reports makes much of the current process a comparative waste of time for everyone involved, including the MPs, who claim to be extremely time-poor in fulfilling their representative duties.

Yours Truly

Dr Kristine Klugman OAM, President

* CLA believes government departments and agencies should be required to make the first submissions to any parliamentary committee, and public/NGO submissions invited only after the government’s final submissions are in. Currently government entities usually wait until last to submit.