

REVIEW OF STANDING ORDERS (2003) I.18B

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Other issues raised by submitters

Code of conduct

H V Ross Robertson proposed a draft code of conduct for members of Parliament, and asked that we recommend its approval by the House. Mr Robertson made this proposal out of his concern for the continuing erosion of the standing of Parliament in the eyes of the public. The draft code does not regulate the declaration and registration of members' interests, apart from the context of the general principles of personal conduct. It begins with general public duties incumbent on members, outlines a set of general principles for members to observe in their conduct, and ends with a section on behaviour and appearances in the House.

Advice to members about appropriate behaviour is primarily a matter for induction training, and for internal party discipline by leaders and whips. Members ultimately are accountable to the electorate for their behaviour. We will consider the issue of members' pecuniary interests separately in the context of our examination of the Members of Parliament (Pecuniary Interests) Bill. At this time we may also return to the question of a code of conduct.

Behaviour in the House

We received, as a submission, a report from a group of students from Wellington High School on their observation of the behaviour of members in the House. The students arrived at an unfavourable assessment of the behaviour of members. They made a number of suggestions about the need for members to consider their position as role models, adopt a less adversarial approach, and develop a culture of positive debate and co-operation. We do not condone the trade in personal insults across the floor of the House, and we acknowledge that at times members, through their behaviour, do themselves no favours in the eyes of the public. However, it is not unparliamentary to be adversarial. The House is the primary forum for the rigorous contest of policy positions and political ideals, and for holding the Government to account. We will not curb the free speech of members or the robustness of debate inherent in this environment.