

**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION BY NOT-FOR-
PROFIT ORGANISATIONS IN AUSTRALIA'S PUBLIC LIFE THROUGH
SUBMISSIONS TO PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRIES**

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INTRODUCTION

A well-functioning democracy requires some level of interaction between ordinary citizens and the state's administrative and legislative bodies (Part I). This right is protected by the Australian Constitution's implied doctrine of freedom of political communication,¹ and there are a range of ways that this public participation is supported in Australia, discussed in Part II.

However, some question the efficacy of these institutions in encouraging the participation of the nation's most vulnerable.² This paper investigates this issue, by investigation the participation in Parliamentary Inquiries of large Not For Profit organisations (NFPs) who advocate on issues of social justice (Part III). A survey was conducted, which asked these entities a series of questions about their participation in the process (Part IV).

Results obtained, outlined in Part V, indicate that submission writing remains an important and meaningful way in which these organisations, and the vulnerable people that they represent, can participate in the parliamentary process. While there is room for improvement, for example through making the whole process more transparent to that that make submissions, overall it seems that participation by NFPs in the Parliamentary inquiry process is an effective contribution to public life, and Australian democracy. The fact that this opportunity is extended to even Australia's most disadvantaged attests to its effectiveness.

¹ *Lange v Australian Broadcasting Corporation* (1997) 189 CLR 520

² See, for example, The Australian Collaboration, *Democracy in Australia – Citizen participation in Democracy* (July 2013) The Australian Collaboration <<http://www.australiancollaboration.com.au/pdf/Democracy/Citizen-engagement.pdf>>. Brenton Holmes, 'Citizens' engagement in policymaking and the design of public services' (Research Paper No 1, Parliamentary Library, Politics and Public Administration Section, 2011).

I THEORY

*'Citizenship participation is the cornerstone of democracy'.*³

Universal suffrage, the founding tenet of modern democracies, guarantees at least the opportunity of some level of participation to all citizens.⁴ Elections and polls signal popular opinion on a small number of topical issues; however, many would argue that democracy demands greater and more ongoing participation than this.⁵ For example, Bishop and Davis consider there to be a 'democratic deficit' when the public only engages with the parliamentary process through the polls.⁶ Further, if this is the case, the 'aspirations and expectations of the public' to be involved in parliamentary processes have not been met.⁷ For the majority to legitimately govern on the full range of policy domains, politicians must inform and canvas the public opinion on all these issues.

Pragmatically, therefore, ongoing public participation pertaining to these wider policy domains is essential for representative democracy. Other than through elections, there are a number of ways in which the Australian public may participate in government. For example citizens may petition the house⁸, join 'political parties, contact local members, pay taxes'⁹, and make submissions. Consultation, partnership, legal action, and consumer choice also provide avenues for citizens to influence policy, and thus enhance a representative democracy.

³ Nancy Roberts, 'Public Deliberation in the an age of direct citizen participation' (2004) 34 *American Review of Public Administration* 315, 315.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The Australian Collaboration, above n 2., Brenton Holmes, 'Citizens' engagement in policymaking and the design of public services' (Research Paper No 1, Parliamentary Library, Politics and Public Administration Section, 2011).

⁶ Bishop, Patrick, and Glyn Davis. "Mapping public participation in policy choices." *Australian journal of public administration* 61.1 (2002): 14-29.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure, *It's your House: Community involvement in the procedures and practices of the House of Representatives and its committees*, (October 1999) (It's your House).

⁹ Ibid.

All these forms of democratic participation also rely to some degree on the right to free political speech.¹⁰ Without it, debate and inquiry free from fear of interference is impossible. It is essential that those who enter into political debate may do so without fear of intimidation. Furthermore, democratic participation requires the debate to be accessible to all citizens, even the most marginalized.

II THE COMMITTEE PROCESS

It has been argued that submissions to government or parliamentary inquiries, one of the means of participation mentioned above, provide the community with ‘the greatest opportunity to become involved in the day to day work of our Parliamentary system’.¹¹ These submissions are often made to Parliamentary Committees, which are established to conduct inquiries into legislation or policy.

Committee inquiries typically follow three steps. Firstly, the Committee researches the issue under inquiry, including seeking submissions from the public. Secondly, it clarifies the evidence obtained by holding public meetings. Finally, in response to its investigation, the committee formulates conclusions and recommendations into a report presented to the Parliament. The recommendations are generally addressed to the government, who may respond to these recommendations by endorsing, rejecting or endorsing in principal (subject to resource constraints) the recommendations in the report.

Committee inquiries promote participation in a number of ways.¹² Through investigating a particular area of interest, and reporting the findings to Parliament,

¹⁰ *Lange v Australian Broadcasting Corporation* (1997) 189 CLR 520, *Australian Capital Television v Commonwealth* (1992) 177 CLR 106

¹¹ It’s your House, above n 8, 41.

¹² Mark Rodrigues, ‘Parliamentary Inquiries as a Form of Policy Evaluation’ (2008) 23 *Australasian Parliamentary Review* 25, 27. Parlia Parliament of Australia, *Infosheet 4 - Committees* (no date) Parliament of Australia
<http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/House_of_Representatives/Powers_practice_and_procedure/00_-_Infosheets/Infosheet_4_-_Committees#> (Parliament of Australia)

they ‘can contribute to better informed policy-making and legislative processes’¹³. This includes ensuring the Parliament is informed of public opinion about particular issues subject to debate. As part of their investigations, inquiries afford ‘marginalised groups...(and) community and interest groups’¹⁴ the opportunity to participate in the parliamentary process, ensuring that ‘the Parliament is able to be better informed of community issues and attitudes’.¹⁵ Ian Marsh posits that this interaction also serves the purpose of 'social learning', advancing knowledge of the policy under consideration throughout society.¹⁶ As such, the informatory nature of the process is bi-directional.

Not only does the submission process afford individuals with an opportunity to participate in Australian politics, it protects those who chose to do so through parliamentary privilege (the content of submissions is non-prosecutable). In that regard, the submission process promotes the implied freedom of political communication. This protection ensures that all citizens have a genuine opportunity to communicate and express their views freely, without fear of reprimand. Without this safety net, any opportunity to participate in this process would be meaningless.

It is clear from this analysis that the Committee process is of crucial importance to the democratic process, by enabling the public to safely make their views known directly to the Parliament.

In 1999, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Procedure conducted an investigation into the procedures and practices of the House and its Committees. The Terms of Reference specifically stated that the committee was to ‘inquire into the opportunities for individuals and community groups to become

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Rodrigues, above n 12, 26.

¹⁵ Parliament of Australia, above n 12.

¹⁶ Ian Marsh, ‘Can Senate Committees Contribute to ‘Social Learning?’’ (2006) 45 *Papers on Parliament* 1, 26.

involved' in those procedures and practices, and to provide recommendations for improving such participation.¹⁷ The Committee stated increasing public participation in the inquiry process results in 'more effective input' by the community into that process, and enhanced understanding of that process by the community. Again, the bi-directional nature of public participation in the submission process is emphasized.

One particular issue covered by the inquiry sought to improve 'community involvement in the work of committees'.¹⁸ In relation to the findings about this issue, Weber helpfully breaks up the recommendations into four categories, namely that the Committee and its processes be more open (fair), flexible, independent, and informative (better understood by the wider population).¹⁹ For example, the Committee recommended that media support liason should be given to each inquiry to assist in raising the Committee's profile to the public,²⁰ that alternate forums for advertising the Committee's activities be used, such as televising on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation²¹ and also the Committee developed a Checklist of strategies which it recommended each Committee put in place, including that the Committee should consider alternate means of taking evidence such as through public hearings, or orally (without prior written submission).²²

III THE NEED FOR AND FOCUS OF THIS RESEARCH

While the Inquiry into Inquiries [*It's your House: Community involvement in the procedures and practices of the House of Representatives and its committees* (It's your House)], and Weber's analysis, provide valuable ideas about what the process

¹⁷ It's your House, above n 8, ix

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Robyn Weber, 'Increasing Public Participation in the Work of Parliamentary Committees' (2001) 16 *Australasian Parliamentary Review* 110, 115.

²⁰ It's your house, above n 8, Recommendation 18.

²¹ It's your house, above n 8, Recommendation 15

²² It's your house, above n 8, 58-61.

should be like, little research has been conducted into the actual effectiveness of the current submission process in enhancing participation, from the perspective of those whom make submissions. The research that is the subject of this paper therefore seeks to explore whether the current Committee process meets three of Weber's criteria for effective public participation; those of openness, flexibility, and informativeness.

The research also focuses only on one type of participant in the Inquiry process: large NFPs who advocate on social justice issues. I do this for several reasons.

First, the NFP sector has a crucial role in protecting some of Australia's most vulnerable people, who individually do not have a voice. Consequently, the participation of NFPs in the submission process is likely the most direct means for these people to access and petition the Parliament with their views and concerns.

Secondly, although NFPs employ more than 1 million Australians and contributed \$55 billion to the Australian economy last financial year,²³ their voices are often overlooked. NFPs may not be seen as having the relevant expertise of academics or other 'expert commentators', despite speaking on behalf of millions of Australians. Most NFPs are also politically unaligned, speaking simply on behalf of their multi-faceted membership based, meaning perhaps that they cannot be 'relied upon' to support particular positions.

The third reason why it is important to consider the role of NFPs in the Parliamentary Inquiry process is that it is one of the primary ways that NFPs can make their voices heard, as many do not have access to expensive media campaigns. Therefore, in order to ensure their continued engagement in the

²³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Australian National Accounts: Non-Profit Institutions Satellite Account 2012/13' (Publication Release, 5256.0, 30 June 2014). 'NFPs Provide \$55B to Aussie Economy – ABS', *Pro Bono Australia News* (online), 30 June 2014 <<http://www.probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2014/06/nfps-provide-55b-aussie-economy-abs#>>.

political process it is important that they are not left dissatisfied with their experiences with Parliamentary Committees.

Finally, good-quality NFP participation in the process should mean that NFP organisations share their knowledge with their membership. This means that a wider cross-section of the community will be informed about Parliament and its activities, and particularly the most vulnerable. This will empower more vulnerable people to make better informed choices at the polls and potentially to engage in more active participation themselves, thus supporting democracy.

IV RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research project surveyed national NFPs that make submissions to Federal Parliamentary Committees on issues of social policy. The primary purpose of the questionnaire is to assess NFPs' experience of the submission process. The specific questions that NFPs were asked draw upon the process of Federal committee inquiries, and upon Weber's subsequent categorization of their recommendations.

For the purposes of this essay, three of Weber's criteria of successful participation were assessed: the openness, flexibility and informative nature of the submission process. These three categories were chosen as they appeared to relate more to the submission writing process to a greater extent, than the general 'independence' of the Committee.

The questions pertain to NFPs experience of Parliamentary Committees generally, rather than that of a specific Committee or inquiry. This hopes to ensure that a more balanced view with generalizable results is attained.

A The Survey

1 Openness (Fairness)

Continued participation in the submission process requires submitters to perceive that submitting is a feasible task, that their submissions are having an impact, and that the submission process is open to the wider population.

The first question (on feasibility) asks: *How long do you spend on submissions? What factors influence this?*

The second question (on impact) asks: *Do you feel that your views are given the appropriate weight, taken seriously, or made an impact in the Committees' final reports?*

In order to ensure the public can participate in this process, they need to be aware of its occurrence. For example, recent research conducted by the ABC²⁴ into the Tasmanian budget submission process has revealed, “only 39 from hundreds of groups across Tasmania had been invited to make submissions”.²⁵ As a result of the invitation process, many in the sector have “missed out” on the opportunity to present the views of their membership to the Parliament.²⁶

This is concerning. At the Federal level, informing the public about a current inquiry is done through information on the particular Committee’s webpage, paid advertisements in the newspaper, and personal communications. The third question seeks to draw out just how open this process of calling for inquiries is,

²⁴ ‘Tasmanian community organisations excluded from budget submission process’, *Australian Broadcasting Corporation* (online), 17 February 2015 <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-02-17/tasmanian-community-organisations-excluded-from-budget-submissi/6131888?WT.ac=statenews_tas>

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

and asks: *How do you hear about Inquiries?*

This question should highlight the most effective means of advertising for inquiries and also might shed light on any other common, perhaps less-formal, ways in which NFPs hear about Committee inquiries.

2 Flexibility

The Parliament boasts that one of the strengths of the inquiry process is its ability to provide a flexible means for obtaining evidence, thus enhancing the accessibility of Committees to the community. The following two survey questions tested whether submitters are indeed afforded real flexibility in how they engage with Committees when giving evidence.

The fourth question asks: *If you have additionally given evidence, how has that been done? (e.g. through the usual formal hearings, public meeting, seminar, roundtable discussion, or other).*

The fifth question asks: *Do you feel that the means by which evidence was taken were flexible enough?*

3 Informativeness

Another of Weber's facets of good public participation is that the public become better informed about the parliamentary process. The final two survey questions aim to assess the degree to which the submission process has achieved that.

The sixth question asks: *Through the submission process, have you felt that your organisation's understanding of the Parliament and its processes has been enhanced?*

The seventh question asks: *Through the submission process, have you felt that your members' or stakeholders' understanding of Parliament and its process has been enhanced?*

B Developing the Survey

1 Consultation with Parliament

Not only does this research hope to inform other NFPs about different approaches to submitting to Committee's, it also provides Parliamentary Committees with an opportunity to receive honest feedback about the process from the submitters. For this reason, advice was sought from the Office of the Clerk Assistant to Committees on formulating the survey. The Office confirmed their support for the proposed questions, and indicated interest in reading a summary of results.

2 Ethics Approval

This research has met ethics approval by the ANU Chair of Humanities & Social Sciences Department of Ethics Review Committee, protocol number 2014/813.

3 Timing

The survey was open for 10 days in late January 2015.

4 The Participants

Participants were from national NFP organisations who regularly made submissions across a number of social policy issues. As such, smaller NFP entities with a narrow policy domain were omitted. This was to ensure the sample was representative of the sector as a whole. The researcher obtained, through personal

contacts in the sector and organizations' webpages, 31 email addresses of NFPs who satisfied that criteria. The researcher attempted to make phone calls to some of the organizations to obtain specific email addresses.

Larger parliamentary inquiries generally receive between 25-30 responses from NFPs. Given that 10-15 of those are normally made by organisations that satisfy the researcher's stated participant criteria, this number was chosen as the target response.

V RESULTS

Eleven responses to the survey were received. The Results are broken down below.

A Openness (Fairness)

1 How long do you normally spend writing submissions? What factors influence this?

All participants stated that time spend on submission writing varied from hours, to days, to weeks, to months, depending on the submission.

Respondents identified this was determined by five factors, as shown in *Figure A*, including: the significance of the topic to members of the organisation (64%), size and complexity of the task (45%), current workload (45%), familiarity with the topic (45%), and finally whether consultation was required (27%),

Some respondents provided insight into the organisation's internal process for developing a submission. One organization stated that "sometimes consultants are engaged to develop [the submissions]". Respondents indicated that consultation also includes canvassing the views of the members of the organisation. The

organisations take this role seriously: one NFP stated for “submissions on topics that are very relevant to our members, we may take weeks to develop via volunteer members meeting via teleconference”. Other organisations stated that consulting members might involve simply having a telephone or email conversation with relevant members all the way to setting up and conducting workshops or focus groups within the organisation’s network.

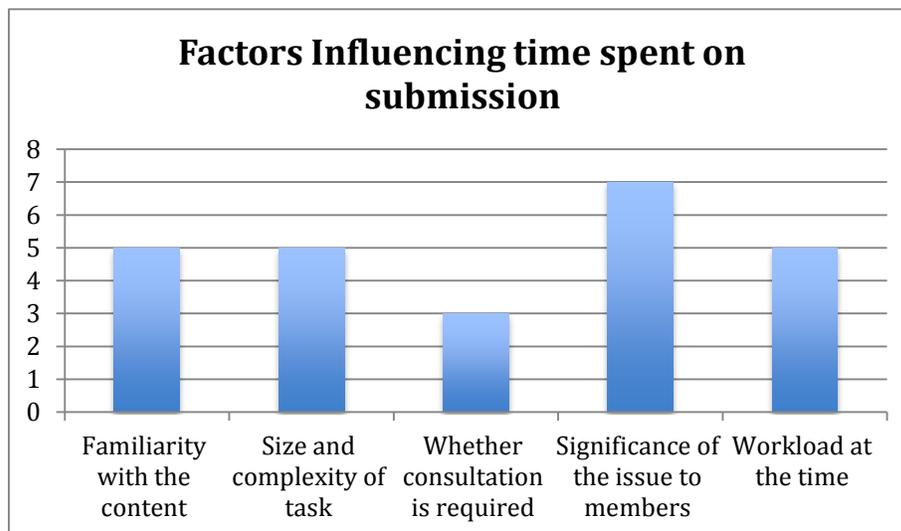


Figure A – Factors Influencing time spent on submission

2 Do you feel that your views are given the appropriate weight, taken seriously, and made an impact in the Committee’s final report?

The majority of respondents (64%) perceived that their submissions had made an impact on the Committee’s final report. Another 18% indicated that this occurred only ‘sometimes’. Most of the organisations made this determination by assessing whether they had been quoted in the report, and whether their recommendations had been taken up by the report.

A number of participants expressed some concern with the politicization of the parliamentary process. One organisation was concerned that their views at times are used in an ad hoc manner to “bolster” the objectives of politicians, whilst other organisations raised the concern that Committee reports may in fact have no

practical impact upon decision making in Parliament.

One organisation did not definitively answer this question, stating that they “haven’t had the time to assess our submissions against the final reports”. This answer raises perhaps suggests there might be other reasons for making submissions, rather than to directly influence Parliament.

3 How do you hear about Inquiries?

Respondents indicated that the most common means for their hearing about inquiries is through invitation from the Committee (64%), the media (64%) and the APH website (36%). Other, less formal sources included through members (9%), Parliamentarians (9%) and other NFP organisations (9%).

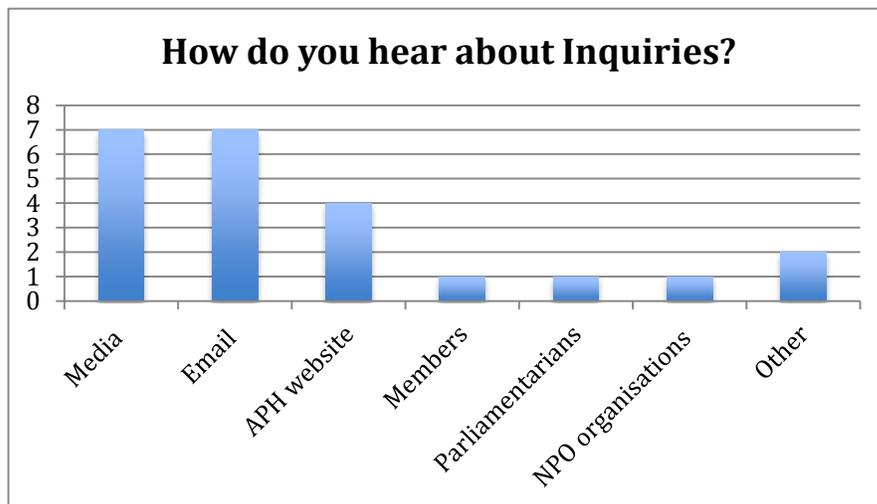


Figure B – ways in which NFPs hear about Inquiries

B Flexibility

4 If you have additionally given oral evidence, how has that been done? (e.g. through formal hearings, public meetings, seminars, roundtable discussions, or other).

A majority of respondents indicated they had given evidence through formal

hearings (82%), with 45% and 18% indicating evidence had been given via roundtable discussion and in public hearings respectively.

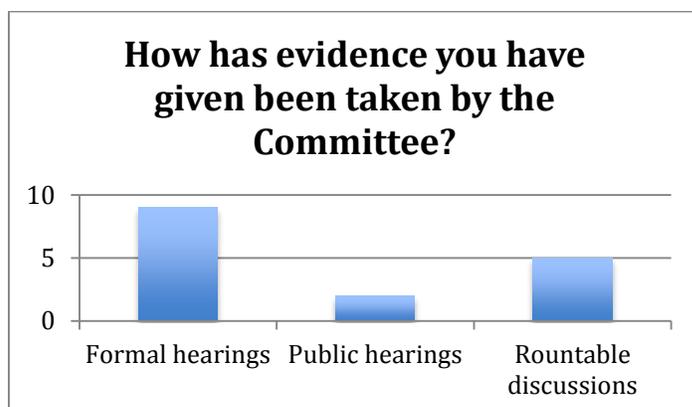


Figure C – How has evidence you have given been taken by the Committee?

5 Do you feel that the means by which all evidence was taken (written and oral) were flexible enough?

All but one respondent indicated that they felt that the means by which evidence was taken was flexible enough. Respondents reported that the Committee demonstrates their flexibility through their promptness in replying to concerns, granting extensions when requested, and allowing for teleconference where the Committee and the NFP head office were not located in the same region.

Nonetheless, a number of respondents indicated that the way in which evidence was taken was quite formal. One organisation stated that “it can be a bit intimidating if you’re not used to it”.

C Informativeness

6 Through the submission process have you felt that your organisation’s understanding of the Parliament and its processes has been enhanced?

The majority (82%) of participants answered this question in the affirmative. One organisation indicated their understanding had not been enhanced. However, that organisation also indicated that their understanding of the process was quite good before they started writing submissions. One organisation was unsure as to whether it had or not.

A number of organisations suggested that the submission process had demonstrated complexity in the parliamentary system that they perhaps had not expected. One organisation stated that “it’s been interesting seeing how clearly political some of the inquiries are (e.g. those in the Senate with a clear political agenda), and how the reports of many inquiries can be completely ignored by the government, despite reflecting real consultation and thorough analysis”. Another organisation stated that, despite learning more about the parliamentary process “to some degree” through submission writing, “there is no great unraveling of the mystery that is the parliamentary process”.

7 Additionally, through the submission process, have you felt that your members’ or stakeholders’ understanding of Parliament and its process has been enhanced?

This question was answered by 55% of in the affirmative. Respondents indicated this had occurred through their submissions being made available on their webpage or through media releases, which were read by members. Additionally, one organisation noted that members engaged in the process themselves when they were consulted by the organisation in making the submission. Another organisation indicated that they would generally give feedback to their members about the outcomes of their submission or the Committee report.

Of the respondents, two indicated that they did not feel their members understanding of the process had been enhanced by their writing submissions. One organisation reported that this was because “it is hard to communicate the process to members as they are so distant from it”.

Finally, 27% of respondents were unsure whether submission writing enhanced their member's understanding of the process. Generally, this was because they had not consulted members about this particular issue.

VI LIMITATIONS

In receiving 11 responses, we acquired our target sample size. However, the research would be more valid and reliable had response rates been higher. There are several ways that this could have been achieved. First, individual policy officers who write submissions could have been approached, if that information had been available (instead of the organisations' generic email address). Secondly, the survey could have been open for response for longer than 10 working days. Finally, the survey could have been conducted at a different time of year, the January holiday period meaning that the researcher received a number of out-of-office responses.

VII DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A Openness (Fairness)

1 How long do you spend on submissions, what factors influence this?

This question aimed to shed light on the effort involved and the time spent on making a submission, in order to gauge how feasible the submission making process is. All participants stated that time spent on submission writing varied with 64% specifically stating that submissions can take a number of full-time days to work on. Thus the results demonstrate that some submissions might prove to be a difficult and time-consuming task, even for professionals with workplace support, along with relevant training and expertise. As such, it seems likely that this task

would prove even more challenging for the general public, who do not possess such expertise and training.

The results also show there to be considerable consistency amongst the factors determining the time spent on submission writing. Therefore, any methods for overcoming barriers to spending time on submission-writing will likely have widespread benefit for the sector.

For example, a 64% of respondents noted that the submission-making process was expedited when “pre-existing material (existed) to draw upon”. Additionally, when organisations had to formulate their position on a particular policy this required a lengthy process of consultation and debate. Affording NFPs greater access to pre-existing material, and thus reducing the time spent on preparing a submission, could be explored through a number of mechanisms.

As such, it would be helpful if future research could investigate opportunities for further collaboration between NFPs writing submissions, including affording an opportunity to draw upon previous work conducted by similar organisations, for example, a shared database between NFPs of their past submissions, organized topically. Any new opportunities in collaboration could helpfully include the participation of the sector’s regulator, the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission.

Additionally, consistent with the recommendation of the “It’s your House” inquiry Committee’s should seek to adopt less time consuming options for the public to voice their concerns to the Committee than through detailed submissions. For example, Committees might chose to hold more public hearings, perhaps in ‘town hall’ style is possible.

2 Do you feel that your views are given the appropriate weight, taken seriously, and made an impact in the committee's final report?

Given that submissions can prove to be a time-consuming task, it is important that these organisations perceive that they are making an impact. Overall, the majority of respondents indicated that they felt that their submissions were having an impact on the Committee's final report presented to Parliament. While some NFPs were concerned with the politicization of the process, and whether the report had any sway in Parliament, it is clear from this research that submissions play a much wider role in promoting democracy than this. For example, 82% and 55% of respondents stated that the submission process helped inform their own and their members understanding of the parliamentary process respectively.

Taken as a whole, these results suggest that the efforts of NFPs are not futile, and thus should encourage NFPs to continue to make regular submissions. However, there would clearly be more positive engagement by NFPs in the process if they did feel that the Committee reports were being seriously considered by Parliament.

3 How do you hear about Inquiries?

Informing the public about Committee inquiries is an important facet of ensuring active participation in this process – for the public to participate they need to be aware. The three most common forms of communication identified by respondents are consistent with the means by which the Parliament state they communicate with the public about inquiries, through: the Committee's webpage, paid advertisements in the newspaper, and personal communications. Consequently, the means by which the Parliament seeks to inform the public about Inquiries appears to be an effective method of advertising to NFPs.

Nonetheless, there are some potential concerns about the accessibility of some methods to the wider population. It is concerning that a large number of NFPs are

informed about inquiries through personal contact with the Committee Secretary. On the face of it, this is a rather ad hoc approach, and is unclear the extent to which the wider public are excluded from this means of communication.

The researcher's results add weight to previous research conducted by the ABC, which raised concerns about the inclusivity of personal invitations as a form of advertising inquiries to the public.²⁷ Given the importance of public participation, Committees in future may wish to consider how they select NFPs to contact about inquiries, whether this list could be broadened or made public, and how to better advertise to the public. As outlined above, "It's your House" Inquiry also recommended Committees engage in alternate means of advertising, for example through establishing a medial support liason.

B Flexibility

4 If you have additionally given oral evidence, how has that been done? Do you feel that the means by which all evidence was taken (written and oral) were flexible enough?

Although the Parliament boasts that a number of methods are used in order to give evidence, the vast majority of respondents have only done so through formal hearings.

Ensuring flexibility in the way in which evidence is given to the Committee will mean that more individuals and organisations are able to participate in that process. Our results show that 91% of respondents reported that the means by which evidence is taken is flexible, this includes through the Committees promptness in replying to concerns, granting extensions and allowing for evidence

²⁷ *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, above n 24.

to be given over teleconference. Encouragingly, the results therefore suggest that the Parliament is accommodating for differing circumstances, and aims to facilitate the presentation of evidence in a number of ways. These efforts assist in ensuring a greater number of people can participate in this process, thus making it more accessible to the wider public. Nonetheless, given that hearings are overwhelmingly used to give evidence, the formalities of these proceedings might “intimidate” and thus deter some individuals. More research may be required to establish whether this is the case, and whether there is scope for more evidence to be taken in a more flexible and informal manner, such as utilizing more public hearings or roundtable discussions.

C Informativeness

6 Through the submission process, have you felt that your organisation’s understanding of the Parliament and its processes has been enhanced?

7 Through the submission process, have you felt that your members’ or stakeholders’ understanding of Parliament and its process has been enhanced?

The results demonstrate that submission-writing is an important means by which NFPs obtain and solidify their own, and their member’s, knowledge about the parliamentary process. Consequently, submission-writing effectively contributes to this facet of public participation. Nonetheless, the transparency of the parliamentary process was raised again as a concern by respondents, along with strategies for enhancing members participation in this process. For example, it is concerning that one respondent stated that the Committee reports are often “completely ignored by the government, despite reflecting real consultation and thorough analysis”.

As above, further research here could helpfully investigate just what happens to submissions before the report is published, and then how reports tend to be treated

in Parliament. The answers to those questions will help NFPs understand the process better, and the importance (or possibly lack thereof) of their participation.

VIII CONCLUSION

Democracy is supported through meaningful public participation, whereby ordinary citizens interact with the state's administrative and legislative bodies. This research has focused on one way in which that can occur: submissions presented to parliamentary inquiries by large, national NFP entities. The survey focused on three tenets of public participation in the submission process – whether it is open (fair), flexible and informative to the public. Research of this nature is important in that it assesses whether submission writing does provide NFPs with an opportunity to engage in the democratic process. Additionally the research it might also contribute to the discourse between Committees and the submitters about the effectiveness of Committee practices under consideration.

The results suggest submission writing-is generally an open, flexible and informative process – to not only those who make the submissions, but also those who communicate with the entities making the submissions.

The results also point to a number of issues that could be clarified and extended upon through subsequent research. Firstly, means by which NFPs could draw upon past research conducted by similar entities could be explored, such as through creating a shared database of past submissions. Secondly, Committees should investigate means of taking evidence other than through detailed submissions, for example through utilizing public hearings more frequently. This should be in an effort to reduce the time spent on submissions, whilst creating less intimidating ways of giving evidence. Thirdly, the Committee should review the means by which inquiries are advertised to the broader public, especially in relation to the creation of invitation lists. Finally, further investigation is required to bring to light a number of processes surrounding submissions. This includes, investigating how

submissions are dealt with in tabling a report and how the Parliament tends to treat reports presented to them.

As such, while there is certainly room for improvement, on balance the results suggest that submission-writing by NFPs to parliamentary inquiries is an effective means for enhancing and realizing public participation in the democratic process.

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