

The Secretary,
Parliamentary Accounts and Estimates Committee,
Parliament House,
Spring Street, Melbourne, 3000

**Submission by the Hon Dr Race Mathews on the Committee's
Ministerial Accountability Reference**

The following points are submitted for the Committee's consideration, in the light of experience and observation as a former federal MP, state MP and minister, municipal councillor and chief of Opposition Leader staff in the federal and Victorian parliaments, and a current member of the Australian Society for the Study of Parliament Working Group which has recently released a comprehensive discussion paper entitled 'Renewing Accountable Government'.

1. Loss of public confidence in the accountability, transparency and veracity of governments, ministers, MPs, parliaments and public administration has been palpable for some time, as polling consistently attests.
2. Asked in a 1955 Morgan poll whether federal politicians usually tell the truth, 67 per cent of respondents disagreed, 24 per cent agreed and 9 per cent had no opinion. Seventy per cent of those polled agreed that politicians could not be trusted to keep election promises, 84 per cent that politicians lied at election time to win votes, and 94 per cent that politicians twisted the truth to suit their own arguments.
3. Public cynicism and scepticism has not been diminished by subsequent events. For example, seventy-one per cent of poll respondents believed that ministers had told less than the full truth about their knowledge of the Australian Wool Board scandal in testimony before the Cole Inquiry. So pervasive a disenchantment is deeply prejudicial to the well-being and future of democratic institutions and Australia's democratic way of life.
4. Accordingly, it is the more important that measures be taken to strengthen the perceived integrity and accountability of parliaments and holders of elective office. Victoria has the opportunity to lead the nation in the adoption of far-reaching reforms which will be widely

welcomed and enjoy widespread public support. The need for reform is inescapable and urgent.

5. It follows that the significance of the Committee's accountability inquiry cannot be over-stated, and the greatest possible advantage should be taken of it. The terms of the reference should be interpreted broadly and extensively publicised, and sympathetic consideration should be given to an extension of the current closing date for the receipt of submissions, and provision for the acceptance of late submissions.

6. The paramount objective should be to secure the adoption or enactment of new sets of principles or codes of conduct for ministers and MPs which clearly set out the community's requirements and expectations of them in terms appropriate to the needs and circumstances of the new century.

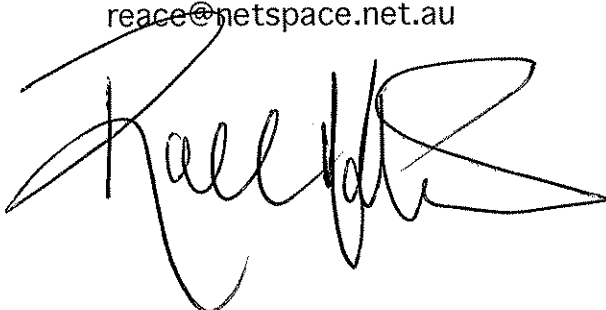
7. The Committee may wish to take the reasoning and recommendations of the 'Renewing Accountable Government' document as a starting point, on which it can improve through its consultations and deliberations.

8. In order to ensure the effectiveness of the principles or code of conduct, Victoria should follow the example and adopt the practice of the United Kingdom Parliament by appointing a Parliamentary Standards Commissioner, whose duties would include inquiring into breaches of the new requirements and reporting publicly on them to Parliament.

9. I strongly commend the 'Renewing Government Accountability' document to the Committee, wish the Committee members well in their deliberations, and look forward keenly to a report truly reflective of the significance of the reference.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Race Mathews', written over the typed name and email address.