Federal
Parliamentarians' Code of Race Ethics

- a contribution towards a more tolerant Australia

December 1998
Background

The *Federal Parliamentarians' Code of Race Ethics* evolved out of concern about the level of racism introduced into the 1996 Federal Election Campaign and a petition brought to the Parliament by Aboriginal people from Ipswich calling upon parliamentarians to 'represent all of their constituents without racial discrimination, fear or favour'. After a unanimous resolution of the Senate in May 1996, the Code was developed over a six-month period with the support of parliamentarians and community leaders from across the political spectrum.

Ideas for the *Code of Race Ethics* were adapted from:

- Politicians and Citizens Roles and Responsibilities, John Warhurst, Catholic Social Justice Series 1995;
- Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice, August 1993; and

The *Code of Race Ethics* was presented in December 1996 to a broad spectrum of Australia's religious and ethnic community leaders in a ceremony at Parliament House, Canberra, which acknowledged the initial 57 signatory parliamentarians' commitment to promote harmony in Australian society.

In 1997 the Code was incorporated into the Tasmanian House of Assembly Standing Orders. It was also endorsed by the then Queensland Opposition Leader now Premier, Peter Beattie, both South Australia's Premier John Olsen and Leader of the Opposition Mike Rahn, and Chief Minister of the ACT, Kate Carnell. It has since been endorsed by New South Wales Premier Bob Carr, Victorian Opposition Leader John Brumby, Western Australian Opposition Leader Geoff Gallop, ACT's Opposition Leader Jon Stanhope and Northern Territory Opposition Leader Maggie Hickey.

In September 1998, the Code of Race Ethics was sent out to all 1435 candidates in the Federal Election. Within the three-week time frame allocated before the election, the total number of candidates who had endorsed the code reached 553. In an effort to give electors the chance to vote for non-racist candidates, Queensland signatories' names were published in The Courier Mail on the Friday before the election, and the national list of all signatories was forwarded to all major newspapers and ethnic media organisations.

The full list of signatories was also available on the Web at: http://www.antar.org.au/race_ethics.

Of the newly elected parliament, 121 Members and Senators* (54%) are now signatories to the code. As parliamentarians approach the new century, we will be addressing significant issues relating to multiculturalism, reconciliation and Australia’s place in the Asia Pacific region. Our goal is that by the Centenary of Federation, all elected Federal Members and Senators will be signatories to the *Code of Race Ethics*.

Senator Margaret Reynolds

Senator John Woodley

* as at 1/12/98
Federal Parliamentarians’ Code of Race Ethics

As a member of the Australian Federal Parliament I agree:

1) To act in a manner which upholds the honour of public office and the parliament;

2) To respect the religious and cultural beliefs of all groups living within Australia in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

3) To uphold principles of justice and tolerance within our multicultural society making efforts to generate understanding of all minority groups;

4) To recognise and value diversity as an integral part of Australia’s social and economic future;

5) To help without discrimination all persons seeking assistance;

6) To speak and write in a manner which provides factual commentary on a foundation of truth about all issues being debated in the community and the parliament;

7) To encourage the partnership of government and non-government organisations in leading constructive and informed debate in the community;

8) To promote reconciliation with indigenous Australians.
Signatories to the
*Federal Parliamentarians’ Code of Race Ethics*

**House of Representatives**

**Australian Capital Territory**
- Annette Ellis (Canberra)
- Bob McMullan (Fraser)

**New South Wales**
- Anthony Albanese (Grayndler)
- Kerry Bartlett (Macquarie)
- Laurie Brearston (Kingsford-Smith)
- Janine Crosio (Prospect)
- Laurie Ferguson (Reid)
- Tim Fischer (Farrell)
- Joel Fitzgibbon (Hunter)
- Jill Hall (Shortland)
- Kelly Hoare (Charlton)
- Joe Hockey (North Sydney)
- Colin Hollis (Throsby)
- Bob Horne (Paterson)
- Julia Irwin (Fowler)
- Jackie Kelly (Lindsay)
- Mark Latham (Werriwa)
- Tony Lawler (Parkes)
- Michael Lee (Dobell)
- Jim Lloyd (Robertson)
- Stephen Martin (Cunningham)
- Robert McClelland (Barton)
- Leo McLay (Watson)
- Daryl Melham (Banks)
- Allan Morris (Newcastle)
- Frank Mossfield (Greenway)
- Brendan Nelson (Bradfield)
- Tanya Plibersek (Sydney)
- Roger Price (Chifley)
- Danna Vale (Hughes)

**Northern Territory**
- Warren Snowdon (Northern Territory)

**Queensland**
- Arch Bevis (Brisbane)
- Mal Brough (Longman)
- Craig Emerson (Rankin)
- Gary Hardgrave (Moreton)
- Cheryl Kernot (Dickson)
- Kirsten Livermore (Capricornia)
- Margaret May (McPherson)
- Bernie Ripoll (Oxley)
- Kevin Rudd (Griffith)
- Cun Saxacca (Bowman)
- Alex Somlyay (Fairfax)
- Queensland (cont.)
- Kathy Sullivan (Moncrieff)
- Wayne Swan (Liilley)
- South Australia
- David Cox (Kingston)
- Martyn Evans (Bonython)
- Rod Sawford (Port Adelaide)
- Patrick Secker (Barker)
- Tasmania
- Dick Adams (Lyons)
- Duncan Kerr (Denison)
- Michelle O’Byrne (Bass)
- Harry Quick (Franklin)
- Sid Sidebottom (Braddon)
- Victoria
- Fran Bailey (McEwen)
- Anna Burke (Chisholm)
- Simon Crean (Hotham)
- Michael Danby (Melbourne Ports)
- Gareth Evans (Holt)
- Martin Ferguson (Batman)
- John Forrest (Mallee)
- Steve Gibbons (Bendigo)
- Julia Gillard (Lalor)
- Alan Griffin (Bruce)
- Harry Jenkins (Scullin)
- Louis Lieberman (Indi)
- Jenny Macklin (Jagajaga)
- Peter Nugent (Aston)
- Gavan O’Connor (Corio)
- Neil O’Keefe (Burke)
- Nicola Roxon (Gellibrand)
- Bob Sercombe (Maribyrnong)
- Sharman Stone (Murray)
- Lindsay Tanner (Melbourne)
- Andrew Theophanous (Calwell)
- Kelvin Thomson (Wills)
- Greg Wilton (Isaacs)
- Michael Wooldridge (Casey)
- Christian Zahra (McMillan)

**Western Australia**
- Kim Beazley (Brand)
- Graham Edwards (Cowan)
- Carmen Lawrence (Fremantle)
- Jann McFarlane (Stirling)
- Stephen Smith (Perth)
In the debate in the Senate on racism and the need for a Code of Ethics, held on 9th May 1996, the following comments were made:

Senator Reynolds (Labor, Queensland):

Australia has always valued its diversity. We have always been proud of the nature of our multicultural society... As parliamentarians, we have an obligation to make sure that what we say is correct in terms of the facts... what we say in interviews and what we say at meetings and in speeches to various groups ultimately affects the way certain extremists in our society respond to the issue of racial harmony.

Senator Short (Liberal, Victoria—Assistant Treasurer):

... we on this side of the chamber—the coalition... come from that basic principle of total abhorrence of any form of racism.

... parliamentarians... are elected to represent all of their constituents and... it is totally reprehensible for any parliamentarian to announce that they will refuse to represent a particular group. Certainly I think all politicians and parliamentarians are elected to represent all the people.

Senator Spindler (Australian Democrats, Victoria):
We should be conscious of... the responsibility that we as parliamentarians have, individually and collectively. Whether we like it or not, it is a fact that we contribute to the shaping of public opinion.

Senator Abetz (Liberal, Tasmania):
... we, as members of the national parliament, have a responsibility to ensure there is community harmony between the different races in Australia.

Senator Barney Cooney (Labor, Victoria):
The issue of racism is vital in a country like ours. The tag of racist is a horrible one because in a multicultural society racism strikes at the heart of the community.

And in the Senate debate on the Native Title Amendment Bill 1997 (No. 2), held on 6th July 1998:

Senator John Woodley (Australian Democrats, Queensland):

[signing] the code of race ethics, which Senator Margaret Reynolds has proposed... would certainly do much to take away the threat of a race-based election.
Signatories to the
Federal Parliamentarians’ Code of Race Ethics

Senate

Australian Capital Territory
Kate Lundy

New South Wales
Vicki Bourne
George Campbell
John Faulkner
Michael Forshaw
Marise Payne
Sue West

Northern Territory
Trish Crossin

Queensland
Andrew Bartlett
Brenda Gibbs
John Hogg
Margaret Reynolds
John Woodley

South Australia
Nick Bolkus
Rosemary Crowley
Meg Lees
John Quirke
Chris Schacht
Natasha Stott Despoja

Tasmania
Bob Brown
Kay Denman
Brian Harradine
Susan Mackay
Shayne Murphy
Kerry O’Brien
Nick Sherry

Victoria
Lyn Allison
Kim Carr
Jacinta Collins
Stephen Conroy
Barney Cooney
Karen Synon

Western Australia
Mark Bishop
Peter Cook
Chris Evans
Dee Margetts
JimMcKerihan
Andrew Murray

Senators Elect
Aden Ridgeway (New South Wales)
Joe Ludwig (Queensland)
Jan McLucas (Queensland)
Brian Greig (Western Australia)
On 2nd December 1996 in the Main Committee Room, Parliament House, Canberra, the *Federal Parliamentarians’ Code of Race Ethics* was presented to religious leaders and representatives of ethnic and community organisations:

- Archbishop Mar T Aboodi
  - Syrian Orthodox Church
- Archbishop Aghan Balozian
  - President, National Council of Churches in Australia
- Cardinal Edward Clancy
  - Chairman, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference
- Commissioner John Clinch
  - Territorial Commander, [Southern] The Salvation Army
- Patricia Firkin
  - Presiding Clerk, Religious Society of Friends
- Archbishop Gibran
  - Primate, Antiochian Orthodox Church
- The Revd David Gill
  - General Secretary, National Council of Churches in Australia
- The Revd Djinjiinyi Gondarra
  - National Chairperson, Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress
- Commissioner John Gowans
  - Territorial Commander, [Eastern] The Salvation Army
- Pastor Cecil Grant
  - Federal Aborigines Board, Churches of Christ
- Mr Robert Leane
  - President, National Conference of Churches of Christ
- Bishop Arthur Malcolm
  - Chairperson, National Aboriginal Anglican Council
- Brother Graeme Mundine
  - Chairperson, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council
- The Revd Graham Paulson
  - National Coordinator, Aboriginal and Islander Baptist Council of Australia
- The Revd Dr Gabriel Popescu
  - Romanian Orthodox Church
- Archbishop Keith Rayner
  - Primate, Anglican Church of Australia
- Archbishop Stylianos
  - Primate, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia

- Dr Jill Tabart
  - President, Uniting Church in Australia
- The Revd Marcos Tawil
  - Coptic Orthodox Church
- Bishop Mar Meelis Zaia
  - Assyrian Church of the East
- Bishop Browning
  - Canberra and Goulburn Anglican Diocese
- Robert Tupper
  - Uniting Church
- Chris Sidoti
  - Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
- Conflict Resolution Network
- Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation
- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Commission
- Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia

- Federation of Chinese Community of Canberra
- Czechoslovak Australian Association (Beseda)
- Anti-Racism Campaign
- Philippine Australian Association of the ACT
- Fiji Australia Association Inc
- ACT Philippines-Australia Community Association
- Salvadorian Women’s Group
- Lao Community
- Sakyamun Buddha Centre
- Afghan-Australia Council of the ACT
- ACT Jewish Community
- Australian-Sri Lanka Association
- Colombian Australian Society of ACT
- National Australian Chinese Assn Inc
- Afghan Community
- ACT Jewish Community
- Russian Community
- Council of Polish Organisations
- Migrant Resource Centre of Canberra and Queanbeyan
- Tongan Association of Canberra and Queanbeyan
- Order of Australia Committee
- Trades and Labour Council of the ACT
- Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union
Fr Frank Brennan SJ, responded to the presentation on behalf of the religious and ethnic community leaders with the following:

I am honoured to respond to Senators Reynolds and Woodley on behalf of community leaders. As an ex-Queenslander I am delighted that this initiative has come from two Queensland senators where the problem first arose. While commending the substance of the Federal Parliamentarians' Code of Race Ethics, I also commend the process by which this code has been formulated and presented.

First, this code results from a legitimate complaint by indigenous Australians in the wake of the brazen declaration by a member of this Parliament that she would not represent them or people of their race. Second, this code was drafted by members of the Parliament in consultation with community leaders. Third, this code is being presented by members of Parliament to community leaders. All three steps in the preparation of this code highlight that in contemporary Australia sovereignty is vested in the people and the sovereignty of any institution such as the national Parliament is derived from the people.

This voluntary code does not place any limitation on freedom of speech but rather is a democratic enhancement of its exercise.

It is no interference with parliamentary privilege but a responsible exercise of it.

It does not derogate from the representative obligation of members of Parliament; it is a fulfilment of that constitutional obligation.

All power in this Parliament is from the ballot box. The power and responsibility to govern come from us, the people. Nothing could be more calculated to undermine the legitimacy of this Parliament or the sovereignty of this nation than an unchallenged declaration by a member of this Parliament that citizens would be unrepresented, especially indigenous Australians.

I congratulate those members of Parliament who have subscribed to the code and urge all members to do so before 10 December, Human Rights Day 1996. On behalf of you, the community leaders gathered here in the Main Committee Room of the Parliament, I gratefully acknowledge the presentation of this code in the hope that politicians of all parties will act in a racially non-discriminatory manner which upholds the honour of public office and the Parliament for the good of the nation.

Frank Brennan, SJ, AO, Uniya Jesuit Social Justice Centre, PO Box 522, Kings Cross, NSW 2001
Further Support for the Code

The Code of Race Ethics has also received support from: Fred Chaney; the Community of Ursuline Nuns; Lt Commander Robert J. Kyle and the Australia-Indonesia Families Association; Margaret Helman & Associates; The Conflict Resolution Network; Lois O'Donoghue (former Chairperson of ATSIC), Dr Peter Wong, AM; the Jessie Street National Women's Library; Michael Dodson (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner); Sir Ronald Wilson; Dennis Altman (School of Politics, La Trobe University).

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Former parliamentarians who endorsed the Code during the 38th Parliament include:

Senate
Belinda Neal (NSW)

House of Representatives
Steve Dargavel (Fraser, ACT) Nick Dondas (Northern Territory)
Peter Andren (Calare, NSW) John Bradford (McPherson, Qld)
Peter Baldwin (Sydney, NSW) Susan Jeans (Kingston, SA)
Bob Brown (Charlton, NSW) Clyde Holding (Melbourne Ports, Vic)
Ted Grace (Fowler, NSW) Barry Jones (Lalor, Vic)
Peter Morris (Shortland, NSW) Ralph Willis (Gellibrand, Vic)
Paul Zammit (Lowe, NSW) Ricky Johnston (Canning, WA)

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