



PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE

hl.pres.16558

Mr Shane Rattenbury MLA

Chair

Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure  
Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

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CANBERRA

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Dear Mr Rattenbury

Thank you for your letter of 29 March 2009, inviting me to comment on your committee's inquiry into the coordination and evaluation of the implementation of the Latimer House Principles in the governance of the Australian Capital Territory.

The only comment I would make on this inquiry is that I have some doubt about the value of measuring accountability mechanisms adopted by a legislature against a set of abstract principles such as the Latimer House Principles. While the latter are useful as an expression of principles of governance with which all legislatures in a democracy can readily agree, they are of necessity expressed in general terms, and it is difficult to determine whether specific accountability mechanisms conform with them.

As you are probably aware, the Senate, over the whole span of its 108 year life, has built up a large range of accountability mechanisms to ensure that government appropriately accounts to the Parliament for its conduct of public affairs. These mechanisms have not been adopted with regard to any statement of abstract principles, but have been determined by the Senate at various times to be appropriate for the resolution of particular accountability problems and workable in the context of the practical conduct of government. These mechanisms have been tried and tested over time and modified as appropriate. I think that this is the appropriate way to ensure that a legislature discharges its accountability obligations.

I wish your committee well in its inquiry.

Yours sincerely

John Hogg