



Speech by

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CODE OF ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR MEMBERS

Statement of Fundamental Principles

Mrs ATTWOOD (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (12.12 p.m.): The code of ethical standards has been long awaited by the general public and by members of parliament in the Queensland Legislative Assembly. I firmly believe that education is the most effective tool to be used in the prevention of undesirable and unethical practices. The code of ethical standards was put together by the 49th Parliament's Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee, of which I was a member. Preparation of the standards was assisted by the results of previous committees' inquiries. It is a comprehensive, educative framework that will ensure that elected representatives in Queensland are aware of, understand and are able to prevent ethical dilemmas and that members can resolve those dilemmas when they arise. It will be a valuable reference on ethical practices for members of parliament.

At present there is a great deal of cynicism about the behaviour of politicians and their worth. It is unfortunate that this has occurred. Over many years certain individuals have not endeavoured to do the right thing and have exacerbated the problem. I believe that this is the reason for the extraordinarily high number of Independents and minor party candidates elected to government to date.

As elected representatives from all political parties, we must be accountable to the people who elected us. To do this we must know what the general public expect of us and be educated in our responsibilities to them. With the code of ethical standards to guide us, we can endeavour to be the most accountable members of parliament in Australia. This, I hope, will change the view of the general public over a period—to respect, rather than cynicism.

Today we are debating the six fundamental principles which are the focal point of the code of ethical standards. The fundamental principles are integrity of the parliament, emphasising the importance of maintaining and strengthening the public's trust and confidence in the integrity of parliament; primacy of the public interest and the duty to take steps to avoid, resolve or disclose any conflicts of interest in a way that protects the public interest; and independence of action, including the requirement that members make decisions in accordance with the public interest and not because they are under any financial obligation or influence.

Appropriate use of information means the requirement that confidential information is not used for personal gain. Transparency and scrutiny covers the need to preserve the integrity of the decision-making process by disclosure of pecuniary interests. Finally, appropriate use of entitlements emphasises the duty to ensure that guidelines for the use of entitlements are complied with. There are many other issues which will crop up over time and which will eventually need to be covered by this code of ethical standards; however, the code is as comprehensive as it possibly can be at this point.

The matter of ethics is never straightforward or black and white. There are always a lot of characteristics and undefined areas when dealing with the determination of ethical and unethical practices. Therefore, it is important that the guide be easily read and understood by all. Notwithstanding its simplicity, each case with which the committee is confronted must be judged on its merits, on equity, on fairness and using natural justice principles.

As the chairperson of the MEPPC for the 50th Parliament, I will use this guide as a starting point to ensure that all matters are dealt with in an even-handed, ethical and practical manner. I congratulate the members of the MEPPCs of the 48th and 49th Parliaments and give thanks to the research staff

for their hard work, patience and commitment, which brought about this valuable historical document. I commend to the House the Statement of Fundamental Principles contained in part 2 of the proposed ethical standards.
