



Grace Tame and Brittany Higgins in National Press Club address — as it happened

By [Dannielle Maguire](#) and [Georgia Hitch](#)

Posted Wed 9 Feb 2022 at 12:15pm, updated Wed 9 Feb 2022 at 4:45pm

Former Liberal staffer Brittany Higgins and 2021 Australian of the Year Grace Tame spoke at the National Press Club in Canberra.

It came a day after Prime Minister Scott Morrison made a formal apology to those who experienced sexual harassment, sexual assault or bullying while working in federal parliament.

Read over how it all unfolded.

Live updates

Latest Oldest

We're going to leave it there

9 Feb 2022, 3:02pm

D Wed 9 Feb 2022 at 3:02pm

By Dannielle Maguire

Thanks for joining us today folks!



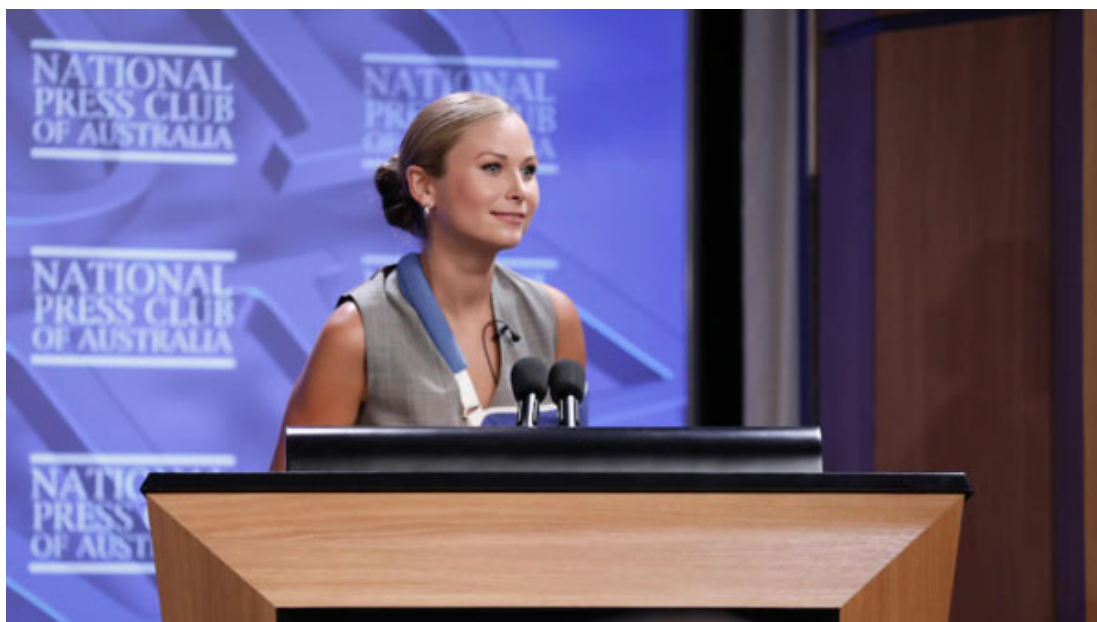
Brittany Higgins and Grace Tame

Grace Tame says she received 'threatening' phone call urging her to protect PM's reputation

9 Feb 2022, 3:00pm

D Wed 9 Feb 2022 at 3:00pm

By Dannielle Maguire



ABC News: Matt Roberts

Grace Tame says a senior member of an organisation funded by the government called her to ask her not to say anything controversial about Scott Morrison as she bowed out as Australian of the Year last month.

[Read the full story](#)

Let's hear from some of our commenters

9 Feb 2022, 2:55pm

D Wed 9 Feb 2022 at 2:55pm

By Dannielle Maguire

Wow powerful speeches by both Brittany Higgins and Grace Tame today. Well done on speaking out again. Enough is enough. I as a woman, I want to see real change, I want politicians to take sexual abuse against children and women seriously and backed by adequate funding and legislative changes, these changes need to be actioned now, in parliament. I want to see leadership in reform and dialogue by those in power.

And Grace Tame and Brittany Higgins, keep making noise, keep calling them out!
-Susie

So, so impressed by these 2 strong, amazing, resilient women. Go girls!

-Tricia

I was glued to the TV to day to listen to two very interesting women speak at the Press club. You both have opened my eyes into what both sides of the political governments have not been doing for the women of our nation. Shame on them. Shame.

Beautiful and informative speeches. Get off your backsides politions, especially men and lift your game as I for one will vote you out. Well done Ladies.



-Ian Morrow

Higgins: Complaint process for political staff too limited

9 Feb 2022, 2:45pm

G Wed 9 Feb 2022 at 2:45pm

By Georgia Hitch

The final question to the pair was whether the [independent complaints process the government setup last year](#) would've made a difference to Higgins's experience, and whether Tame thought that kind of outcome could change workplace cultures.

Giving people who are working for the government a way to report bullying, sexual harassment or sexual assault was one of the recommendations from a separate review, also launched in the wake of Higgins' rape allegations.

She answered first, saying she thought it would've been helpful when she was a ministerial staffer.

"It is only for serious complaints of what is deemed by a certain small team as serious complaints and it's into an all-of-parliament mechanism. So it's still quite limited in scope.

"It don't think it goes far enough ... it's a step but it's not finalised in any way shape or form, but I acknowledge it would have likely assisted me."

Tame backed up Higgins, saying it could change the culture but only if it worked and people felt comfortable making a complaint.

"It's only if the person actually deems it to be serious enough that an action will be taken further.

"So the person who has made the complaint still doesn't actually have very much power over the situation."

PM responds in Question Time

9 Feb 2022, 2:44pm

D Wed 9 Feb 2022 at 2:44pm

By Dannielle Maguire

I'm going to take you to the House of Representatives now, where **Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese** asked **Scott Morrison** about adopting "firm targets" in [the National Plan to Reduce Violence to Women and Children](#).

Mr Morrison began by acknowledging the plan was a "bipartisan, multi-jurisdiction commitment" made back when Julia Gillard was PM:

"When the plan was first announced it wasn't combined with funding of that order"

He said the Coalition had "some \$2 billion" invested in the plan, pointing to the \$1.2 billion in the most recent budget "as a down payment" before rattling off a bunch of funding allocations including:

- "\$165 million also most recently in escaping violence payments"
- "\$73 million for the safe places emergency accommodation program"
- "\$22 million to establish a domestic violence and sexual violence commission to oversee the implementation of the next national plan to end violence against women and children"
- "\$26.2 million to create a safe space online for women and children including funding for the E-Safety Commission to bolster its investigation team into cyberbullying and harmful online content"
- "\$73 million since 2016 on multiple prevention campaigning including the Stop It At The Start and help is here"

Here's how he ended his response:

"We will join all others in this place in ensuring that we have targets as set out collectively and agreed together ..."

How did Brittany Higgins feel about the PM's apology?

9 Feb 2022, 2:32pm

D Wed 9 Feb 2022 at 2:32pm

By Dannielle Maguire

Yesterday, [Prime Minister Scott Morrison apologised](#) to people who had experienced sexual harassment, sexual assault or bullying in Parliament.

He also singled out **Brittany Higgins**, apologising to her and praising her for speaking out.

She said being in the chamber for the apology was very emotional:

"I felt an enormous moment of grief, obviously.

"I was quite emotional, and upset. But I recognise the significance and the importance of it.

"I was grateful that it was happening with multi-party support, that Anthony Albanese decided to participate, that we have the Greens, that we had Zali Steggall

"I think being in that room, kind of, made all the difference."

Could we see Tame or Higgins run for parliament?

9 Feb 2022, 2:25pm

G Wed 9 Feb 2022 at 2:25pm

By Georgia Hitch

Last year when Grace Tame spoke at the press club she gave a resounding "no" when she was asked if she'd ever go into politics.

This time around, as some called out 'Grace for PM', she was asked again whether 12 months down the track she'd changed her mind at all.

"Well, my answer is still no."

"I'm good and that, yes, is because I feel like I can achieve more change outside politics."

As for Brittany Higgins, she left the door a little more open, saying:

"It is an incredible job, I just don't think it's a very natural intuitive fit anymore."

"A lot of water has gone under that bridge. I just, I can't unless I got more life experience or maybe some space and time, I just can't see it being feasible."

To be fair, both women have a lot on their plate already with Tame launching her own foundation to help prevent and response to the sexual abuse of children and others, and Higgins is currently writing a book and is a visiting fellow at the Global Institute for Women's Leadership.



ABC News: Matt Roberts

Tame positive about child abuse law reforms

9 Feb 2022, 2:24pm

D Wed 9 Feb 2022 at 2:24pm

By Dannielle Maguire

Grace Tame was asked about her work lobbying for a national definition of child sexual abuse and uniformity in age of consent laws.

She said the Grace Tame Foundation was launching a campaign called Stop romanticising child abuse and it sounds like the ball's already rolling there:

"We can, I suppose, use federalism to our advantage in that it creates competition with the jurisdictions, you know, one does something and all the other jurisdictions go, 'oh, crap, we better do that too'.

"All of these things are actually quite simple and there's an appetite for it at the moment — these changes in this area of sexual assault legislation.

"New South Wales especially is making huge headway and Victoria sort of chasing behind them with consent legislation.

"So there's a lot of hope there."

What was it like watching the fallout from Four Corners in parliament?

9 Feb 2022, 2:08pm

G Wed 9 Feb 2022 at 2:08pm

By Georgia Hitch

Higgins was asked what it was like to be working in Parliament House the day after [a Four Corners episode went to air](#) detailing allegations of toxic workplace culture inside the building.

"It was deeply traumatic."

It included former staffer Rachelle Miller, who'd had a consensual affair with Education Minister Alan Tudge and has since made an allegation that he was on one occasion physically abusive.

Mr Tudge has denied the allegations and is on personal leave.

Higgins said the episode came out when some people knew about her alleged rape, but many didn't.

"They spoke quite freely about Rachelle Miller - which I'm so sorry about - and it was very disparaging."

"I saw so much of myself in her story and in her lived experience ... it was this re-traumatising thing of this idea that these women were letting down the team, and this frenetic gossip that went around the building.

"It deeply impacted me to the point in which that is why I think I am here today because of the bravery of those women coming before me - 100%, I heard you."

Tame calls for diversity

9 Feb 2022, 2:03pm

D Wed 9 Feb 2022 at 2:03pm

By Dannielle Maguire

She was asked about how she balanced the need to tell her story with the emotional toll retelling traumatising experiences can take.

Tame says she had great support of her family — most of whom were there today — but her advocacy was "all for a greater purpose":

"If can do this so... there doesn't have to be people retraumatised all the time, then it's worth it. 100 times over."

She says her highest priority was prevention.

"Stop it at the start. Yes, it is a long-term investment, it's really difficult, you know, and it's much easier to just sort of cover things up as they happen.

"But if we stop it before it happens then we don't have to do all this."

She went on to say:

"We need more diversity in the conversation, I think there's a lot lacking there.

"We need to hear from First Nations women, we need to hear from women with disabilities and more men obviously."

Higgins on which party would be better for women

9 Feb 2022, 1:50pm

G Wed 9 Feb 2022 at 1:50pm

By Georgia Hitch

Given Higgins' history working in the government and both her and Tame's very public profiles over the last year, they were both asked which party would mean a better outcome for women at the next election.

Diplomatically Higgins described herself as "stateless and partyless" and ruled out being on the campaign trail at all.

"I think we need to listen to messaging as we get closer to the election about who is committed to actually doing something."

As for Tame, her reply was short and sweet:

"Permission to use side eye?"

Tame: Men are not the enemy

9 Feb 2022, 1:48pm

D Wed 9 Feb 2022 at 1:48pm

By Danielle Maguire

Grace Tame says that, before she had been able to go public with her experiences of abuse, it was actually men she was relating to first:

"It was the stories of males surviving clergy abuse who I was relating to before I even spoke to any women who were abused as children.

"So, I actually found it really odd to enter this space and it to be really gendered, so I think it is actually quite sad.

"It really distresses me because... it is not about [gender].

"It is about human beings and, if we take away whatever the form of division is, whether it is gender or whatever it may be, it is about the abuse of power, and that is what we have to remember.

"Men are not the enemy. It is abuse of power.

"It is behaviour, that is the enemy."

Is sexual abuse still seen as a fringe issue by men?

9 Feb 2022, 1:43pm

D Wed 9 Feb 2022 at 1:43pm

By Dannielle Maguire

Reporter Julie Hare remarked on the number of women in the room compared to men, pointing out that, of the 22 journalists asking questions, just one is a man.

Brittany Higgins agreed, saying she couldn't see any male news chiefs in the room — adding that this wasn't a judgment on the journalists present:

"There has been a perception to an extent that it is a women's issue and it should be, whether it is a sensitivity thing, I am not saying it is entirely out of a place or them not particularly caring about the issue, but it is a conversation they don't feel comfortable in participating in.

"But I think it is very telling, just the numbers in the room and who seems to care about the issue, or at least be vocal about caring about the issue, definitely."

How does Higgins keep up the hope that things will change?

9 Feb 2022, 1:38pm

D Wed 9 Feb 2022 at 1:38pm

By Dannielle Maguire

Brittany Higgins says she's been "really buoyed" by the support of women:

"I think we have kind of got a new wave of women who are just not copping it

"To have people stand behind you and go,"no, this is not OK the time is now, let's stand together," that has been a powerful thing and that has kept me going in my darkest times."

Tame on her last meeting with the PM

9 Feb 2022, 1:32pm

D Wed 9 Feb 2022 at 1:32pm

By Dannielle Maguire

We all remember those pictures of Tame with the PM at the Australian of the Year morning tea.

Tame was asked about why she chose to turn up to that meeting and act the way she did.

Here's what she said:

"My answer to your question is that I ACT with integrity. That's it."

We're into Q&A now

9 Feb 2022, 1:29pm

D Wed 9 Feb 2022 at 1:29pm

By Dannielle Maguire



Tame: Three key tasks to 'better our nation'

9 Feb 2022, 1:27pm

D Wed 9 Feb 2022 at 1:27pm

By Dannielle Maguire

She says she wanted to finish her address with something constructive, making three recommendations:

1. For the government to take the issue of abuse in all its forms seriously: *"I mean proactive, preventative measures - not these reactive, bandaids, electioneering stunts like acknowledging past harm at the last minute. If you don't take a strong stance to condemn abuse, you enable it."*
2. More funding for prevention education - which is actually implemented: *"What we need in order to create real change is meaningful investment in our children. In their education. Because they are the future of our nation."*
3. National, consistent, legislative change: *"Still today, perpetrators of abuse find safety in outdated, inconsistent legislation which both protects them and perpetuates social ignorance."*

Tame asked not to bad-mouth the PM

9 Feb 2022, 1:17pm

D Wed 9 Feb 2022 at 1:17pm

By Dannielle Maguire

She says this happened back in August:

"I received a threatening phone call from a senior member of a government-funded organisation, asking for my word that I would not say anything damning about the Prime Minister on the evening of the next Australian of the Year Awards."

She went on to say:

"And it crystallised a fear - a fear for himself and no-one else, a fear that himself and no-one else... might lose his position or, more to the point, his power."

"Sound familiar to anyone? Well, it does to me."

[SHOW MORE POSTS](#)