

Parliament makes formal apology to victims of harassment, bullying in wake of Jenkins report

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Scott Morrison apologised in parliament to Brittany Higgins for the "terrible" things that happened to her.

Australia's political leaders have formally apologised to all those who have experienced sexual harassment, sexual assault or bullying while working in federal parliament.

The statements, made in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, were the first recommendation of an independent review conducted last year into the workplace culture within parliamentary offices.

The review was sparked by former Liberal staffer Brittany Higgins's rape allegations.

It found there was a "boys club" culture of "bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault", and that one in three staff working across parliamentary offices had experienced sexual harassment.

Key points:

- Scott Morrison directly apologised to Brittany Higgins for her experience
- Ms Higgins's allegations she was raped in a ministerial office rocked parliament last year
- An inquiry sparked in the wake of her allegations recommended a formal apology to all victims

It was one of a number of inquiries called by the government after Ms Higgins alleged she was raped in Parliament House in 2019 and spoke out about the way her complaints were handled by the government afterwards.

Ms Higgins listened to the statements from the gallery of the House of Representatives, along with a small group.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison directly thanked Ms Higgins for her role in bringing to light the issues facing many employees, particularly women, "whose experience, and more importantly courage, is the reason why we are all here today."

"I am sorry, we are sorry," he told parliament.

"I am sorry to Ms Higgins for the terrible things that took place here. The place that should have been a place for safety, that turned out to be a nightmare.

"I am sorry for far more than that. All those that came before Ms Higgins ... but she had the courage to speak, and so here we are."

Mr Morrison said the people responsible for the bullying and harassment would be exposed.

"The light will come to those behaviours, as it must," he said.

The Prime Minister said the statements made on Tuesday were an indication of the entire parliament's commitment to clean up the workplace and make it safe for all staff.

"We must, we can and we will do better," he said.



Brittany Higgins' allegations created a national conversation about the treatment of women in parliamentary workplaces. *(Supplied: Australian Parliament)*

'Men have to step up'

Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese echoed Mr Morrison, also declaring he and the Labor Party were sorry.

He too thanked Ms Higgins for her courage.

"You have torn through a silence that has acted as the life-support system for the most odious of status quos," he said.

"To describe your experiences is to relive them.

"I say to everyone who took part, that took a level of courage that you should never have needed to show, but you did and we thank you for it."



Anthony Albanese says there is "no excuse" not to follow the recommendations of the Jenkins review.

Mr Albanese affirmed Labor's commitment to changing the workplace culture within the building and parliamentary offices, urging men to acknowledge they had to be part of the solution.

"We cannot attract the best people to this place if we don't strive to be the best ourselves," he said.

"Nor can we leave this work just to women ... they belong to us all.

"Men have to step up and be allied in both word and deed.

"This has been made clear to us by the extraordinary examples of not just Brittany Higgins, but Grace Tame and others who have found the strength to lift the weight of their own experience and hold it high until no one could look away."

Both the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Andrew Wallace, and the President of the Senate, Slade Brockman, read out statements to open the first sitting day for the year.

Mr Wallace and Mr Brockman thanked the people who were brave enough to come forward and share their experiences with the Jenkins review.

"We also acknowledge the many others who could not or did not participate but who may have experienced misconduct," they said.

"We know that your experiences have had profound and far-reaching impacts on your lives.

"We have listened and heard you, and we accept your calls for change."



Rachelle Miller says she felt "vindicated" by the apology. (AAP/ Lukas Coch)

Hopes apologies are first step of many

As well as Ms Higgins, a number of other women who have publicly come forward to report allegations of misconduct also watched the statements and apologies in parliament.

One was Rachelle Miller, who had a consensual affair — with Education Minister Alan Tudge — which she alleges was at times abusive and on one occasion physically abusive.

Mr Tudge denies the relationship was abusive and is on personal leave while an independent investigation, called by the Prime Minister, takes places.

Ms Miller said she was glad there was a formal apology.

"I welcome the statement of acknowledgement and I felt vindicated that there was an apology made," she said.

"It felt like, finally, what I had been saying all along that this culture is unacceptable was being recognised and acknowledged.

"I do feel like we've made a step, but it is just the first step."



Full video of the statements and apologies by the Prime Minister, Opposition Leader and Speaker of the House of Representatives.