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# New Options for Parliamentary Committees\*

## The newDemocracy Foundation

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**Abstract:** Parliamentary Committees are the backbone of our Parliament. They scrutinise problems and policy as MPs on these committees develop expertise in their particular subject areas, bringing an informed view to the consideration of legislation. At their best, they showcase elected representatives from all sides working together on the in-depth exploration of issues and the bi-partisan development of sound recommendations on challenging issues. They are the part of the Parliament we should most want citizens to see, yet they are the part least visible. The community's expectations about the kind of participation they have with their decision-makers has changed. Citizens are less trusting of Government and are now more engaged on issues that affect them and their community. They now expect to be involved in a range of ways that allow them to contribute to decisions that impact them. This enthusiasm can be productive as long as we can provide a format that is grounded in evidence and considered conversation.

These developments raise three basic but connected problems: (1) there are a wide range of views in the community, often all wanting different outcomes; (2) everyday people, without the time or incentives to read widely, lack the technical competence to make judgments about what policy decisions will have what impact: and (3) the people who do contribute to community meetings or are invited to give evidence at parliamentary inquiries are, more often than not, not very representative of the wider community.

These challenges are interlinked and pose an ongoing problem for our committee inquiries if not directly addressed. As they stand, they risk leaving the impression that

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<sup>1</sup> A full-text version of this Options Paper has been included as an attachment to this Special Edition with the permission of the author. For further information contact [ian.walker@newdemocracy.com.au](mailto:ian.walker@newdemocracy.com.au).

parliament does not reflect what everyday people view as fair, further eroding trust in members and our institutions. This paper introduces to Committee Chairs a new set of inquiry elements, made available to the NSW Parliament's Committees, to address emerging challenges using deliberative processes. These methods combine democratic lotteries that select a representative mix of everyday people with deliberative exercises that help them listen, weigh expert testimony, apply critical thinking, understand biases, have honest conversations, and find common ground.