



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

**Report of the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference
Sydney, Australia**

3 – 8 November 2024



Introduction

1. This is the report of the visit by the Scottish Parliament delegation to Sydney, Australia from 3 to 8 November 2024 for participation in the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) hosted by the Parliament of New South Wales and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) New South Wales Branch. The delegation comprised of:
 - Stuart McMillan MSP
 - Jeremy Balfour MSP
 - Sarah Boyack MSP

The delegation was accompanied and supported by Steven Bell from the International Relations Office (IRO). Mr Iain Huddart also travelled with the delegation to assist Jeremy Balfour MSP.

2. In addition to the CPC General Assembly and associated workshops, members of the Scottish parliamentary delegation also attended the conference in their capacity as regional representatives of the CPA British Islands and Mediterranean Region (BIMR). This was the first time all three important CPA officeholder roles were held by Members of the Scottish Parliament which serves to underline the influence the Scottish Parliament currently holds within the CPA. These roles were:
 - a. Stuart McMillan MSP, BIMR representative on the CPA International Executive Committee (ExCo)
 - b. Jeremy Balfour MSP, BIMR representative on the CPA Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities Network (CPwD); and
 - c. Sarah Boyack MSP, Acting BIMR representative on the CPA Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP)

Background

3. The CPC is the largest annual gathering of Commonwealth parliamentarians who come together to discuss global parliamentary and political issues. Each year, the Conference is hosted by a different Commonwealth Parliament. The 67th conference, hosted by the Parliament of New South Wales and CPA New South Wales Branch, was attended by over 700 parliamentarians and parliamentary officials representing Parliaments and Legislatures from across the Commonwealth.
4. The conference was chaired by the CPA President (2023-2024), the Hon. Ben Franklin MLC, President of the New South Wales Legislative Council. This was the first time that the CPA New South Wales Branch and the Parliament of New South Wales has hosted the CPA's annual conference. It was also the first time that an Australian State or Territory has hosted the CPA's annual conference.

5. The main theme of the 67th CPC was *'Engage, Empower, Sustain: Charting the Course for Resilient Democracy'*. The Conference period included a number of elements, such as:
 - a. the General Assembly, the CPA's supreme authority constituted of delegates from each CPA Branch;
 - b. meetings of the Executive Committee;
 - c. the CPA Small Branches Conference;
 - d. the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Conference and associated meetings;
 - e. meeting of the Regional Champions of the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network;
 - f. meetings for parliamentary clerks and officials (Society of Clerks-at-the-Table - SOCATT); and
 - g. learning and development workshops for Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff
6. Delegates to the 67th CPC were welcomed by the Vice-Patron of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), Her Excellency the Hon Margaret Beazley AC KC, Governor of New South Wales; the Hon. Ben Franklin MLC, President of the New South Wales Legislative Council and CPA President (2023-2024); the Hon. Greg Piper MP, Speaker of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, and the Hon. Chris Minns MP, Premier of New South Wales.
7. Members of the delegation wish to put on record their sincere thanks and appreciation to President Ben Franklin MLC, Speaker Greg Piper MP and all colleagues from the CPA New South Wales Branch for their kind hospitality in Sydney. The organisation of the wider conference was excellent and a testament to both their leadership and the hard work of officials in the New South Wales Parliament.

Programme

8. Over the course of five full days in Sydney the delegation attended a combined total of nine meetings (including the all-day General Assembly), eleven workshops, and seven networking and other events (see Annex for full list). A summary of these meetings and events are provided below in a broadly chronological order.

Sunday 3 November 2024

Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities Network (CPwD), Regional Champions Meeting

9. Jeremy Balfour MSP, in his capacity as the BIMR representative on the CPwD, attended the CPwD annual governance meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to set the agenda of the network for the year ahead and to review CPwD activities, including the Capital Investment Fund supporting Commonwealth Parliaments to

become more accessible. This meeting was held in the Parliament of New South Wales.



(Jeremy Balfour MSP, back row, second left, with regional colleagues on the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disability Network)

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Steering Committee Meeting

10. Sarah Boyack MSP, in her capacity as the Acting BIMR representative on the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) attended a meeting of the CWP Steering Committee. The Steering Committee met ahead of the formal start of the conference to discuss activities as well as key themes for future conferences and meetings.
11. The CWP Steering Committee elected the Hon. Kate Doust MLC from the Parliament of Western Australia as the CWP Vice Chairperson for another one-year term. The CWP Conference was previously triennial (every three years) but in 2023, CWP Members agreed to hold an annual conference, to be held alongside the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

CPA International Executive Committee (ExCo)

12. Stuart McMillan MSP, in his capacity as BIMR representative on the CPA International Executive Committee (ExCo), joined colleagues at a reception at Government House hosted by Her Excellency the Hon Margaret Beazley AC KC, Governor of New South Wales. This was followed by a formal 'welcome' dinner at Sydney Opera House for all members of ExCo ahead of the committee's formal meeting the following morning.

Monday 4 November 2024

CPA International Executive Committee (ExCo) Meeting

13. Stuart McMillan MSP, as BIMR representative on the CPA International Executive Committee (ExCo), attended a meeting of the ExCo Finance Sub Committee, followed by a formal meeting involving all ExCo members from across the CPA's nine geographical regions. Members discussed at this meeting the CPA Status Bill, the financial statements for the Association and key governance issues. The Acting CPA Chairperson at the meeting was the Hon. Arthur Holder SC, MP, Speaker of the House of Assembly of Barbados.

CPwD Bilateral Meeting

14. Jeremy Balfour MSP, in his capacity as BIMR representative on the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) Network, held a bilateral meeting with Senator Isaiah D Jacob from Malaysia, CPA CPwD Champion for the South-East Asia Region. They discussed their own experiences growing up in Malaysia and Scotland as persons with disabilities, including measures both countries could take to support persons with disabilities to become elected representatives. This was followed by a short discussion on measures put in place in their respective Parliaments to support them and other colleagues with disabilities.

15. Senator Jacob also spoke about his hope to raise awareness and change misconceptions about what disabled people can do as well as his goal of the establishment of a government department in Malaysia to cater to persons with disabilities.

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Meeting

16. Sarah Boyack MSP joined women Parliamentarians from across the Commonwealth at their 8th Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Conference. The theme of this conference was "*Engaging, Promoting and Retaining Women in Power*". Women's representation in Parliaments, gender sensitisation and quotas were amongst a wide range of topics discussed at the conference.

17. The CWP Conference was opened by the CWP Chairperson, the Hon. Dr Zainab Gimba MP, Member of the House of Representatives at the National Assembly of Nigeria, who welcomed delegates. The CWP President (2024), Ms Lynda Voltz MP (New South Wales) spoke to the CWP conference about her experience as a legislator.

18. Over 100 Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians and delegates attended the conference which saw leading figures in Commonwealth Parliaments addressing

delegates and included four wide-ranging sessions. The CWP Business meeting which preceded the conference, also attended by Sarah Boyack MSP, were updated on the CWP network's activities during the previous year and the plans for the year ahead.



(Sarah Boyack MSP, second row, centre, with participants in the 8th Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Conference)

CWP Workshop A: Promoting the Political Participation of Young Women and Girls

19. Following conclusion of the CWP Conference, Sarah Boyack MSP attended the first of the CWP Workshops titled, "*Promoting the Political Participation of Young Women and Girls*". The workshop sought to respond to the question 'why are there so few young women in political leadership?' by highlighting some of the current challenges that girls and young women face when trying to engage with and participate in politics. Key challenges included the perception of a woman's role, a lack of visible representation of women in Parliament and inadequate access to education and training.

20. Panellists from Pakistan, Canada, India and Australia also shared examples of current initiatives and strategies in their jurisdiction which sought to increase the participation and representation of girls and young women in political leadership. Many of these programmes provide future leaders with training to build confidence, attain skills and cultivate networks. The panel discussion also emphasised the importance of retention, noting that while entering the field of politics may be one particular challenge, creating an environment which encourages women to stay is another.

21. At the end of the session, workshop participants noted the recommendation that: Parliaments should have effective strategies in place to promote the political participation of girls and young women, including collaboration with civil society organisations. The day's CWP business was followed by a networking reception in the Parliament of New South Wales, hosted by the CPA New South Wales Branch. Sarah Boyack MSP said, *“Access to affordable childcare and support for carers were part of the discussion both in terms of enabling women to stand and to stay on as elected representatives. In addition, the need to ensure that women had equal access to funding for running campaigns was mentioned.”*

Tuesday 5 November 2024

CWP Workshop B: Gender and National Climate Planning: moving from commitment to scalable action (Joint CPA Small Branches and CWP Workshop)

22. Sarah Boyack MSP attended this workshop which explored the intersection of gender equality and climate change. While everyone is impacted by climate change, this workshop explored how each person faces different impacts based on gender and other social vulnerabilities. Women will experience greater impacts, which will potentially worsen existing gender inequalities.
23. Panellists highlighted how drivers of gender inequality lead to unequal exposure to the effects of the climate crisis and natural hazards. However, they warned against treating women as ‘just victims’ in climate action planning as women can be powerful agents of change.
24. This important role of women to drive climate action is largely recognised across most Commonwealth jurisdictions. Panellists from smaller island nations highlighted how gender is factored into their National Climate Plans and policies. There is a need to increase participation and representation of women in decision-making and climate planning.
25. Panellists also emphasised the uneven climate change impacts that small island nations face. Although they bear the smallest responsibility for the climate crisis, their nations are already facing the worst impacts of climate change. Panellists also highlighted examples of the programmes and projects that have been implemented from their National Climate Plans. These nations must continue to advocate for global climate action while progressing their own national plans.
26. Delegates proposed amending the recommendation to recognise that parliamentarians do not make decisions about accessing climate financing and mainstreaming gender in climate plans. Rather, parliamentarians are tasked with advocating to the Executive for action. A delegate also proposed amendments to reflect gender mainstreaming already occurs but should be increased. Both of these amendments were agreed to. At the end of the session, workshop participants

endorsed the recommendation that: Parliaments should advocate for the further mainstreaming of gender into National Climate Plans. Sarah Boyack MSP said, *“We need to recognise that women need support as food producers and farmers, and they are often responsible for sourcing clean water. We need to see innovative support such as in Malawi and Kenya to empower women, and to enable them to grow more sustainable crops that will be climate resistant and deliver increased incomes for local communities. It is vital that emergency responses factor in the needs and vulnerability of women, children, and disabled people. We need governments to act now, investing in safety and resilience, as well as adaptation”*.

CWP Workshop C: Future-Proofing Democracy: Innovations in Security and Support for Women Parliamentarians

27. Sarah Boyack MSP attended this workshop which examined the physical and psychological safety concerns faced by women parliamentarians, as well as potential options for innovation and reform that could be explored to address these issues.
28. Panellists discussed the impact of social media use and viral internet misinformation on the safety of women parliamentarians. It was noted that, since 2017, there has been a significant increase in threats and physical assaults on women parliamentarians, which appears in part to be caused by an increase in violent online behaviour. Panellists discussed options to address these concerns, including the use of Artificial Intelligence to identify the source of information and requiring social media companies to remove threatening language or content.
29. Panellists also discussed what approaches different jurisdictions have taken to protect the physical safety of women in light of serious threats and attacks, including undertaking security reviews and the use of duress alarms and escape rooms. However, it was also noted that precautions of this kind are often challenging, given the need for parliamentarians to be available and accessible to their constituency.
30. The workshop canvassed what options are available to improve parliamentary culture and, specifically, the Westminster system, with a move away from an adversarial, conflict-based approach and towards a more collaborative and value-led system. Panellists also discussed what options are available within current systems, such as leveraging existing legislation and parliamentary processes in a way that seeks to improve the safety of women parliamentarians.
31. At the end of the session, workshop participants endorsed the recommendation that: Commonwealth Parliaments should, with the support of experts, put in place protective measures that address the multifaceted security challenges that women parliamentarians face. Sarah Boyack MSP commented, *“It was good to be able to reference our own work on this issue in the Scottish Parliament in relation to monitoring social media with over 660 cases of abuse reported to the police. Moreover, we now get advice as MSPs in relation to safety when it comes to holding*

surgeries in the community. I also referenced the inspiring work of the Jo Cox Foundation. There were also good examples of tackling misogyny and abuse in legislation from Wales and concerns raised about the impact of AI on social media. But we need to be alert to the abuse and intimidation women experience on a day-to-day basis in countries like Kenya”.

Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities Network - Outreach Programme

32. CPwD Chairperson, the Hon. Laura Kanushu MP (Uganda), accompanied by Jeremy Balfour MSP and other Regional Champions of the Network, went to the Royal Rehab Ryde, a rehabilitation hospital in Sydney, to see their work and tour the Brain and Spine Injury Units and the Royal Rehab Lifeworks Unit.
33. This visit also provided Jeremy Balfour MSP the opportunity for informal bilateral meetings with many of his CPA regional colleagues on the CPwD Network. The challenges experienced by CPwD parliamentarians in their respective jurisdictions, including measures taking place in Parliaments to both assist CPwD pre and post-election, were discussed along with examples of best practice.
34. The visiting CPwD Regional Champions and Members also participated in an interactive demonstration on wheelchair basketball and tennis. The visit to the Royal Rehab Ryde was organised through the Hon. Liesl Tesch MP (New South Wales Legislative Assembly) who is the CPwD Regional Champion for the CPA Australia Region. Jeremy Balfour MSP wishes to put on record his sincere thanks to Ms Tesch for arranging this opportunity to visit such a wonderful facility. He remarked, *“having gone through rehab myself recently, it was fascinating to visit another hospital and learn from staff and patients. The visit was inspiring and there are lessons to be learnt.”*

CWP Workshop D: The Retention of Women in Parliaments: How to Keep Women in Politics?

35. Sarah Boyack MSP attended this workshop which examined the challenges faced by women parliamentarians and how these impact on women remaining in politics. While the focus, to date, has often been on encouraging women to enter politics, proactively exploring efforts to retain women parliamentarians is important if we are to reach near equal representation.
36. Discussions focused on some of the main reasons women parliamentarians leave politics, including toxic and abusive cultures and a lack of support for caregiving roles, particularly for parents of young children. Also discussed was the increasing prevalence of deepfakes, cyberbullying and nonconsensual distribution of intimate images, which especially impacted women parliamentarians.

37. A range of initiatives to support the retention of women in parliaments were canvassed. For example, enabling hybrid participation in parliamentary activities could help support women with caregiving responsibilities to maintain a better work/life balance. Anti-harassment policies, proxy voting and on-site childcare could also play a role. Practical approaches to addressing online harm were also discussed, including the importance of referring instances of online abuse to the appropriate authorities, wherever possible.
38. While politics is a competitive arena, the workshop agreed that women parliamentarians needed to work together across party lines to support and celebrate each other, to address the barriers that prevent women from staying in politics and to work towards a common agenda. At the end of the session, workshop participants endorsed the recommendation that: Parliaments should proactively explore all necessary measures and support systems to allow parliamentarians to undertake their term in office. Sarah Boyack MSP said, *“When the Scottish Parliament was established in 1999 the issue of onsite creche facilities was highlighted as essential both for MSPs and those visiting our Parliament from our communities. In recent years the issue of childcare has not gone away but care for relatives has also risen up the agenda. We passed a motion to be agreed at the main conference on the need to agree on the importance of addressing discrimination and intimidation against women”*.

BIMR Meeting

39. All delegates from the BIMR gathered ahead of conference to be briefed by their regional representatives on the International Executive Committee, Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Steering Committee and Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities Network; Stuart McMillan MSP, Sarah Boyack MSP and Jeremy Balfour MSP respectively. This meeting provided an opportunity for regional representatives to update delegates on discussions at their respective meetings, discuss voting options for the following day’s election of a new CPA Chairperson and to answer any questions.
40. Following conclusion of the BIMR meeting, Jeremy Balfour MSP, in his capacity as CPwD regional representative, attended a joint networking reception for CPA Small Branches and CPA delegates held in the New South Wales Parliament and hosted by the CPA New South Wales Branch.

Wednesday 6 November 2024

Official Opening of the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference

41. All members of the delegation attended the official opening ceremony of the 67th CPC at the Darling Harbour Theatre, Sydney International Conference Centre. The Vice-Patron of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), Her Excellency the

Hon Margaret Beazley, AC KC, Governor of New South Wales, urged Commonwealth parliamentarians to work together to uphold the values of the Commonwealth as she opened proceedings. A message to conference delegates from HM King Charles III, Head of the Commonwealth and Patron of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, was also read out by the CPA Vice-Patron.

42. Delegates to the 67th CPC were then welcomed by the CPA President (2023-2024), the Hon. Ben Franklin MLC, President of the New South Wales Legislative Council followed by remarks from the Speaker of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, the Hon. Greg Piper MP; the Premier of New South Wales, the Hon. Chris Minns MP; and CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg. The Vote of Thanks was given by the Hon. Penny Sharpe MLC, Leader of the Government in the New South Wales Legislative Council, and the opening ceremony was conducted by the Hon. Courtney Houssos MLC, New South Wales Minister for Finance and Natural Resources.
43. A 'Welcome to Country' and digeridoo performance was given by Matthew Doyle and subsequent performances by the Sydney Children's Choir, the Sydney Conservatorium, the Bangarra Dance Company and musician James Johnston rounded off the morning's proceedings.

CPC Workshop B: The Use of Artificial Intelligence in Parliamentary Processes and Practices - Opportunities and Challenge

44. Jeremy Balfour MSP attended the above workshop which focused on how Parliaments are implementing Artificial Intelligence (AI) into their processes and practices, and the opportunities and challenges this presents. While many jurisdictions have begun to introduce AI into various aspects of their processes, such as transcribing parliamentary debates and simplifying administrative tasks to improve efficiency, this is in the early stages.
45. Panellists agreed that AI can undoubtedly bring great opportunities and potential benefits to Parliaments, but cautioned that safeguards must be developed against dangerous and/or unintended consequences, such as the inclusion of bias and 'fake news' in AI-produced analysis, leaks of private and sensitive information, and the risk of hacking of AI systems by 'bad actors'.
46. Panellists further agreed that Parliaments and jurisdictions need to develop the capabilities to take advantage of the benefits that AI can offer while mitigating the potential risks, noting that it is a complex issue and that different responses will be needed based on the individual context of each jurisdiction. Panellists suggested the scrutiny of parliamentary committees as an important tool in examining the issue based on their experiences with inquiries in the United Kingdom's House of Lords and the Canadian Senate. The workshop also featured a presentation on the AI initiative of the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies, which includes AI-powered analysis of citizens'

opinions on Bills, as well as AI summarisation of Bills and parliamentary speeches.

47. Participants of the workshop agreed that there are risks with the use of AI in parliamentary processes and supported a participant's suggestion that the CPA create a Steering Committee on the use of Artificial Intelligence in Parliaments. At the end of the session, workshop participants endorsed the recommendation that: Parliaments should encourage the sharing of best practice and lessons learned from integrating Artificial Intelligence into parliamentary processes and practices and consider the creation of a CPA Steering Committee on the use of Artificial Intelligence in Parliaments. Jeremy Balfour MSP said, "*there is a danger that legislation does not keep pace with changes in Artificial Intelligence. AI comes with great opportunities but has risk attached to it*".

CPC Workshop C: Violence and Abuse of Parliamentarians: Case Studies from the Commonwealth

48. Both Stuart McMillan MSP and Sarah Boyack MSP attended the above workshop which discussed threats to the safety of parliamentarians, their staff, and family and the impact these threats have on their physical and mental wellbeing as well as Members' ability to speak openly and freely in the democratic systems they work in. This workshop explored issues of violence towards and the abuse of parliamentarians, the changing trends in such behaviour, their impacts on individual welfare and the wider society, and which cohorts are more vulnerable. Panellists spoke on the topic from Pakistan, Kenya, and the United Kingdom.

49. The discussion highlighted both the presence of combative political climates and the rise of online platforms and social media as factors contributing to modern abusive behaviour towards parliamentarians. Social media, 'fake news', Artificial Intelligence and cyberbullying are some examples of threats in the online space. These can impact on the mental health of those targeted; however, they can also cross over into threats to physical safety. Moreover, they may foster a wider climate of distrust and fear of speaking out in public and in democratic institutions.

50. The workshop discussed those cohorts who are vulnerable to abuse, especially women and other marginalised communities. One panellist noted that any conversation about threats against Members of Parliament is also a conversation about gendered violence. Women, historically a silenced cohort, may find themselves again unwilling to speak out of fear for their safety when elected to public office. Panellists named social media regulation, legislation around truth-telling in politics, less combative debate environments in Parliament and policies targeting misogyny as potential solutions to the issue of abuse.

51. At the end of the session, workshop participants endorsed the recommendation that: Parliaments of the Commonwealth should be committed to providing robust security measures for Members and their staff, adaptable to changing political landscapes,

and supplemented by adequate and accessible medical, physical, mental health and legal support. Stuart McMillan MSP said, *“This session was hugely informative but also alarming at how precious the democratic process is. With greater political pressures and some in society feeling emboldened to go beyond the realms of robust debate, it is important that safety of politicians, their staff and family is fully acted upon.”* Sarah Boyack MSP said, *“It was really good to hear about best practice from other legislatures. But the need not just to tackle violence and rebuild trust in our legislatures was stressed. What also struck me was the issue of the need for mental health support for parliamentarians, given the range of pressures they face. This is not something I’m aware of being discussed”.*

CPC Workshop D: How can Legislatures Best Support and Promote LGBT+ Participation?

52. Stuart McMillan MSP attended this workshop which focused on how Legislatures can promote and encourage a positive environment for the political engagement of LGBT+ voices in the democratic process. Panellists were from Belize, Victoria (Australia), the Cook Islands and the UNDP.
53. Panellists discussed the importance of a diverse range of voices and experiences in both the membership of Legislatures and in the views presented to them through political engagement. The panel discussion highlighted the need to acknowledge different LGBT+ perspectives and encourage diverse representation. Panellists agreed that without LGBT+ participation, legislation and policies may overlook critical social perspectives and experiences.
54. The workshop highlighted the challenges some jurisdictions face in supporting and promoting LGBT+ participation. Workshop participants spoke about some societal and cultural norms being ‘less welcoming’ of LGBT+ participation, making it politically challenging for some Legislatures to support the LGBT+ community.
55. Panellists agreed that inclusive and equal political systems are fundamental to sustainable legislative development, noting the value of meaningful engagement, open dialogue and participation between parliamentary and LGBT+ communities. While there was recognition that some jurisdictions had made significant progress in this space, there was a general consensus that most jurisdictions could do more to support and promote LGBT+ participation. Other key themes that were raised by workshop participants included the economic cost of inclusion and exclusion, the role of the CPA in supporting and promoting LGBT+ participation, and the impact of cultural and religious resistance to LGBT+ participation in some jurisdictions.
56. At the end of the session, workshop participants endorsed the recommendation that: Political actors across the Commonwealth have a responsibility to listen to the voices of LGBT+ citizens and support their meaningful participation in the democratic

process. Stuart McMillan MSP said, *“This session was yet another example of the long journey that lies ahead but there are politicians from across the Commonwealth who are prepared to work to deliver LGBTQ+ equality.”*

CPC Workshop F: Benchmarking, Standards and Guidelines: Strengthening the Institution of Parliaments through the Adoption of Best Practice

57. Jeremy Balfour MSP and Sarah Boyack MSP attended this workshop which focused on discussions around how the Commonwealth could explore benchmarking tools, standards and guidelines to improve good governance and strengthen Parliamentary institutions.
58. Panellists from India, Guyana, KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa), Deakin University and the Rule of Law Section at the Commonwealth Secretariat discussed the importance of benchmarking in building institutions that function effectively and are resilient to the complexities of modern governance. In discussing why benchmarks are relevant, it was noted that they demonstrate commitment to democratic values and foster transparency around parliamentary processes, which in turn builds public trust.
59. The CPA has 132 benchmarks which have been developed since 2006. Thirty Legislatures have undertaken assessments since the benchmarks were updated in 2018. Panellists provided examples of supported self-assessment processes that have taken place in different Parliaments around the world. While a report with recommendations is developed by the CPA Secretariat, it is up to each individual Parliament to implement the recommendations. The recommendations can serve as an opportunity for self-reflection and a roadmap for change, regardless of whether or not they are implemented.
60. Panellists reinforced the relevance of establishing appropriate codes of conduct, which are complementary to and act as ethical standards supporting the benchmarks. Codes of conduct establish clear expectations and sanctions, and therefore set a high bar for accountability. It was highlighted that any benchmarks and codes of conduct should be flexible so that they can be adapted to different Legislatures.
61. Following the presentations, the panellists answered questions on the practical challenges of adopting benchmarks, including those related to digitalisation and the emergence of social media, and preserving democracy in the face of change. At the end of the session, workshop participants endorsed the recommendation that: Commonwealth Parliaments should commit to exploring relevant benchmarking tools, standards and guidelines, including but not limited to the CPA Democratic Benchmarks, that can be adapted and implemented within their respective Parliaments to strengthen their institutions and promote good governance. Jeremy Balfour MSP said, *“I think we can be pleased on the work already done in the Scottish Parliament and should be ready to share good practice with other jurisdictions.”* Sarah Boyack MSP said, *“it was interesting to hear the raft of work that has been done by*

different legislatures and made me think I should re-read the report produced by our previous Presiding Officer, Ken Macintosh, on how to modernise the way we work in the Parliament and what lessons can be learned given the changes since the Parliament was established. The importance of codes of conduct, the importance of standards being upheld, and respect demonstrated by elected representatives both in Parliaments and on social media, are all linked to building and rebuilding trust in democratic institutions.”

CPC Workshop G: Combatting Discriminatory Legislation: 365 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence

62. Stuart McMillan MSP attended this workshop examining the role that Parliamentarians and Governments have in combatting discriminatory legislation, particularly that which negatively impacts women and girls, and the challenges that come with addressing persistent gender inequalities and enacting gender-responsive laws. Discussions focused on the unique ways that different countries have responded to those challenges, and addressed how the CPA membership and international organisations like UN Women could contribute to developing best practice.
63. Panellists from New Zealand, The Maldives, Australia and UN Women highlighted the current trends regarding the rights of women and girls in their jurisdictions. Each presented specific examples of initiatives that have been undertaken to address discriminatory laws on marriage and divorce, inheritance, welfare benefits, gender-based violence and the gender pay gap, such as the passing of Bills or resolutions, convening of subject matter Committees and unannounced visits to relevant agencies to assess work against human rights principles.
64. All jurisdictions are experiencing similar issues, to a greater or lesser extent, and all panellists acknowledged that, despite the many successes, there is still much work to be done. Impediments to the swifter implementation of law reform include insufficient data collection due to weak reporting mechanisms, inadequate education of the public on the relevant issues and ineffective communication of legislative change, as well as the costs and difficulties typically associated with making change.
65. At the conclusion of the presentations and the Chair’s comments, participants from India, Pakistan, South Africa and Canada shared the progress their respective jurisdictions have made with respect to addressing discriminatory legislation. At the end of the session, workshop participants endorsed the recommendation that: Legislatures across the Commonwealth should ensure that they have CEDAW-compliant policies and legislation in place to effectively tackle all forms of harassment, discrimination and abuse.

CPC Workshop H: Creating Inclusive Elections for Persons with Disabilities (PwD)

66. Jeremy Balfour MSP was a panellist at this workshop and was joined by colleagues from the Ugandan and Malaysian Parliaments. This workshop addressed the critical need for inclusivity in the electoral process, exploring the challenges faced by different groups in society and proposing actionable strategies to ensure that all persons with disabilities can participate fully in elections.
67. It was noted that 2024 has been named the 'Year of Elections', with a record number of elections taking place and so many Commonwealth jurisdictions have faced these challenges in recent months. Jeremy Balfour MSP and his fellow panellists provided examples from each of their jurisdictions as to how their Parliaments had tackled these challenges and suggested inclusive processes in order to provide increased inclusivity. A virtual panellist from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) also provided relevant examples from election monitoring and technical assistance activities in North America, Europe and Central Asia.
68. Electoral accessibility is for everyone, and no member of society should feel excluded from the democratic process. Through the presentations, discussions and shared experiences, the workshop helped to raise awareness, generate solutions and foster collaboration among stakeholders committed to enhancing accessibility to elections for persons with disabilities. Elections are a cornerstone of democratic practices in the Commonwealth and across the world, yet individuals with disabilities often face significant barriers that hinder their ability to participate in elections equally.
69. At the end of the session, workshop participants endorsed the recommendation that: Commonwealth Parliaments should commit to integrating technological solutions and adjustments to allow for inclusive participation in electoral processes and practices for all persons living with disabilities. Jeremy Balfour MSP said, *"I think the next challenge for the CPG on disability (in the Scottish Parliament) is to become more mainstream and engage with a wider audience."*



World Café Session: Solving contemporary challenges in the Commonwealth

70. Sarah Boyack MSP took part in the 'World Café' at the 67th CPC. This was billed as an opportunity for discussions about contemporary challenges faced in the Commonwealth, focused around five different topics: including challenges to global stability; addressing the colonial past; the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); corporate lobbying against climate change; and assisted dying and human rights. Discussion leaders from Pakistan, the British Virgin Islands, Malawi, Fiji and Jersey guided the individual group discussions to generate collective ideas to address these issues.
71. Participants were given the opportunity to circulate between the topics in small groups to share real world experiences from their jurisdictions as well as considering what a common goal could look like.
72. There was discussion about the importance for parliamentarians to work toward common goals when faced with a challenge, particularly conflicts and challenges to global stability. The need to join together as individuals, putting state policy to one side was highlighted. This may not be effective in solving conflict that is raging, but there is the potential to learn and resolve issues before they become conflicts. A collective movement is required when solving contemporary challenges faced in the Commonwealth. Another discussion looked at how some communities are still experiencing colonialism in real time. The group agreed that the acknowledgement of the continued presence of colonialism should be a starting point before considering any reparations. This should then be followed by adequate education on its legacy.
73. Most groups participating in the 'World Café' expressed how the CPA could be a catalyst for change. The CPA can, they noted, be a sounding board to generate ideas and share successful initiatives. Parliamentarians may then be better equipped to canvas and influence innovative ways to resolve problems in their respective countries. Sarah Boyack MSP said, *"There were really good discussions on how we can do more to share best practice on issues relating to the SDGs and supporting colleagues on the challenges of getting value from investing in tackling the climate emergency; as well as addressing other deep-rooted issues such as poverty and inequality."*

Reception Hosted by Louise Cantillon, British Consul General and Deputy Trade Commissioner

74. Stuart McMillan MSP, Jeremy Balfour MSP and Sarah Boyack MSP attended a reception hosted by the British Consul General in Sydney, Louise Cantillon, at the British Consulate General in Circular Quay. Members of the delegation were joined at the reception from Members and officials from the other UK based legislatures represented at the CPC, namely Westminster (House of Commons and House of Lords), the Welsh Parliament and the Crown Dependencies.

Thursday 7 November 2024

CPA General Assembly (Full Day)

75. All members of the Scottish Parliament delegation attended the 2024 CPA General Assembly. The CPA General Assembly was presided over by the CPA President (2023-2024) the Hon. Ben Franklin MLC, President of the New South Wales Legislative Council and was attended by Members from 128 CPA Branches. The CPA General Assembly, the Association's supreme authority, is constituted by delegates to the annual Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.
76. The CPA General Assembly also included a topical debate '*Votes vs Likes – the Role of Parliament in Strengthening Democratic Resilience in an Age of Fake News and Synthetic Media*', with presenters from CPA Branches including Australia Federal, Punjab (Pakistan), The Maldives, Wales, Canada Federal, New Zealand, Trinidad and Tobago, and Northern Ireland.
77. Some of the key decisions and outcomes from the 2024 CPA General Assembly were: Delegates welcomed the work undertaken to enable the CPA to create a new non-charitable organisation and the passage of the CPA Status Bill in the UK Parliament to legislate to recognise the CPA as 'akin to an international, interparliamentary organisation'.
78. Delegates also approved the 2023 CPA Annual Report (including the audited Financial Statements), the CPA Membership Report, the CPA Budgets and Financial Management Reports.
79. Delegates endorsed reports from the three CPA networks - the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP), the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) and the CPA Small Branches.
80. During the 2024 CPA General Assembly, CPA Members elected Hon. Dr Christopher Kalila MP (Zambia) as the Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee for a three-year term. They also looked ahead to the next Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference – the 68th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) - to be hosted by the CPA Barbados Branch and Parliament of Barbados in October 2025.



(L-R: CPA Scotland Branch representatives Stuart McMillan MSP, Sarah Boyack MSP and Jeremy Balfour MSP in the Main Conference Hall, CPC General Assembly)

81. After the General Assembly, Stuart McMillan MSP attended the first meeting of the new EXCO which changes by one third at every General Assembly.

Official Delegate Dinner

82. The final engagement of the CPC was a dinner hosted by the CPA President (2023-2024), the Hon. Ben Franklin MLC, President of the New South Wales Legislative Council; and the Hon. Greg Piper MP, the Speaker of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly. Members were addressed at this dinner by the Prime Minister of Australia, The Hon Anthony Albanese MP.

International Relations Office December 2024

Annex: Programme

DEL = Delegation
SM = Stuart McMillan MSP
JB = Jeremy Balfour MSP
SB = Sarah Boyack MSP

Friday 1 November 2024

07.30 Depart Edinburgh on Qatar Airways QR 032 (DEL)
17.20 Arrive Doha
20.45 Depart Doha on Qatar Airways QR 908 (DEL)

Saturday 2 November 2024

18.50 Arrive Sydney (DEL)

Sunday 3 November 2024

09.00 Registration (DEL)
12.30 Transfer to Parliament of New South Wales (JB, SB)
13.00 Lunch, Members Dining Room, NSW Parliament (JB, SB)
14.00 CPwD Regional Champions Meeting (JB)
17.30 Reception at Government House hosted by Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, Governor of NSW Reception for CPA Executive Committee (SM)
19.15 Dinner for CPA Executive Committee, Yarramundi Rooms at Sydney Opera House (SM)

Monday 4 November 2024

09.00 CPA Executive Committee - Finance Subcommittee (SM)
09.00 Breakfast Briefing, British Consulate-General Sydney (JB, SB)
11.00 CPA Executive Committee meeting (Part 1) (SM)
13.00 14.00 Lunch (DEL)
14:00 Bilateral Meeting: Senator Isaiah D. Jacob (Malaysia), CPA CPwD Regional Champion for the South-East Asia Region (JB)
14.00 CPA Executive Committee meeting (Part 2) (SM)
14.00 CWP Business Meeting (SB)
17.00 8th Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Conference – Opening and CWP Workshop: Promoting the Political Participation of Young Women and Girls (SB)
19.00 Transfer to Parliament of New South Wales (SB)
19.30 Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians reception (SB)

Tuesday 5 November 2024

- 10.30 CWP Workshop: Gender and National Climate Planning: moving from commitment to scalable action (SB)
- 12.00 Lunch (DEL)
- 13.00 CWP Workshop: Future-Proofing Democracy: Innovations in Security and Support for Women Parliamentarians (SB)
- 13.00 Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities Outreach Programme, Royal Rehab Ryde (JB)
- 15.00 CWP Workshop: The Retention of Women in Parliaments: How to Keep Women in Politics? (SB)
- 17.00 Briefing for Delegates, Secretaries and Observers (DEL)
- 18.00 BIMR meeting (DEL)
- 19.00 Transport to NSW Parliament (JB)
- 19.30 Reception for CPA Small Branches and CPwD Delegates (JB)

Wednesday 6 November 2024

- 08.30 Delegates seated for opening ceremony
- 09.00 Official Opening of the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, Darling Harbour theatre (DEL)
- 10.30 Official photographs (SM)
- 11.00 CPC Workshop B: The Use of Artificial Intelligence in Parliamentary Processes and Practices - Opportunities and Challenges (JB)
- 11.00 CPC Workshop C: Violence and Abuse of Parliamentarians – Case Studies from the Commonwealth (SM, SB)
- 13.00 Lunch (DEL)
- 14.00 CPC Workshop D: How can Legislatures Best Support and Promote LGBTQ+ Participation? (SM)
- 14.00 CPC Workshop F: Benchmarking, Standards and Guidelines: Strengthening the Institution of Parliaments through the Adoption of Best Practice (JB, SB)
- 16.00 CPC Workshop G: Combatting Discriminatory Legislation: 365 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence (SM)
- 16.00 CPC Workshop H: Creating Inclusive Elections for Persons with Disabilities (PwD) (JB)
- 16.00 World Café Session: Solving contemporary challenges in the Commonwealth (SB)
- 18.00 Reception hosted by Louise Cantillon, Consul General and Deputy Trade Commissioner (DEL)

Thursday 7 November 2024

- 09.00 CPA General Assembly – Part 1 (DEL)
- 12.00 Lunch (DEL)
- 13.30 CPA General Assembly – Part 2 (DEL)
- 16.00 CPA Executive Committee (Part 2) (SM)

18.45 Official dinner for Delegates, Sydney Town Hall (DEL)
22.30 Dinner ends

Friday 8 November 2024

**Optional tours provided by NSW Parliament (AM), including early departures*

11.00 Hotel Check out (DEL)
18.00 CWP NSW Branch Networking Event, NSW Parliament (SB)
21.40 Depart Sydney on Qatar Airways QR909 (SM, JB)

Saturday 9 November 2024

04.50 Arrive Doha
07.45 Depart Doha on Qatar Airways QR 029 (SM, JB)
12.35 Arrive Edinburgh

Sunday 10 November 2024

21.40 Depart Sydney on Qatar Airways QR909 (SB)

Monday 11 November 2024

04.50 Arrive Doha (SB)
07.45 Depart Doha on Qatar Airways QR 029 (SB)
12.35 Arrive Edinburgh