HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

COMMITTEES

Privileges and Members' Interests Committee

Report

SPEECH

Thursday, 5 May 2016

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (09:28): As Chair of the Standing Committee of Privileges and Members Interests, I rise to inform the House of the outcome of the committee’s consideration of an important matter. On 17 March 2016 I presented to the House a report from the Standing Committee of Privileges and Members Interests as to whether the former member for Dobell, Mr Craig Thomson, deliberately misled the House on 21 May 2012. Having regard to the findings against Mr Thomson made by the Melbourne Magistrates’ Court on 18 February 2014, in presenting the report I advised the House that there appeared to have been a breach of process in the committee’s finalisation of the matter and that this would be considered further by the committee at its next meeting.

I now advise the House that this breach of process was an apparent unauthorised disclosure and publication of the committee’s draft report. Members will be aware that, under the standing orders and the Parliamentary Privilege Act, unauthorised disclosure of committee documents may amount to contempt of the House where the disclosure causes, or is likely to cause, substantial interference with the work of the House or its committees.

I advise the House that the committee considered the matter at a meeting yesterday evening and concluded that, on this occasion, the unauthorised disclosure and publication of the draft report is unlikely to have caused substantial interference to the work of the House or its committees. In addition, the committee’s view is that it would be difficult to determine with any certainty the source of the unauthorised disclosure. It is most regrettable that this occurred, especially as the Committee of Privilege and Members’ Interests was finalising such a serious reference in relation to a one-time member of this House.

I wish to take this opportunity to remind all those involved with the committee processes of the importance of observing the rules against unauthorised disclosure of committee documents, including draft reports. There is obviously a potential for unauthorised disclosures to impact adversely on our work as parliamentarians. This concludes the matter. It is finished. I thank the House.