

# How to Debate Responsibly in a Heated Moment

## A one-page crib for MPs and advisers

### Purpose

This crib supports **calm, credible debate** when global conflict and domestic tension are flooding the chamber with emotion. It does not argue for a vote; it helps members **protect cohesion, legitimacy, and safety** while debating hard issues.

---

### 1) Anchor the debate (openers that steady the room)

- “We can protect communities **and** preserve free speech; these are not competing goals.”
  - “Free speech is democracy’s **early-warning system**—we weaken safety when we blind ourselves.”
  - “This bill should stop intimidation and violence without criminalising lawful dissent.”
- 

### 2) Separate people from politics (a critical discipline)

- Affirm protection of **people and communities**.
  - Make clear that **states, ideologies, and policies remain open to criticism**.
  - Avoid language that treats disagreement as disloyalty or danger.
- 

### 3) Keep thresholds clear (repeat this test)

Before endorsing any provision, ask: - Does it require **intent**? - Is conduct **targeted**? - Is there **credible harm**?

If the answer is no, the risk of false positives and grievance escalation rises.

---

### 4) Use conduct-based language

Prefer: - threats, intimidation, harassment, stalking, doxxing, incitement Avoid: - offence taken, slogans, vague fear without targeting

This keeps enforcement symmetric and reviewable.

---

### 5) Acknowledge fear without validating escalation

- “Many Australians are frightened because of events overseas.”
- “Fear is understandable; **violence and intimidation are not**.”

- “Good law distinguishes between trauma and threat.”
- 

## **6) Name the risk of overreach (briefly, safely)**

- “Low thresholds increase false cases and public cost.”
  - “Overreach strengthens extremist minority tails and weakens moderates.”
  - “Precision protects communities better.”
- 

## **7) Close with legitimacy**

- “Symmetry, transparency, and reviewability are what keep multicultural trust.”
  - “We should legislate for the long term, not the loudest moment.”
- 

### **One-sentence fallback (if time is tight)**

“Protect people by regulating conduct, not belief—and keep free speech working as our early-warning system against extremism.”

*(Prepared for quick reference during debate.)*