



Remuneration Tribunal

Travel within Australia for parliamentarians' family members

STATEMENT

The remuneration and work expenses framework for parliamentarians, established by the *Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017* (PBR Act) sets out a number of inquiry, reporting and determinative obligations on the Remuneration Tribunal, to be completed at least once each year. The Tribunal may be asked by the Minister to inquire into other matters. Regulations must be made or amended in accordance with the Tribunal's recommendations.

Request

On 22 December 2025, Senator the Hon Don Farrell, Special Minister of State and Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher, Minister for Finance, wrote to the Tribunal asking it to inquire into and report on whether changes should be made to the Parliamentary Business Resources Regulations 2017 (the Regulations).

Considerations

The Tribunal took the following factors into account as part of its inquiry:

- The community has concerns about the frequency, travel class, adherence to the actual intent and spirit of, and overall cost of parliamentary family reunion travel.
- Parliamentary life is not family-friendly, noting the average parliamentarian based outside the Australian Capital Territory spends around one quarter of each year in Canberra.
- Conditions of service should reasonably facilitate the attraction and retention of talented individuals from diverse backgrounds and all walks and stages of life to represent their communities in the parliament.
- The PBR framework is a principles-based system, within which parliamentarians are expected to apply good judgement.
- The PBR framework has robust reporting, assurance and auditing functions undertaken by the Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority (IPEA), providing oversight of expenditure.

The Tribunal considered data from IPEA on the number of trips, travel class and overall cost of family reunion travel and other family member travel in its inquiry, together with representations from members of the public. It noted in particular, that parliamentarians appeared to generally make appropriate and modest use of reunion travel provisions, with only 11% of both Australia-wide fares and the budget for travel to Canberra and the local area used in 2024-25.

Recommendations

Family reunion travel

The Tribunal recommends the Regulations be amended so that:

- The annual limit for family reunion travel for the family members of all eligible members (that is, all members not representing the Australian Capital Territory) is calculated using economy class return airfares.

- All family-reunion travel, including spouse¹ travel, is booked at economy class.
- All eligible members, including senior office holders, are subject to the same standard family reunion travel provisions. There are to be no additional fares or additional travel for families (including dependent children) of senior office holders for family reunion purposes.
- There is no separate Australia-wide travel entitlement. Parliamentarians may access 1 return economy fare per year to an Australian location outside of Canberra. The value of this fare is to be deducted from the member's annual limit for family reunion travel to Canberra and within a parliamentarian's local area or electorate. Before booking this travel, the member should seek advice from IPEA to assist them in making their decision as to whether the travel is appropriate and meets the criteria for family reunion travel.

The Tribunal considered removing all access to Australia-wide reunion travel, but noted that while parliamentary work is primarily undertaken in Canberra, it is not exclusively done so. Further, it considered the PBR framework establishes a sound structure and sets a threshold test for the purpose of claiming family reunion travel. In accessing family reunion travel, whether it is to Canberra or elsewhere, the onus is on parliamentarians to apply good judgement and ensure such travel meets the 3 elements of the definition of 'family reunion' for the purposes of the Regulations:

1. The member is travelling within Australia for the dominant purpose of conducting their parliamentary business,
2. The family member travels to accompany or join the family member, and
3. The travel by the family member is for the dominant purpose of facilitating the family life of the member's family.

In 2024-25, 194 of 226 parliamentarians did not access any Australia-wide family reunion travel.

As noted, the Tribunal believes it is important to attract and retain talented individuals from diverse backgrounds to represent their communities in the nation's parliament. However, parliamentary life is not family friendly. In undertaking their duties parliamentarians are required to live interstate for long periods. Therefore the availability of family reunion travel is important, particular for parliamentarians with children.

While some of the recommended changes will reduce support for members with young children, the Tribunal considers that these will be mitigated – once implemented – by the 2022 recommended changes to the accompanying infants and carers regulation, which expands entitlements to all parents of children up to 6 years of age. The Tribunal also notes that the Special Minister of State retains the capacity to make exceptional circumstances determinations which may provide additional resources to members.

Travel for functions and engagements

The Tribunal recommends the Regulations be amended so that:

- Travel for a spouse of a member to attend, by invitation, an official government, parliamentary or vice-regal function is limited to 3 return fares per year. Where a spouse does not travel with the member to attend such a function, the travel must be booked at no higher than economy class.

¹ Spouse includes de facto partner within the meaning of the *Acts Interpretation Act 1901* (see section 5 of the *Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017*).

- Travel for a spouse of a senior officer holder to attend engagements is to be limited to engagements where the spouse has received an official invitation in their capacity as the office holder's spouse and the engagement is connected to the office holder's portfolio or official duties², and is to be limited to 3 return fares per year. These fares are in addition to the 3 return fares provided to the spouses of all members, above. Where a spouse does not travel with the member to attend such an engagement, the travel must be booked at no higher than economy class.
- Before booking travel for either of the above purposes, the member should seek advice from IPEA to assist the member in making their decision as to whether the travel is appropriate by obtaining advice as to whether it meets the relevant criteria.
- All other commercial travel by family members provided for in the Regulations is to be booked at no higher than economy class.

The above changes ensure that relevant travel is subject to appropriate caps and facilitates greater engagement with IPEA. The Tribunal expects parliamentarians to access and apply the personal advice available to them from IPEA on the use of parliamentary travel resources more generally. IPEA is available to provide guidance and recommendations about specific decisions or courses of action.

The Tribunal reported to the Ministers on 16 January 2026.

The Tribunal will continue to monitor the framework and may make further recommendations should it consider them warranted.

Implementation

The Tribunal expects these recommendations to be implemented as soon as practicable.

Remuneration Tribunal

20 January 2026

Enquiries may be directed to the Tribunal through enquiry@remtribunal.gov.au.

² Official duties is defined in the Parliamentary Business Resources (Parliamentary Business) Determination 2025.