



9 June 2026

Remuneration Tribunal
GPO Box 419
Canberra ACT 2601

By email: SecretaryReview@RemTribunal.gov.au

Dear sir/madam,

Review of remuneration for Departmental Secretaries

As the primary union representing employees in the Australian Public Service (APS), the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) is committed to providing a strong voice for our members in key public policy and political debates. We welcome the opportunity to make a submission to this review of remuneration for Departmental Secretaries.

The CPSU has significant concerns that the current remuneration framework for APS Secretaries and other senior public sector roles is not fit for purpose. It is disconnected from broader Commonwealth public sector pay trends for non-SES staff and exacerbates existing pay gaps. The growing gap between the wages and conditions of APS employees and the Senior Executive Service (SES) is unacceptable. This review should make recommendations to address this growing problem.

This issue was recently recognised in the Australian Government Public Sector Workplace Relations Policy 2026 which directs agency heads *“to take all practical steps to moderate the growth of SES total remuneration, including steps to ensure that SES total remuneration does not increase at a greater/faster rate than non-SES remuneration.”*¹ The CPSU is pleased to see some guidance on the issue of SES pay. However, it remains to be seen, how effectively this will be implemented.

We note the Remuneration Tribunal (Tribunal) has stated the review will examine the overall level and structure of remuneration of Secretaries, remuneration relativities with other senior public offices, and the suitability of associated terms and conditions, including non-remuneration benefits. While not explicitly in the scope of this review, a broader examination of SES remuneration is necessary to properly assess Secretary pay arrangements.

The Executive Remuneration Management Policy currently limits the total remuneration for SES employees to 65 per cent of the lowest pay point of the Secretaries structure without APSC approval.² The Tribunal has also stated in its discussion paper that SES Band 3 remuneration is an important reference point in maintaining “appropriate relativities” with APS Secretary

¹ Australian Public Service Commission. (2026). *Australian Government public sector workplace relations policy 2026*. Australian Government. <https://www.apsc.gov.au/publication/public-sector-workplace-relations-policy-2026>

² Australian Public Service Commission (2024). *Executive Remuneration Management Policy*. Australian Government. <https://www.apsc.gov.au/publication/executive-remuneration-management-policy>

remuneration. As SES pay is set by Secretaries, movements in SES and Secretary remuneration have a direct and reciprocal relationship. This review should therefore consider the role of pay and conditions relative to other factors in SES attraction and retention, as well as the organisational impacts of widening pay gaps on public sector organisations.

The CPSU is concerned that the Tribunal has historically emphasised the uniqueness of APS Secretary roles, contributing to remuneration outcomes that are out of step with public expectations and comparable roles. While APS Secretaries hold significant responsibilities, the Tribunal's reluctance to treat state and territory departmental heads as valid comparators is perplexing, especially as APS Secretaries in recent times had experience as departmental heads at a state level. State and territory departments manage complex service delivery, management of large workforces and major programs, and exercise substantial constitutional responsibilities. This reluctance contrasts with the frequent use of state and territory comparisons when pursuing APS reforms affecting non-SES staff, pay, conditions or workforce structures. For example, the Australian Public Service Commission has previously stated that *"While there are differences in roles and responsibilities between the APS and State/Territory public services, classification structures across all jurisdictions are broadly comparable."*³

The CPSU also notes the Tribunal's determinations are often accompanied by limited reasoning and lack a clear connection to broader public sector wages policy. Wage freezes imposed under the previous Coalition Government's bargaining policy, for example, exacerbated the growing pay gap between APS employees and the SES, who the wages freeze did not apply to.

If changes to APS Secretary remuneration or related entitlements are made, the CPSU believes that all submissions and evidence provided to the Tribunal should be made public. Greater transparency would improve public understanding of how remuneration decisions are made, including how agency data and the annual APS Remuneration Report is used, and would strengthen confidence in the Tribunal's determinations.

The CPSU is happy to provide further information regarding any of the matters raised in this submission and supplementary information on other relevant issues.

If you require further information, please contact [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] via email at [REDACTED] or on [REDACTED].

Sincerely,



Melissa Donnelly
National Secretary
CPSU-PSU Group

³ Australian Public Service Commission (2022), *APS Hierarchy and Classification Review Report – Appendix E: Comparisons with Australian State and Territory Public Services*. Australian Government. <https://www.apsc.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/workforce-information/aps-hierarchy-and-classification-review-report/appendix-e-comparisons-australian-state-and-territory-public-services>