To: Entitlements Review
Subject: submission

I have just become aware of the opportunity to make submissions. Unfortunately I did not see any public advertisement for submissions. I was informed yesterday evening by a former member that submissions have been invited and that they close to-day.

Below are a small number of hastily prepared submissions.

First, I submit changes need to be made to avoid ‘double dipping’.

Here are some examples of what I mean.

Parliamentarians frequently attend functions paid for from the public purse, for example, state dinners for visiting dignitaries, dinners at Commonwealth State ministerial meetings. It is well known that members of parliamentary committees sometimes organise committee meetings so that substantial refreshments are provided from committee funds. Parliamentarians attending any of such publicly funded functions may be in receipt of travelling allowance which includes a meals component. So the public purse is paying twice. In these circumstance the parliamentarians should either pay for the function or forgo the meals component of their travelling allowance.

Stricter conditions need to be imposed on use of Commonwealth cars. It is common to see parliamentarians using Commonwealth cars to take them to and from dinner at Manuka and Kingston. Bearing in mind the availability of meals at Parliament House, dining elsewhere should be seen as private and parliamentarians should not have access to Commonwealth cars for private use - they should use taxis. parliamentarians who elect to use Commonwealth cars for such private purposes should be billed.

Some parliamentarians stay in the outer suburbs of Canberra or in Queanbeyan where accommodation is cheaper-they take advantage of free Commonwealth car transport-so the public purse pays for long travel to their accommodation. Commonwealth car travel from Parliament House to accommodation should be restricted to a reasonable distance-say 5km from Parliament House. Parliamentarians who use Commonwealth cars to travel to accommodation in outlying suburbs beyond say 5km from Parliament House should be billed the excess cost over the 5km charge.

The style of Commonwealth car transport should be reconsidered. Surely minibuses would be more appropriate when for example large numbers of parliamentarians arrive at the airport at the same time or when large numbers need to be transported to accommodation in the evening when Parliament rises.

In relation to international air travel, bearing in mind that parliamentarians regularly ‘trade’ their first class travel entitlement for lower classes of travel, the first class travel entitlement should be seen as a relic of the rail age; first class international air travel is now seen as extremely luxurious. Business class travel is standard for senior executives. The overseas travel entitlement should be to business class travel.

In relation to domestic travel, there is no need for business class travel for short journeys. The standard for travel for say 2 hours or less should be economy class.

In relation to travel entitlements after office, this should be restricted to a short period where it can be seen as reasonably related directly to the former office eg 3 months for ordinary members, 6 months for ministers. Travel outside these periods should be seen as private and a private expense.

Governors-General hold office for only a short period. Unlike prime Ministers, they do not come to office after a long period of parliamentary service. The post office entitlements of Governors-General should be proportionate to the term in office rather than for life, for example, they could continue for say 50% of the period for which they held office.
There is a general public perception that printing and electoral allowances remain excessive. They can be reduced substantially. Amongst other things the current very high allowances may distort the democratic process in that they favour the majority party.

Entitlements are inherently subject to change and there should be no objection to applying any reductions in entitlements to those currently enjoying them- any reduction would not be retrospective in the sense that a reduction would not require repayment of past benefits-it would reduce benefits prospectively.

Entitlements should be clearly set out in a publicly accessible instrument.

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