



MATTHEW CANAVAN

Senator for Queensland

The Hon Kelly O'Dwyer
The Hon Kate Ellis
Independent Reviewers
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Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Independent Review into the operation of the *Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017* (PBR Act) and the operation of the *Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority Act 2017* (IPEA Act) and legislative rules.

My overarching comment would be that the PBR Act and the operation of IPEA are, on the whole, working well, and are achieving the objectives around enhanced accountability and transparency.

I support the principles-based framework covering parliamentarians' work expenses, requiring that for any expense claimed, the dominant purpose be parliamentary business and that it represents value-for-money for the Commonwealth.

I note that over time there has been several determinations made to provide clarification on a range of matters such as defining parliamentary business, resources for parliamentarians who are office holders, staff travel and relief staff. In addition, the PBR Act provides that the IPEA may give a written ruling (in relation to travel expenses and travel allowances only), determining whether a parliamentarian has acted in accordance with sections 26 (Dominant purpose test), 27 (Obligation to ensure value for money), or 28 (Obligation not to make claims or incur expenses in breach of conditions) of the PBR Act. In some ways this is counter-intuitive to the principles-based approach.

I am concerned that the number of determinations and rulings are adding complexity, and the consequential amendments to the Act and associated regulations mean that officers are now, more than ever, likely to seek further advice for fear of missing and update, change or ruling.

Unfortunately, advice is not always received in a timely manner, particularly for example, when it pertains to Office expenses and is referred to the Department of Finance (Ministerial and Parliamentary Services) State Office for response. Furthermore, I have copied a typical response from the State Office below:

Please refer to the website regarding purchasing of the below camera equipment.
This will clarify whether you are satisfied and meets the criteria for reimbursement and is within your budget.
If you're are satisfied this meets the criteria, please send invoice to m&psqld@finance.gov.au

Operating within the principles-based framework, if I am satisfied the dominant purpose is parliamentary and represents value for money, I should be able to approve expenditure from my office expenses budget.

Finally, I am also concerned that there is a significant disparity in terms of budget, allowances and approved expenses between Members from provincial and rural electorates and Senators with electorate responsibilities across an entire jurisdiction.

I have attached a brief submission with some specific issues and recommendations around Section 66, of the PBR Regulations.

Thank you again for your consideration of these matters.

Yours sincerely,

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Matthew Canavan. A small blue scribble is visible above the top-left corner of the box.

MATTHEW CANAVAN

1 November 2021

Submission to the Independent Review into the operation of the *Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017* and the operation of the *Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority Act 2017* and legislative rules

I would like to take this opportunity to seek a review of Section 66 (2) Parliamentary Business Resources Regulations 2017 (specifically Compilation 6, dated 15 May 2020) which states: "Office expenses must not be used to pay for production or placement of content for broadcasting on television".

Background

My Office was advised on several occasions during 2020-21 that I could not purchase a LiveU Compact Portable Transmission Unit (nor associated lighting equipment) using my office expenses budget unless I was able to sufficiently articulate exceptional circumstances. Despite the argument put forward that during extended periods of lockdown, travel restrictions and parliamentary recess, I wanted to be able to easily communicate with constituents and commentate on policy issues impacting my electorate (the State of Queensland) – creating videos and podcasts for distribution on social media. Unfortunately, even if my request had been approved, I would have been prohibited from using this equipment for the production or placement of content for broadcasting on television in accordance with Part 3 of the Parliamentary Business Resources Regulations 2017 (Compilation 6, dated 15 May 2020) Section 66 (2) which states "Office expenses must not be used to pay for production or placement of content for broadcasting on television".

Issues

I am aware that many members and senators received approval during 2020-21 to use their office expenses budget to purchase Portable Transmission Units and in some cases associated lighting equipment. I would contend that where this equipment has been approved, it is being used for the production or placement of content for broadcasting on television. I could also argue that using Skype on a DPS ICT issued laptop or iPad for TV broadcasting should also be prohibited.

I am concerned about the inequity expressed in Section 66 (2A) which allows for the production or placement of content for broadcasting on radio by members of the House of Representatives from provincial or rural electorates yet makes no such provision for Senators whose electorates encompass an entire State.

Recommendation

Given the significant changes to the way we work, interact and engage with constituents and communities that have occurred as a direct result of the COVID pandemic, I suggest that it is timely to consider a revision of Section 66 of the Parliamentary Business Resources Regulations 2017.

Specifically, I recommend that this Review considers and subsequently makes changes to the *Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017* and associated regulations to:

- allow the purchase of equipment from the office expenses budget for the production or placement of content for broadcasting on television (for news content and interviews not advertising); and
- remove inequity between the allowances, entitlements and rules for television of radio broadcasting between Senators (with whole of State responsibilities) and Members (in provincial and rural electorates).