

Agreed summary of oral submission to the Victorian Independent Remuneration Tribunal's review of the Members of Parliament (Victoria) Guidelines

The Hon. Danielle Green MP

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Summary of themes raised in oral submission

The Members of Parliament (Victoria) Guidelines (the Guidelines) *could be strengthened by increasing clarity which would assist interpretation by DPS and the Clerks*

- Some areas of the Guidelines are not as clear as they could be which can result in sometimes restrictive and inconsistent interpretation and confusion
- MPs can be reluctant to spend their Electoral Office and Communications (EO&C) budgets due to a nervousness that they will get the interpretation wrong; there is no pre-approval or advice to aid the interpretation and judgement
- It's important that the Guidelines reflect the spirit of the PSAS Act which is designed to support the work of MPs
- Once guidelines are finalised I would encourage a full and comprehensive briefing by DPS on these

The Guidelines should more adequately recognise and support the role of an MP particularly in their community

- The role of an MP could be more accurately defined, in particular recognising the importance of MPs communicating and supporting their communities, including through challenging times (eg following the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires)
- Some electorates are in growth corridors and so are changing and growing; constant communication with all, including new constituents is a key role. The use of communications materials is overly scrutinised and restrictive which can deter MPs from fulfilling these important communication functions
- The fixed unit price of \$2 for communications materials encourages MPs not to buy local (to ensure this low unit cost is met)
- MPs aren't permitted to do joint newsletters with another MP. For example two MPs delivering the same message to both electorates through the one leaflet; it would be cheaper; it's not clear why this is not allowed.
- The guidelines don't allow community groups to use the photocopiers in an MPs electorate office; this is a small but important service MPs would like to provide to their communities; some of these are not for profit groups led by volunteers, some are unemployed volunteers; others have limited English and they are wanting to make copies of materials to communicate to their community groups eg on COVID-19
- In some new growth areas; there are no community halls established and the community groups wish to use the meeting rooms in our electorate offices because no alternative facilities exist - we would like to support this

Restrictions on using the Electorate Office and Communications Budget (EO&C Budget) for party political communication

- MPs are also politicians; this is a key aspect of our work yet the Guidelines don't allow activity that represents any kind of political activity

- MPs should be able to communicate to their electorates about government policy that may relate to other parts of the state (not just the matters that relate to the electorate). MPs role is to communicate to their electorate and discuss a broad range of issues. Hence we should be able to communicate government investments elsewhere in Victoria; or initiatives happening in neighbouring electorates that the local community could access or benefit from
- Where the Guidelines do not allow expenditure for MP related work, an MP will claim these work related expenses through the Australian Tax Office (ATO). Hence a recognised system to record expenses system should be developed eg MYOB. However, investing in such a system is currently not permitted given it's a system to record political activity. Further, if MPs were to invest in the system themselves, they could not draw on the training budget to train staff in the use of the system; and would have to train staff in the evening/out of regular office hours.

Challenges in reimbursement of allowances

- Another issue relates to the differential treatment of MPs in relation to whether or not you are a member of the executive or not. If you're not a member of the executive, it is more difficult to get reimbursed
- There can also be confusion as to which allowance to claim which expense and activity from. For example, it can be challenging to work out which expense relates to committee versus parliamentary work – the different buckets of money and rules can be confusing. Clarifying this would be helpful.

Lessons can be learned from the design of the Commonwealth Government Guidelines (clarify title)

- The Commonwealth guidelines offer a good example; these guidelines more closely recognise there are political elements to the role of an MP, and these activities are supported.

General employment and administrative support (partly relate to Guidelines)

- A central travel booking service for MPs particularly for regional Victoria travel would be efficient and an effective way of supporting MPs. It could be cost effective in terms of bulk bookings, would ensure accommodation complies and could assist in planning ahead to avoid big regional events and accommodation shortages and cost increases.
- MPs and motor vehicles; would be helpful to receive advice in relation to car leasing/novated leasing
- It is important to note that Quarterly reporting of MP expenses may at times be misleading if for example some expenses incurred in a previous quarter, but reported in a later quarter which can look as though expenses were higher than they were in a given quarter.