



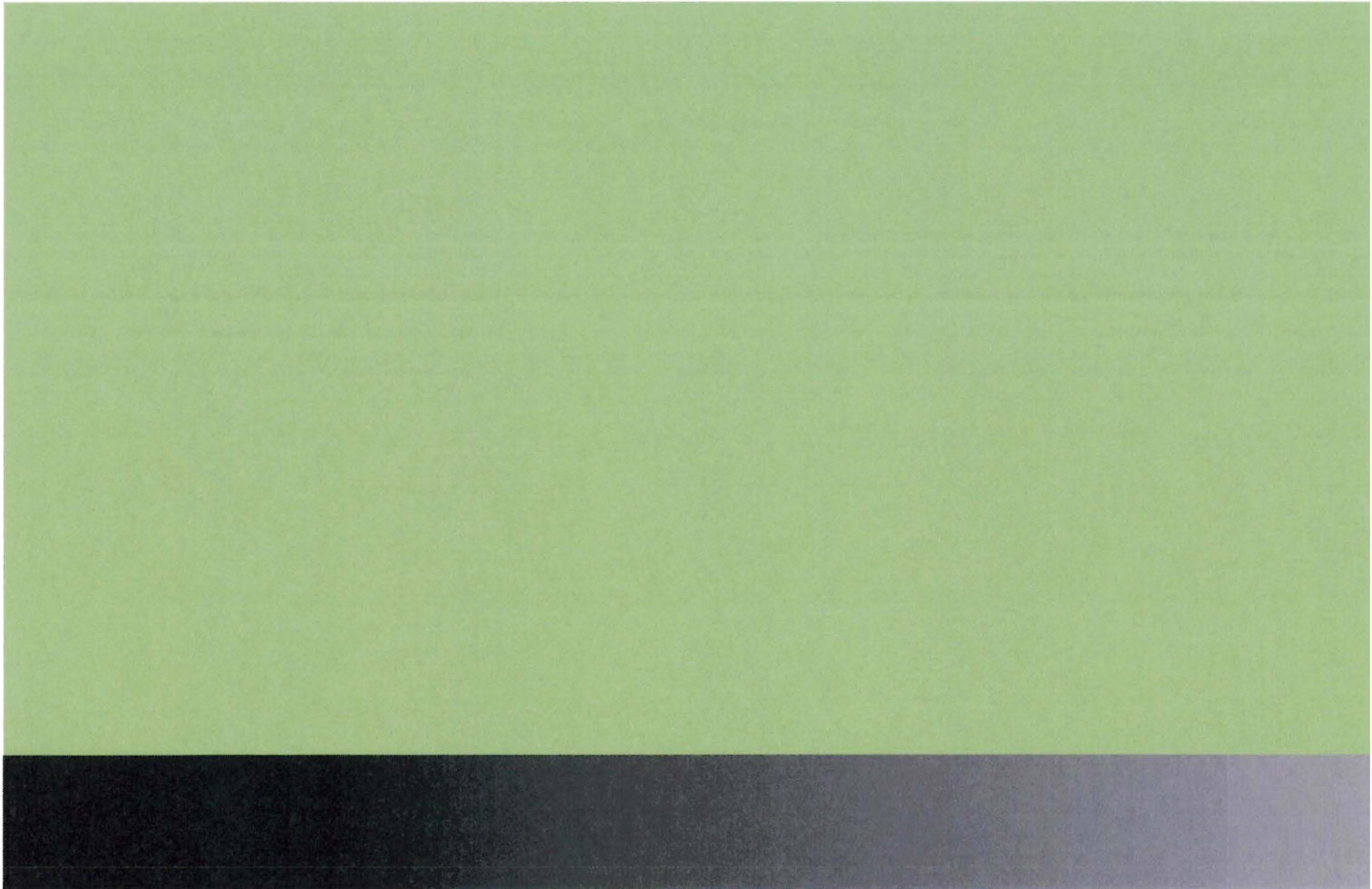
**Australian Government**

**Independent Parliamentary  
Expenses Authority**

Assurance Review 2025/033

Ms Cassandra Fernando, Member for Holt

Review of travel to Sydney between 3 and 4 October 2024



# Contents

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>3</b>
Scope and Purpose	3
Engagement with Ms Fernando	3
Assurance Review Findings	3
<b>Audit and Assurance function</b>	<b>4</b>
IPEA's statutory audit function	4
<b>Legislative framework</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Assurance Review methodology</b>	<b>6</b>
Background	6
Scope of Assurance Review	6
<b>Assessment of work expenses</b>	<b>7</b>
Summary of findings	7

## Executive summary

1. The Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority (IPEA) conducted an Assurance Review of travel by Ms Cassandra Fernando to Sydney between 3 and 4 October 2024. The Assurance Review forms part of IPEA's 3 Year Assurance Plan.

### Scope and Purpose

2. The scope of this Assurance Review is travel by Ms Fernando to Sydney between 3 and 4 October 2024. The purpose of the Assurance Review was to determine whether the use of parliamentary business resources by Ms Fernando was consistent with the legislative framework.

### Engagement with Ms Fernando

3. IPEA engaged with Ms Fernando on two occasions, by letter and email. The details of the interaction are described in the Assessment section below and are at **Attachments 1 to 4**.

### Assurance Review Findings

4. The Assurance Review assessed the whether the use of parliamentary business resources was for the dominant purpose of parliamentary business. IPEA identified Ms Fernando as having used parliamentary business resources for travel to Sydney between 3 and 4 October 2024.
5. Having considered the available information, including responses and additional information provided by Ms Fernando, IPEA is satisfied that the travel to Sydney was for the dominant purpose of parliamentary business and was consistent with the Parliamentary Business Resources Framework.

## Audit and Assurance function

### IPEA's statutory audit function

6. IPEA audits parliamentarians' work expenses and the travel expenses of their staff under section 12 of the *Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority Act 2017* (IPEA Act). IPEA conducts Assurance Reviews to assess the use of parliamentary business resources against the legislative framework to determine if there has been a misuse.
7. Potential outcomes of an Assurance Review include:
  - a. no further action in circumstances where the review has concluded the use of parliamentary business resources was not inconsistent with the legislative framework, or
  - b. administrative remedial action, including penalty where the review has concluded there is evidence the use of parliamentary business resources was not consistent with the legislative framework, or
  - c. an IPEA initiated Ruling or Audit, where there is evidence of systemic or substantial misuse of parliamentary business resources, or
  - d. referral to the Australian Federal Police where compelling prima facie evidence of fraud or other criminal conduct is identified, or
  - e. referral to the National Anti-Corruption Commission, where there is clear evidence of serious or systemic corrupt conduct.

## Legislative framework

8. The legislation relevant to this Assurance Review is:
  - a. *Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017* (the PBR Act)
  - b. *Parliamentary Business Resources Regulations 2017* (the PBR Regulations)
  - c. *Parliamentary Business Resources (Parliamentary Business) Determination 2017* (Parliamentary Business Determination)
  - d. *Parliamentary Business Resources (Commonwealth Transport) Determination 2017* (Commonwealth Transport Determination)
9. The PBR Act and PBR Regulations establish a framework for providing resources to parliamentarians in respect of their parliamentary business. Parliamentarians are eligible to claim public resources under the framework in respect of their parliamentary business.
10. Section 6 of the PBR Act provides the following meaning of **parliamentary business**:
  - (1) The parliamentary business of a member means any of the following:
    - (a) the **parliamentary duties** of a member, being activities of the member that:
      - i. relate directly to the member's role as a member; and
      - ii. are determined for the purposes of paragraph (4)(a);
    - (b) the **electorate duties** of the member, being activities of the member that:
      - i. support or serve the member's constituents; and
      - ii. are determined for the purposes of paragraph (4)(b);
    - (c) the **party political duties** of the member, being activities determined for the purposes of paragraph (4)(c);

- (d) for a member who is an office holder or a Minister of State – the **official duties** of the member being activities that:
- i. relate to the member's role as an office holder or Minister of State; and
  - ii. are determined for the purposes of paragraph (4)(d).

11. Subsection 6(4) of the PBR Act provides that the Minister must determine activities of a member that are **parliamentary duties** of the member, or **electorate duties** of the member, or **party political** duties of the member, or **official duties** of the member.
12. The Parliamentary Business Determination prescribes the activities which fall within the four duty streams set out in section 6 of the PBR Act:

- (1) For the purposes of paragraph 6(4)(a) of the Act, the **parliamentary duties** of a member are the activities specified in Schedule 1 for that member.
- (2) For the purposes of paragraph 6(4)(b) of the Act, the **electorate duties** of a member are the activities specified in Schedule 2 for that member.
- (3) For the purposes of paragraph 6(4)(c) of the Act, the **party political duties** of a member are the activities specified in Schedule 3 for that member.
- (4) For the purposes of paragraph 6(4)(d) of the Act, the **official duties** of a member are the activities specified in Schedule 4 for that member.

13. Subsection 6(2) of the PBR Act further provides in part:

However, an activity is not the **parliamentary business** of a member if:

- (a) The member carries it out for the dominant purpose of either or both the following:
  - i. Providing a personal benefit to the member or another person;
  - ii. Pursuing commercial purposes of the member or another person; ...

14. The Commonwealth Transport Determination provides that COMCAR services are to be made available for the purposes of subsection 8(2) of the PBR Regulations. There are limits and conditions on a member's use of COMCAR within Australia. Subsection 9(1) of the Commonwealth Transport Determination provides:

COMCAR is not available for the purpose of subsection 8(2) of the Regulations if the member could reasonably use the member's private plated vehicle in the circumstances, assuming the member had a private plated vehicle.

Note: A member who chooses an allowance instead of a private plated vehicle could reasonably be expected to use the allowance instead of claiming COMCAR transport costs in circumstances where a private plated vehicle could otherwise reasonably be used.

15. As an overarching matter, the public resources prescribed in Parts 2, 3 and 4 of the PBR Regulations are subject to a specific accountability regime established in the PBR Act for that purpose. Parliamentarians' access to and use of public resources are subject to the following obligations:

- parliamentarians must be personally responsible and accountable for their use of public resources, and to act ethically and in good faith using and accounting for their use of those resources (section 25)
- a parliamentarian must not claim or use public resources unless it is for the dominant purpose of conducting their parliamentary business (dominant purpose test, see section 26)



- a parliamentarian must ensure value for money for the Commonwealth in incurring expenses or claiming public resources, taking into account the need to conduct the parliamentary business (value for money test, see section 27), and
  - a parliamentarian must not claim resources or incur expenses if any conditions for accessing the resources have not been met (section 28).
16. In accordance with sections 30 and 31 of the PBR Act, the Commonwealth must pay the travel expenses and travel allowances as prescribed by the PBR Regulations. Division 1 of Part 2 of the PBR Regulations prescribes travel expenses and travel allowances for travel within Australia for the purposes of sections 30 and 31 of the PBR Act.

## Assurance Review methodology

### Background

17. As part of the Assurance program, IPEA conducts ongoing, systematic analysis of the parliamentary business resources accessed by parliamentarians and their staff via a combination of regular transaction sampling and review of publicly available information.
18. On 31 March 2025, IPEA commenced a review of all verified travel for Ms Fernando, *Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984* staff employed in her office and a designated person and for the period 1 July 2024 to 25 March 2025.
19. The review found that Ms Fernando accessed parliamentary business resources to travel to Sydney during the period 3 to 4 October 2024. IPEA was unable to establish the dominant purpose of this travel and on 1 April 2025 commenced an Assurance Review to determine whether the use of parliamentary business resources by Ms Fernando to travel to Sydney was consistent with the legislative framework.

### Scope of Assurance Review

20. The scope of this Assurance Review is travel by Ms Fernando to Sydney between 3 and 4 October 2024.

## Assessment of work expenses

### Summary of findings

#### Analysis

21. IPEA considered the legislative framework and applied the following questions to the use of resources associated with travel to Sydney by Ms Fernando during the period in scope:
  - a. What was the dominant purpose for travel to Sydney between 3 and 4 October 2024?
  - b. Where the dominant purpose was parliamentary business, what was the nature of Ms Fernando's parliamentary business for travel to Sydney between 3 and 4 October 2024?
22. IPEA conducted the Assurance Review by examining and assessing:
  - a. information obtained from the Audit and Assurance Dashboard
  - b. information held by IPEA in the Parliamentary Expenses Management System
  - c. the legislative framework
  - d. publicly available information
  - e. information provided by Ms Fernando.
23. On 1 April 2025, IPEA identified that Ms Fernando travelled to Sydney between 3 and 4 October 2024 using parliamentary business resources.
24. On 15 April 2025, IPEA wrote to Ms Fernando detailing the requirements of the Parliamentary Business Framework and identifying the travel funded using parliamentary business resources for the period in scope (**Attachment 1**). Ms Fernando was asked to advise what the dominant purpose of the travel and the nature of her parliamentary business in Sydney. A response was requested by 30 April 2025.
25. On 1 May 2025, Ms Fernando's office contacted IPEA by telephone to seek an extension of time to provide a response. IPEA agreed to an extension with the response due by 9 May 2025.
26. On 9 May 2025, IPEA received a response from Ms Fernando (**Attachment 2**) advising she had travelled to Sydney to attend the Shop, Distributive and Allied (SDA) Employees Association National Dinner on 3 October 2024. Ms Fernando explained the travel to Sydney for this dinner was for parliamentary duties as the Member for Holt and as a member of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training.
27. Ms Fernando also advised she was invited in her capacity as a member of the Employment, Education and Training Committee to attend a tour and information session on 4 October 2024 at the Parramatta Female Factory about the history of Women's workplace rights.
28. On 12 May 2025, IPEA wrote to Ms Fernando seeking copies of documentation to support the use of parliamentary business resources, such as diary notes, invitations or media reporting (**Attachment 3**). A response was requested by 27 May 2025.
29. On 13 May 2025, IPEA received a response from Ms Fernando (**Attachment 4**) providing copies of emails and invitations relevant to her attendance at the SDA National Dinner 3 October 2024 and the tour of the Parramatta Female Factory on 4 October 2024.

Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority  
*Ms Cassandra Fernando*  
*Travel to Sydney between 3 and 4 October 2024*

30. Having considered the available information, including the initial response and the additional information provided by Ms Fernando, IPEA is satisfied the dominant purpose of the travel to Sydney between 3 and 4 October 2024 was parliamentary business and the use of parliamentary business resources for the travel was consistent with the legislative framework.

**Conclusion**

31. The Assurance Review assessed the use of parliamentary business resources by Ms Fernando to ensure the resources claimed were consistent with the legislative framework.
32. Having considered the available information, including responses from Ms Fernando, IPEA found that the resources claimed were consistent with the Parliamentary Business Resources Framework.