



Australian Government
**Independent Parliamentary
Expenses Authority**

Assurance Review 2025/025

**Dr Anne Webster MP – family reunion travel
1 July 2021 to 30 June 2023**

**Independent Parliamentary
Expenses Authority**

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Dr Anne Webster MP – family reunion travel

Executive summary

1. The Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority (IPEA) conducted an assurance review of Dr Anne Webster MP's use of work resources for family reunion purposes (family reunion travel resources) between 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2023 (the period in scope).

Scope

2. The scope of this assurance review is family reunion travel by Dr Webster and her spouse between 1 July 2021 and 30 June 2023.
3. The purpose of the assurance review was to determine whether the family reunion travel resources were used in accordance with the legislative framework.

Reason for review

4. As part of IPEA's review of parliamentarians' use of family reunion travel resources, IPEA undertook a preliminary assessment into family reunion travel by Dr Webster and her family members during the period 1 July 2021 and 30 June 2023. After excluding family travel to and from Canberra, the preliminary assessment found that family reunion travel resources had been used by Dr Webster for 3 trips between 9 December 2022 and 23 June 2023.
5. On 4 February 2025, IPEA commenced an assurance review of Dr Webster's family reunion travel.

Outcome*

6. IPEA found that:
 - Dr Webster's use of family reunion travel resources in December 2022 and May 2023 was consistent with the legislative framework
 - Dr Webster's use of family reunion travel resources for her flights between 21 and 22 June 2023 and her spouse's flight on 21 June 2023, was not consistent with the legislative framework, contravening sections 26 and 28 of the *Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017*.
7. Dr Webster was invoiced a total of \$2265.40, including a 25% penalty loading to repay the flight undertaken by her spouse from regional Victoria to Melbourne on 21 June 2023 and for her flights between Canberra and Melbourne and return, between 21 and 22 June 2023. The expenses have been repaid.

*Potential outcomes

There are three potential outcomes of an assurance review:

1. Consistent with the framework (rules)

IPEA finds that the use of the relevant travel resource complied with the law.

This means the available evidence, including information provided by the member, clearly shows that all obligations under the *Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017* were met.

2. Not inconsistent with the framework (rules)

IPEA finds that the use of the relevant travel resource was not shown to be against the law.

This means IPEA has accepted the member's explanation that they met their obligations under the *Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017*, and IPEA has not found any evidence to the contrary.

3. Not consistent with the framework (rules)

IPEA finds that the use of the relevant travel resource did not comply with the law.

This means there has been a misuse of a parliamentary work resource under the *Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017*. Where misuse is found, the value of the resource will be recovered, including any applicable penalty.

IPEA's statutory audit function

8. IPEA audits parliamentarians' use of their parliamentary business work resources and the use of travel resources by their staff under section 12 of the *Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority Act 2017*. IPEA conducts assurance reviews to assess the use of resources against the legislative framework to determine if there has been misuse.

Legislative framework

9. Section 6 of the *Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017* (PBR Act) provides the following meaning of **parliamentary business**:

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).
10. 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. The Parliamentary Business Resources (Parliamentary Business) Determination 2017 (the Determination) determines the activities which fall within the four duty streams set out in section 6 of the PBR Act.

11. Section 6 of the Parliamentary Business Resources Regulations 2017 (PBR Regulations) provides the meaning of **family reunion purposes** as:

A family member of a member travels for **family reunion purposes** if:

- (a) the member is travelling within Australia for the dominant purpose of conducting the member's parliamentary business; and
 - (b) the family member travels to accompany or join the member; and
 - (c) the travel by the family member is for the dominant purpose of facilitating the family life of the member's family.
12. Section 4 of the PBR Regulations provides the following meaning of **family member**:
- (a) the member's spouse or nominee;
 - (b) a dependent child of the member;
 - (c) a designated person in relation to the member.

Review process

13. Dr Webster used parliamentary work resources for flights, accommodation and ground transport to travel to:
 - Melbourne between 9 and 10 December 2022
 - Melbourne and regional Victoria between 26 and 28 May 2023
 - Melbourne between 21 and 22 June 2023 and to Sydney on 23 June 2023.
14. Dr Webster's spouse also used parliamentary work resources for flights from regional Victoria to meet Dr Webster in:
 - Melbourne on 9 December 2022, returning to regional Victoria on 10 December 2022
 - Melbourne on 26 May 2023, returning to regional Victoria on 28 May 2023
 - Melbourne on 21 June 2023, travelling onwards with Dr Webster before returning to regional Victoria on 23 June 2023.
15. On 4 February 2025, IPEA wrote to Dr Webster asking about the dominant purpose of her travel for the abovementioned trips and the nature of her parliamentary business, with reference to the Determination (**Attachment 1**). Dr Webster was also asked to advise whether her family member's travel met the three-part test in section 6 of the PBR Regulations. A response was requested by 28 February 2025.
16. Dr Webster advised IPEA that the dominant purpose of her travel:
 - to Melbourne in December 2022 was to attend the Board of Management meeting and Christmas party for the National Party of Australia – Victoria (the Victorian Nationals)
 - to Melbourne in June 2023 was to undertake duties in her capacity as Shadow Assistant Minister for Regional Health, and to regional Victoria to attend functions associated with the Victorian Nationals
 - to Melbourne on 21 June 2023 for a personal matter before travelling onto Sydney to the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation facility at Lucas Heights.
17. The response provided included several attachments about Dr Webster's engagements, including agendas and invitations.
18. After considering the information provided, IPEA further wrote to Dr Webster to clarify whether her travel to Melbourne between 21 and 22 June 2023 was for parliamentary business, as well as personal reasons. IPEA also clarified with Dr Webster that:
 - the legislative framework did not allow for overnight stays for parliamentarians for personal reasons, unless returning immediately to their home base
 - the legislative framework did not allow for nomination of a secondary place of residence as a home base
 - although Dr Webster and her office had understood that her spouse's flight from regional Victoria to meet her in Melbourne on 21 June 2023 and her own flights between Canberra and Melbourne and return on 21 and 22 June 2023 for personal reasons had been paid using Dr Webster's personal funds, the flights had been charged to the Commonwealth as parliamentary business and family reunion travel.
19. Following additional correspondence between IPEA and Dr Webster, Dr Webster's office confirmed that Dr Webster's spouse met her in Melbourne on 21 June 2023 for personal reasons and advised that Dr Webster would repay her spouse's flight of 21 June 2023. Dr Webster's office also informed IPEA that Dr Webster would repay her flights from Canberra to Melbourne and return.
20. IPEA's correspondence with Dr Webster is at **Attachments 1 to 13**.

Conclusion

21. Based on IPEA's records and the information made available from Dr Webster, IPEA found that:
 - Dr Webster's use of family reunion travel resources in December 2022 and May 2023 was consistent with the legislative framework
 - Dr Webster's use of family reunion travel resources for her flights between 21 and 22 June 2023 and her spouse's flight on 21 June 2023, was not consistent with the legislative framework, contravening sections 26 and 28 of the *Parliamentary Business Resources Act 2017*.
22. Dr Webster was invoiced a total of \$2265.40, including a 25% penalty loading to repay the flight undertaken by her spouse from regional Victoria to Melbourne on 21 June 2023 and for her flights between Canberra and Melbourne and return, between 21 and 22 June 2023. The expenses have been repaid.