



Australian Government
**Independent Parliamentary
Expenses Authority**

Assurance Review 2025/009

Hon Luke Howarth MP – family reunion travel
1 July 2021 to 30 June 2023

Independent Parliamentary
Expenses Authority

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Hon Luke Howarth MP – family reunion travel

Executive summary

1. The Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority (IPEA) conducted an assurance review of Hon Luke Howarth 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 Mr Howarth and his 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 Mr Luke Howarth and his 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 Mr Howarth for a trip from Brisbane to Melbourne and return between 27 and 28 February 2023.
5. On 4 February 2025, IPEA commenced an assurance review of Mr Howarth's family reunion travel.

Outcome*

6. IPEA found that the use of family reunion travel resources was not inconsistent with the legislative framework.

*Potential outcomes

There are three potential outcomes of an assurance review:

1. Consistent with the 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 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 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

7. 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

8. 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).

9. 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.

10. 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.

11. 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

12. Mr Howarth and his spouse flew from Brisbane to Melbourne on 27 February 2023 using parliamentary work resources for flights, ground transport and one night of accommodation. They returned to Brisbane on 28 February 2023 using parliamentary work resources for flights and ground transport.
13. On 4 February 2025, IPEA wrote to Mr Howarth asking about the dominant purpose of his travel for the abovementioned trip and the nature of his parliamentary business, with reference to the Determination (**Attachment 1**). Mr Howarth was also asked to advise whether his family member's travel met the three-part test in section 6 of the PBR Regulations. A response was requested by 28 February 2025.
14. Mr Howarth responded to IPEA advising that Mr Howarth travelled to Melbourne in his official capacity as Shadow Minister for Defence Industry and Shadow Minister for Defence Personnel, attending the Avalon Airshow. The response also noted that Mr Howarth's spouse joined him for family reunion purposes and to facilitate family life.
15. In support of the response, Mr Howarth provided copies of his diary entries between 27 February 2023 and 1 March 2023, his invitation to the Avalon Airshow, and emails about how to register for the event.
16. IPEA requested further information regarding Mr Howarth's parliamentary business in his use of COMCAR on 27 February 2023 to travel from Melbourne Airport to Ferntree Gully, before proceeding to Melbourne to attend the Avalon Airshow welcoming dinner.
17. Mr Howarth advised he was unable to provide documentation regarding the reason for his travel by COMCAR to Ferntree Gully. However, Mr Howarth's recollection was that he travelled to Ferntree Gully in his role as Shadow Minister during the federal by-election where he met the Liberal candidate for the seat of Aston and local constituents, among others.
18. Based on the information provided by Mr Howarth, IPEA notes that the dominant purpose of the travel undertaken by Mr Howarth to Melbourne was parliamentary business, specifically parliamentary duties, and that his spouse accompanied him for the dominant purpose of facilitating family life.
19. IPEA's correspondence with Mr Howarth is at **Attachments 1 to 7**.

Conclusion

20. Based on IPEA's records and the information made available by Mr Howarth, IPEA found that the use of family reunion travel resources was not inconsistent with the legislative framework.