



Australian Government
**Independent Parliamentary
Expenses Authority**

Assurance Review 2025/018

Hon Brendan O'Connor - family reunion travel

1 July 2021 to 30 June 2023

**Independent Parliamentary
Expenses Authority**

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Hon Brendan O'Connor - family reunion travel

Executive summary

1. The Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority (IPEA) conducted an assurance review of Mr Brendan O'Connor's use of parliamentarians' travel and work resources for family reunion purposes (family reunion travel resources) between 1 July 2021 and 30 June 2023 (period in scope).

Scope

2. The scope of this assurance review is family reunion travel by Mr O'Connor and his dependant between 1 July 2021 and 30 June 2023. Mr O'Connor was serving as Minister for Skills and Training during this period.
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 O'Connor 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 O'Connor for a trip from Melbourne to Brisbane and return, commencing on 13 September 2022 and returning on 17 September 2022.
5. On 4 February 2025, IPEA commenced an assurance review of Mr O'Connor's family reunion travel.

Outcome*

6. Having regard to the information made available from Mr O'Connor, 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 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 Act). 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* (the 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 O'Connor and his dependant flew from Melbourne to Brisbane on 13 September 2022 using family reunion travel resources for flights and a hire car. They returned to Melbourne on 17 September 2022 using family reunion travel resources for flights and ground transport. No travel allowance was claimed for this trip.
13. On 4 February 2025, IPEA wrote to Mr O'Connor 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 O'Connor 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 O'Connor responded on 28 February 2025 (**Attachment 2**), advising that the dominant purpose of his travel was to engage in meetings with stakeholders relevant to his position at the time as the Minister for Skills and Training. However, he indicated that on arrival in Brisbane, he became unwell and was unable to undertake the meetings. He advised that he decided to stay on at his hotel in Brisbane because he was unsure whether he had contracted COVID or the flu and would be contagious and therefore decided he should not travel back until he had recovered. He advised he had decided not to claim accommodation costs for the period.
15. He further advised that his family member had accompanied him on this travel for the dominant purpose of facilitating family life, consistent with the legislative framework requirements for the use of family reunion travel.

Conclusion

16. Based on the information made available by Mr O'Connor, IPEA found that the use of family reunion travel resources was not inconsistent with the legislative framework.